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Kenneth Albert Dore
University of Texas at El Paso

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INTERPRETATIONS OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND ITS ENACTMENT IN HIGH
SCHOOL VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION

KENNETH A. DORE, III

Doctoral Program in Teaching, Learning, and Culture

APPROVED:

Alyse C. Hachey, Ph.D., Chair

Song An, Ph.D.

Jessica Slade, Ph.D.

Yolanda Medina, Ph.D.

Stephen Crites, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Dedication

This dissertation is wholeheartedly dedicated to my supportive parents who inspired and encouraged the continuation of my educational journey. They never left my side and gave me strength and hope. Mom and Dad, thank you for your interest and enthusiasm about my research and for always being there to listen. Without your love and assistance, this endeavor would not have been possible.

Mom, thank you for instilling in me a sense of industriousness and a passion for learning. I still make it a point to caress the desk in the classroom and embrace the sights, sounds, and smells of the learning environment—the pencil, paper, backpack, and books. Remember that Geology class we took together in community college? I knew it was a special time then, but I didn't appreciate the magnitude of that experience until now. As much as physical labor is a part of who I am, I equally appreciate the work that goes into engaging in conversation, listening, responding, reflecting, developing relationships, and connecting our experiences with those of others to move forward productively. Dad, thank you for modeling lessons in imagination and humility, and for teaching me the importance of tolerance and silence. Mom and Dad, you both offer the *greatest education* of all, which consists of lessons toward being a caring husband, father, son, brother, and human being. It is this type of educational endeavor I wish to continue developing and reciprocate.

Moreover, I dedicate this dissertation to my wife and children who have greatly sacrificed so that I could have this opportunity. I am blessed that you all were patient and supportive of this endeavor. Without your love and support, this achievement would not have been possible; and it wouldn't have mattered as much if it had not been for the sacrifices that we shared and the successes we earned together—as a family. Cristy, thank you for grounding me, believing in me, and pushing me to be the best version of myself.

INTERPRETATIONS OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND ITS ENACTMENT IN HIGH
SCHOOL VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION

by

KENNETH A. DORE, III, M.Ed.

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation sought to identify interpretations of *Aesthetic Experience* (AE) of high school visual arts teachers and purposes of its facilitation in their classrooms. Five high school visual arts teachers within a large school district in West Texas were interviewed. A qualitative *Hybrid Phenomenological Method* was utilized to analyze the data consisting of a *descriptive* and an *interpretive* approach. The *descriptive* approach highlighted common and unique characteristics of aesthetic experience as interpreted by the teachers. An *interpretive* approach was also employed utilizing *Aesthetic Critical Pedagogy*, *Feminist Theory*, and *Aesthetic Theory* frameworks along with my 20-years-experience as a visual arts teacher. This analytical approach yielded five themes: (1) AE is Facilitated Toward Individualistic Pursuits; (2) AE Facilitated with Minimal Consideration for Postmodern/Contextualism Views; (3) A Disconnect of Self from Classroom Experience; (4) Challenges Facilitating AE; and (5) Novel Views of AE.

Analyses showed that teachers interpreted aesthetic experience differently and maintained a variety of ways in which they recognized, planned for, and facilitated it. Although the results all pointed toward a type of transcendence—a climbing or going beyond—the advance was more of a transformation of self for *personal gain*, rather than a transcendence *toward others*. Hence, in a move away from the current literature on aesthetic experience that encourages the use of imagination and creativity toward alternate views of self and society to influence positive change, the findings instead revealed that AE at the high school level is facilitated more as a personal and private event. Analysis also showed that most teachers intentionally and inadvertently distanced themselves from classroom experiences, avoided *Postmodern* aesthetic approaches, and deliberately evaded *complicated conversations*. Results revealed several novel views of aesthetic

experience and challenges in facilitating it at the high school level that are not currently found within the literature.

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Chapter 1

Searching for Student Voice within the Narrative of Neoliberalism

If we truly feel the pain of another as our own, and simultaneously feel our own part in causing that pain, we are less inclined to cause it. If we truly feel the pleasure of another as our own, and simultaneously feel our own capacity to generate that pleasure, we are likely to seek to increase it. When we realize we are connected with another, we are responsible for the other as we are also responsible for ourselves. (Stinson, 1985, p. 11)

Setting the Stage

The above quote from Susan Stinson highlights the significance of *placing ourselves in the shoes of others* and understanding that our actions affect others. This type of reflection is necessary to develop as moral citizens in general, but it is especially needed as a practice teachers and students can do within the classroom to model and reciprocate decent behavior as a life-long initiative. One way that this reflection can be accomplished is through reflection of *Aesthetic Experience*¹ as an individual both observes and creates works of art. Medina (2012) defines aesthetic experience as “a moment of perception when our senses are functioning at their peak, because we are fully aware and fully awakened by the artwork in front of us” (p. 44). Within the context of K-12 public Arts Education, teaching through aesthetic experience can have a profound impact on how individuals see themselves, their relationship with others, their roles in society, and their capacity to make change in it (Greene, 2001).

¹ The definition of *Aesthetic Experience* that will be utilized throughout this study will be a fusion of definitions by Dewey (1934), Greene (2001), Medina (2012), and Stinson (1985). In other words, aesthetic experience is understood as a democratic, pragmatic, and a temporal process in which the classroom environment is intentionally constructed to facilitate encounters with art—be it through viewing or creating works of art. These experiences are hopeful in engaging students’ senses and body awareness toward the reflection of self and one’s connectivity to society, as well as one’s ability to change it. It is not the artwork itself, but rather the engagement with the artwork that moves a person toward reflection, empathy, and motivation to act against societal injustices.

Current research exploring the development of aesthetic literacy in public schools emphasizes *intentional* planning and making students' creative processes tangible for assessment (Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2017; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1980; 1986; 2001; Gulla, 2018; Sunday 2015; 2018). As Medina (2012) highlights in her work, an experiential reflection on our perception of the world, as our senses are operating at their peak, can develop compassion toward others and ignite the spark toward ethical change. However, currently much Arts Education within the context of K-12 public schools is consumed with grand narratives of market-based ideology (Ingram, 2013) and *representationalism*² (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). In other words, when observing and creating works of art, emphasis is placed on the beauty and realistic quality of final products. This mindset funnels through a hierarchy of structures starting with those in control of the market economy, to policy makers, to educational administrators—and these values become adopted and reciprocated by the school community, teachers, and students (Apple, 1990; 1999; 2014; Bale & Knopp, 2012; Bowles & Gintis, 2011). As students aim to copy teacher's examples and improve on specific skills within highly structured, teacher-centered classrooms, which are based on standardized patterns (Barnes, 1987; Bresler, 1992; Herberholz & Hanson, 1995; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020; Spidell-Rusher et al., 1992), there is a tendency that student voice, their imagination, and reinterpretation of the world is reduced or ignored.

It is significant to note that current research on the integration of aesthetic experience, to enhance students' perceptions of their identity and role within society, spans from pre-kindergarten, all the way through college years, and beyond. Most of this endeavor is taking place at the elementary level, while considerable efforts are also being made at the college level (e.g.,

² According to Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020), *Representationalism* focuses on the relationship between an artwork and reality. It is an approach toward the aesthetic that emphasizes on students' ability to interpret and represent realistic objects and themes in their artwork and the artwork of others.

Almqvist & Andersson, 2019; Barker, 2010; Chang, 2017; Fang et al., 2018; Medina, 2012; Rusanen et al., 2012; Wanzer et al., 2020). However, the area that remains scarcely explored is at the high school level. Based on my personal experience as a visual arts teacher (both in elementary and high schools) and collaboration within a local school district fine arts department, I hypothesize that the reason for this may be because the intensity of arts competitions reaches the highest point when students attend high school. Perhaps the focus on product, mastery of technique, and winning precedes aesthetic development. Whatever the reason may be, while elementary children's aesthetic experiences and voice are well heard across the literature, there seems to be a significant amount of stillness in the context of high schools.

A Moment of Silence

Take a minute to reflect on the following scenarios within current Arts Education contexts. The complete school year of a high school theatre arts class revolves around a UIL (University Interscholastic League) one-act play competition and scripted dialogue. Or perhaps, a music program, such as band, choir, or orchestra utilize their respective UIL competitions and well-known music as the basis of their curriculum. A dance class may prepare several routines to exhibit in a school recital for a seasonal performance or city-wide competition. Lastly, throughout the school year, a visual arts class might enter artwork in various shows in preparation for the end-of-year student art awards competition. Although these courses may provide other kinds of valuable learning for students besides the performative and competitive aspects, the process along the way is traditionally meant to prepare for and hopefully to excel at these competitions. It could be said that these fine arts courses are like school athletics in that the desired goal is to beat others by way of demonstrating a mastery of certain skills.

The concern is not with competitions per se. Yet, in my view, the more students can engage and succeed collectively—the better. The concern here is student voice—Is it heard through the approach of these programs? Based on my 20 years teaching experience, I observed various arts programs, such as music or theatre, usually consist of limited selections of well-known compositions and scripts that have been regurgitated over the years. Perhaps this tendency is about maintaining familiarity, alignment, and consistency with lessons and activities. It probably also has to do with knowing what tools and materials have previously been successful at teaching content and what wins at competitions. Dance and visual arts programs are no exceptions. It is quite common that their materials and resources will repeat year-after-year because of small budgets and limited time to plan for innovative projects. Like music and theatre, their focus is likely to be on yearly seasonal shows, recitals, annual competitions, or portfolio reviews toward potential entry into arts colleges.

It is not that these competitive initiatives have absolutely no value for students (Butera et al., 2021; Verhoeff, 1997). Yet, some (myself included) argue that there is potential for more meaningful and holistic experiences that extend throughout a student's life—well beyond the competitive realm. From this stance, the likelihood that utilization of tradition, routine, and scripted experiences will limit student voice is great (Apple, 2003; Bale & Knopp, 2012). Moreover, rather than engaging students to think critically and contribute their original ideas toward consideration of relevant themes within their interests, or even to address current societal problems using the Arts, these programs may seem equivalent to a typical grocery store visit in which we have grown accustomed to seeing familiar products in frequented aisles.

There is an inclination to depend on arts programs to satisfy the production of beautifully reiterated products as a showcase of student talent and the schools' capacity to nurture it. It is

commonplace to boast that these initiatives are facilitated in the name of student development and achievement (Apple, 1999; 2003; 2014; Au, 2007; Bale & Knopp, 2012; Greene, 1980; Rose, 2014). A more critical eye, however, may reveal a similar picture when comparing the concepts of equity and equality. While initiatives are said to be geared toward fairness (everyone gets the same opportunity to enter the competition), teachers may lack the proper resources to meet everyone's needs—which may result in a lack of equity. The irony is that even if all the needs of students were met, there would still only be a small handful of art that gets chosen and displayed. Whether an elementary student creates an artwork with the mindset that it could be displayed in the hallway, or a high school senior considers the best work to include in their portfolio, the Arts toward a product-based, means-to-an-end endeavor becomes a “commonsense” (Apple, 1990) engagement of competitive tradition with very few winners (Apple, 1999; Bale & Knopp, 2012; Markovits, 2020).

Consider the scripted art experiences and competitions described above for just a moment more. One could argue that even if the foundation of arts curriculum includes repeating the works of masters, students still bring their own interpretations to these performances and an excitement of certain feelings and emotions may take place when playing, for example, in a marching band or dancing choreography of a classical ballet. Yet, students integrating their imagination or engaging a heightened awareness of their senses and emotions may not always be the case, and if student creativity and an aesthetic experience are not engagements that current endeavors can offer—it leads myself and others (Greene, 1980; 1986; 2001; Robinson, 1982; 2001; Stinson, 1985) to question the point of them in Arts Education.

Thus, if teachers do not create the space to invite aesthetic experience, to include engaging students in shaping lessons and activities with *their* stories, then they might as well be in support

of silencing student voice. When students are acting, playing instruments, and performing, are they given opportunities to write *their* song, to incorporate *their* interpretation of a musical instrument, or share *personal stories* in theatrical plays? Or are they merely reproducing someone else's work? Although we'd like to aim for the previous scenario, the latter tends to happen (Edwards, 2010). Such practice may also be evident in visual arts pedagogy in which students copy teachers' examples and the result is 20-30 artworks that look very similar (Foley, 2014; McLennan, 2010).

Take this example a step further to consider the realistic *hegemony*³ of visual arts programs. Very infrequently do we witness an *original, student-created* work of art either used in a UIL competition or a showing at a local school. Schools and their communities may claim to value student input and creativity, but students typically copy other artists' work (Foley, 2014; Greene, 1980; 1986; 2001; Gulla, 2018; McLennan, 2010) and the community is usually satisfied with this practice. The inclusion of well-known art and the masters who created them *are* significant and relevant for students to study and copy (Duncum, 1988; Ishibashi & Okada, 2004; 2006; Marsh et al., 1996; Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 2017; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). However, our allure to continue refabricating them may indicate a lack of ingenuity toward something original that is specifically reflective of today's life.

Experiences that happened 30, 50, or 100 years ago may be pertinent as to who we have become, or maybe even where we still are as a society. Yet are these understandings applicable to the experiences and voices of today's students? At what point in time can we say a student of the Arts is ready to explore their own themes? Is it somewhere in middle school, high school, or early adulthood? When I ask my current students (pre-service teachers, who are typically in their early

³ According to Apple (1990; 1999; 2003), *Hegemony* refers to the dominance that one social or political group has over another.

to mid-20's), if they still play their musical instruments, dance, or pick up the paintbrush and canvas; their reply is usually, "I haven't done art in years." So, did they ever get an opportunity to explore their own creative processes and aesthetic experiences, or did they just copy and live through others' art experiences? I *do not* believe we lack the ingenuity in creating a new generation of original thinkers. However, I *do* believe, based on my personal experience as an arts educator, that current arts programs may lack the necessary components to support students in developing their voice, original ideas, and *aesthetic awareness*⁴.

There may also be a misconception that current arts programs are where one might find solace from the rigidity of core-subjects that are assessed by state-mandated tests due to openness of thought and boundless creative opportunities. However, even the Arts are not safe from the hegemony of those in power of curriculum (Apple, 1999; 2003; Au, 2007, Greene, 1980; 1986; Rose, 2014). Indeed, the more stress that is placed on mandated testing and teacher accountability—with initiatives, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and Race to the Top (RTTT)—the narrower the space for the Arts, as well as the space *within* the Arts. This trend has been seen in the past when arts programs are the first in line to get omitted (Apple, 2003; Au, 2007; Bale & Knopp, 2012; Rose, 2014). Not only that, but the Arts become a place of one-dimensional assessment as to what counts as art in public schools (Foley, 2014; Greene, 1980; 1986; 2001; Gulla, 2018). A critical eye is vital to investigate curricula that claims to be neutral from political, monetary, or hegemonic agendas. From this stance, my ambition is to examine the purpose of the Arts, specifically *visual arts* programs, as well as teachers' role in them. I propose an examination,

⁴ According to Greene (1980; 1986; 2001), an *Aesthetic Awareness*, or aesthetic literacy is the ability to understand one's capacity to confront and engage artworks, as well as to access and understand one's feelings and emotions involved within the process. In addition, this awareness acknowledges the ability to articulate one's reflection of their aesthetic journey and creative processes.

and perhaps even a restoration, of what is meant by creativity, aesthetics, and meaningful art experiences in the context of the high school years.

I contend that the Arts, while having the potential to be a real threat to the hegemony of curriculum and *Neoliberalism*⁵ (Apple, 2014), could be perceived as mostly dormant in these times. One possible reason why the Arts may fail to be impactful in empowering student voice that transfers to core-subjects is because the Arts might suppress student creativity within its own structure. A careful consideration of critical pedagogy literature illuminates how arts curriculum may have fallen victim to dominant ideologies. Through my review of current literature, I have contemplated how visual arts teachers, the school community, and mandated testing, may contribute to the silencing of student voice and maintain the hegemony of curriculum. This may happen if *privatization*⁶ and *compartmentalization*⁷ tactics are utilized to maintain *Capitalist*⁸ structures and employ art teachers as part of the *social reproduction*⁹ process. I suggest that this injustice might be eradicated with thoughtful integration of aesthetic experience and the development of a vision necessary to see through the fog of dominant ideologies (Stinson, 1985).

Through this study, I sought to explore how applying the theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogues (i.e., Apple, 2014; Au, 2007; hooks, 2010; McLaren, 1998; 2003; Pinar, 2012; Rossatto, 2005) may aid in reconstructing commonsense approaches to education to ones that are

⁵ According to Apple (2014), *Neoliberalism* is the concept that recognizes free-market Capitalism. It is a policy model that encompasses both political and economic agendas. This model de-regulates government control and gives more economic power to the private sector.

⁶ *Privatization* is a deregulation from the State to private sectors. For example, property that was once owned by the government becomes owed by a private entity—hence, a public school becomes a private school.

⁷ *Compartmentalization* in education is teaching knowledge through individual subjects. This approach contrasts with holistic learning in which a concerted effort is made to teach by way of connecting across subject content areas and engage students through mind, body, spirit, and one's environment.

⁸ *Capitalist* or *Capitalism* is an economic system based on the private ownership and investments in industry for profit.

⁹ *Social Reproduction* describes the reproduction of social systems that are influenced by demographics, education, or monetary status. It is a concept that explains how current social systems are maintained.

more empowering toward students' life-long vision of their role in society. These critical theories are at the very heart of compassion, hope, and justice for *all of humanity*—concepts that are very much in correlation with aesthetic experience and what it has to offer in changing the existing climate (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2001; Medina, 2012; Stinson, 1985). From my perspective, the answer to counteract this may very well be found through the exploration of aesthetic experience which includes the development and nurturing of one's social responsibility, *body authority*¹⁰, and compassion (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1995; 2001; Medina, 2012; Stinson, 1985).

Arts Teachers: Their Role in Social Reproduction

Although the Arts curriculum has already been socially constructed by dominant ideologies even before it entered schools, teachers may still play a significant role in sustaining the status quo. Apple (1990) addresses this likelihood by referring to these types of teachers as *institutional abstractions*—almost like empty bodies that roam the schools doing what they are directed to do. In my professional experience, I have observed fine arts administrators and school principals expect band directors to outcompete other schools—so they do what they can to accomplish this—even if it means silencing student voices. In addition, Apple (1990) views the dialogue teachers have in schools as potentially being *neutral commodity language* in which they talk to students presenting themselves as transparent and unaffected by the *social and economic reproduction* imposed by those in power. Similarly, Freire (1970) contends that teachers have a habit of depositing what gets to be *official* information into (what they view as) barren minds. In my 20

¹⁰ According to Medina (2006), *Body Authority* is “the visceral feeling that helps us distinguish what is fair from what is unfair” (p. 46). This authority aids individuals in their capacity to make decisions rather than allowing others to decide for them.

years as a public-school visual arts teacher, I have witnessed fine arts educators deposit scripted, well-known dialogue and materials into the minds of students and engage them in the rhetoric—*practice makes perfect*—with the intent to increase the chance of winning at competitions.

Through all these *agreements* (Ruiz, 1997) that teachers concede to, there is potential to wind up disassociating themselves from students. Teachers may become indifferent, insensitive, unhuman, or as Pinar (2012) suggest—*posthuman*¹¹. When teachers approach their relationship with students through this sort of detachment, the tendency might be to let students fend for themselves based on the concept of *meritocracy*¹² (Markovits, 2020). This idea is that if students work hard enough, their work will get selected, they will win at competitions, and become successful. If they do not win at competitions, it might be assumed that students didn't work hard enough, or their work isn't good enough to win. This described journey, may or may not be about developing one's aesthetic literacy, or a life-long regard toward the *aesthetic*¹³. It may not involve opportunities for teachers to share their aesthetic experiences with students or model what it looks like to immerse oneself in an artwork. This experience may very well be an isolated journey in which it is the student against their peers, the school, the community, and society as they fight to validate their voice—if not worthy of showcasing in an art show—perhaps important enough to be heard within some venue. This may be part of the reason why aesthetic experience is often

¹¹ *Posthumanism* focuses on environmental influences, such as cultural, technological, biological, and the physical rather than on an individual's ability to navigate their course toward change.

¹² *Meritocracy* is an individuals' achievement based on ability, talent, or performance. It does not take into consideration social class or wealth.

¹³ *Aesthetic* is a set of principles to refer to an artists' intentions, artwork, or a particular art movement.

overlooked (Greene, 1980; 1986; Medina, 2012) as it does not fit into the criteria of what has come to be regarded as *official knowledge*¹⁴ (Apple, 1990; 2014).

The Community: Their Role in Maintaining Hegemony

Fine arts curriculum is not safe from what Apple (1975) refers to as the *hidden curriculum*¹⁵ and its influence. Pinar (2012) explains that even with the best intentions and initiatives, such as efforts to celebrate student achievements, may still have underpinnings of submission to dominant ideologies. This can be seen in fine arts' tradition of community performances and competitive contests. Although most would assume that children greatly benefit from these initiatives, not all scholars agree that they are representative of the most meaningful experiences for students. They may very well represent, as Apple refers to them, "assumptions that do not get articulated or questioned" (Apple, 1975, p. 99). Further, while some parents praise their children for getting selected to perform, compete, or display their work, other parents may sulk with their children for *not making the cut*. This makes me, and others (Apple, 1999; 2003; Moje et al., 2004; Rogoff, 1994) wonder is there any narrative in which the community questions the value of these existing structures?

One might ask: "Why should these initiatives get questioned? After all—it is *tradition*, right? It has been done this way for so long—it must be the *right* way!" Yet, there may be a misconception that mastering and regurgitating art and songs of the past, be it for school social functions or competitions, are the *only* meaningful aesthetic experiences for students, and above

¹⁴ According to Apple (1975), through hegemony and privatization, textbooks and curriculum become controlled, and knowledge derived from these resources becomes recognized as *the* knowledge to acquire. Hence this knowledge becomes official, or *Official Knowledge*.

¹⁵ According to Apple (1975), the *Hidden Curriculum* is a set of norms, values, and beliefs that may be learned unintentionally but is conveyed by the classroom environment.

all, develop and nurture creativity (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). Viewpoints such as this, may prove to be as McLaren (2003) puts it: *ideological hegemony*, in that it primarily serves as a reproduction of what students will expect at college-related competitions, in entertainment, or visual and musical accompaniment—for example, at a football game halftime show. One might ask: “Why are these practices *not* questioned?” Besides the desire to maintain tradition, Apple (2014) asserts that knowledge finally filtering to schools and their community has already been *conditioned* by supposed *common-sensical* ideals of those in power. Hence, it is difficult to take a stand on what the majority feels is commonsense, and the way things should be.

Standardization: A Neoliberal Strategy to Disrupt the Arts?

*Standardized testing*¹⁶ affects fine arts curriculum in three ways: First, it narrows the curriculum and squeezes art programs to the wayside. Au (2007) explains that high stakes testing empowers curricular control because only the content that gets tested is deemed significant enough to keep in students’ daily routine. Secondly, tests only measure a child one-dimensionally—essentially, the *right* answer according to the curriculum (Greene, 1980). Rossatto (2005) asserts that standardized tests do not consider holistic development, rather, they only measure if a child can regurgitate hegemonic information deposited by their teachers (Freire, 1970). This discourse serves little-to-no value for the student’s identity, interests, and culture. Finally, tests have a powerful influence on the Arts as they narrow critical thinking and creativity (Foley, 2014; Greene, 1980; Gulla, 2018).

Foley (2014) asserts that because of standardized testing, creativity has taken on a paradoxical meaning in both tested and non-tested contexts. To illustrate, the substantial focus of

¹⁶ *Standardized testing* is an approach in which administering and assessing tests are executed in the same predetermined manner for all students.

testing has perpetuated the thinking that subjective or abstract ideas have no place in a world with only *one* “bubble to fill in” for the correct answer. Consequently, creativity becomes situated outside the realm of core-subject content areas. Similarly, Foley (2014) goes on to explain that even though the Arts are currently not a tested subject, creativity tends to be assessed based on how accurately a student can copy a teacher’s example, a technique of a master artist, or a well-known artwork. In other words, rather than viewing creativity as the source for originality, out-of-the-box ideas, and unlimited possibilities, it is now being looked at as just another space to assess for *official knowledge* (Apple, 2014).

Aesthetic Experience: When, and Why We Should Care

Although most art curricula and related programs encourage aesthetic experience to be a part of student understanding, it is often regarded as a phenomenon that happens *automatically* when children view works of art. This is very much in line with scholars, such as Tatarkiewicz (1980), that speak of aesthetic experience as disinterested, unintentional, bound to happen, and a matter of typical happenstance. This viewpoint can also be compared to the concept of *Formalism*¹⁷ in which emphasis is not on deliberate interpretation of how social significance, content, history, social conventions influence an artwork—or how all these considerations connect to one’s experiences. Rather, the focus is on how aesthetic elements (i.e., line, color, shape, and texture) work to complement the artwork’s *form* (Kant, 1790; 2000; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). While some children may have euphoric learning experiences without any assistance, how would a student or a teacher know that they did? Is it important to acknowledge and address these experiences when they happen? Many scholars would argue, *yes* (e.g., Dewey,

¹⁷ According to Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020), *Formalism* is an approach to aesthetics which focuses on an artwork’s form—void of personal interest, historical, political, or cultural contexts.

1934; Greene, 1980; 1986; 1995; 2001; Eisner, 2002; Medina, 2012; Stinson, 1985; Sunday, 2015; 2018). Yet, to say that a child had an aesthetic experience *without* having a conversation about it, could be compared to assuming children will inevitably find life-relevance with math or science concepts without ever assessing their understanding.

These assumptions and lack of dialogue between teacher and students are exactly the concepts that Au (2012), Banks (2015), Giroux (2016), and Pinar (2012) assert to be the detriment of current curricula. For example, Banks (2015) asserts that students should be given the opportunity not only to construct their own views, but also to articulate their understanding through multiple perspectives (Kalantzsis & Cope, 2012). The intention should not be to *throw things at the wall* hoping that they stick. Rather, there should be careful planning of intentional spaces not only to nurture these experiences, but also to talk about them. Pinar (2012) avers that because individuals in schools choose not to participate in *complicated conversations*¹⁸ about phenomena, such as in this case with aesthetic experience, we are often left with *official knowledge* (Apple, 2014) that gets regarded as the *only* knowledge to be measured.

Banks (2015), Giroux (2016), and Greene (1995; 2001) argue that because value tends to be placed only on the *quantifiable*; then concepts, such as aesthetic experience are often overlooked because they are phenomena that typically only an individual can claim to have had. There is no existing assessment tool in which K-12 teachers can justify that their students are, in fact, having aesthetic experiences in their classroom. According to the various levels of aesthetic experience defined by Stinson (1985), a teacher claiming that all her/his students are aesthetically engaged at the highest level would, therefore, be claiming something very unrealistic. To assert

¹⁸ According to Pinar (2012), *Complicated Conversations* represent dialogue that may consist of exposure to social injustices or political contradictions. These conversations may prove to be challenging, especially within the context of public education.

the highest aesthetic level would be to say that the entire class became so moved by their artmaking experience that “[their] work[s] of art [became] vehicle[s] for appreciating, connecting, self-reflecting in critical awareness and moral agency” (p. 5). Or, as Medina (2012) eloquently puts it, “It is a moment of perception when our senses are functioning at their peak, because we are fully aware and fully awakened by the artwork in front of us” (p. 44). It is likely that every arts teacher (or any teacher for that matter) would celebrate that their methods were so effective as to cause their whole class to approach their work with such emotional intensity and presence. Yet, arts teachers need to be deeply reflective about the level of self-reflection, critical awareness, and perception that is happening in their classrooms to consider whether emphasis is more about winning contests or on empowering students with meaningful art experiences. In addition, it should be questioned as to whether approaches consider *subjective* experiences that are abstract (Greene, 1980) or only *objective* ones that are tangible.

The value of aesthetic experience is that it has the potential to balance our approach toward a Democratic society (Dewey, 1934, Eisner, 2002; Greene, 2000). Aesthetic experience facilitates an approach in which *process* is more significant than *product* and *collective* ideals are better for humanity than *individualistic* ones. In addition, learning is more impactful when it is student-centered and there is an understanding between teacher and student that knowledge is *co-constructed*¹⁹ and rooted in a meaningful relationship between the two (Medina, 2010; Medina, 2012; Moje et al., 2004; Rogoff, 1994). Since aesthetic experience requires a peak engagement of one’s sensory and emotional capacities (Dewey, 1934), it is hopeful that teachers will model vulnerability by sharing their aesthetic experiences and students will reciprocate when sharing

¹⁹ *Co-construction* is a concept that derives from early childhood theorists, Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget. The concept recognizes that knowledge evolves by way of *active* participation and collaboration—it is not a *passive* process.

theirs. Engagements such as these support the empowerment of teacher's and student's bodies as contributors toward knowledge. Learning to depend on one's body, or *embedded cognition*²⁰ (Nathan & Sawyer, 2022), and developing the kinesthetic skills to access those embedded feelings, emotions, memories, sounds, tastes, and colors are vital to understanding one's identity, as well as their learning process (Medina, 2012; Nathan & Sawyer, 2022). These acknowledgements contribute to the validation that the body is just as significant as the mind in retaining knowledge because the body is a spiritual realm that influences a persons' reality (Anzaldúa, 1987; 2007; Greene, 1995; 2001; Stinson, 1985).

Yet, for many students, school is a waste of time because they must endure remote learning, bland classroom settings, and teachers who view their role as nothing more than depositors of information (Aronowitz, 2004; Fischman, 2009; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2010; 2016; Medina, 2012; Pinar, 2012; Rossatto, 2005). For these students, time in school is irrelevant and their thinking, emotions, and creativity are invested in entertaining themselves with anything but school. Rossatto (2005) explains that these students likely suffer *blind* or *fatalistic* views about who they are and their critical role in society. They do not see school as time invested *now* for a successful future. Moreover, they would most likely not view their schooling tenure of playing other peoples' music for band or reproducing the artwork of master's as time well-invested. Many times, I have heard an individual say, "I used to play in high school, but I haven't picked up the instrument in years," or "I haven't painted since elementary school." Why? Perhaps most of their experiences were thought-out, pre-packaged, and prescribed before they had an opportunity to see how they would *personally* approach them and make application to their lives—which decades of research shows

²⁰ According to Nathan & Sawyer (2022), *Embodied Cognition* consists of how one's body and environment plays a critical role in cognitive ability. For example, cognition may become embodied psychologically, biologically, or even culturally.

is critical for life-long learning (Greene, 1980; Moje et al. 2004; Olmedo, 2003; Razfar et al., 2011; Stinson, 1985; Rose, 2014). Developing a *critical consciousness*²¹ along with body awareness, or an understanding of what one's body is capable of, can aid students in connecting both their past and present experiences—this approach contextualizes their education and makes it relevant (Au, 2009; Freire, 1970; Greene, 1980; 1986; Kincheloe et al., 1999; Medina, 2012; Stinson, 1985). In this way, teachers may lead the way by modeling how to develop such qualities and by empowering students as agents equipped with *transformative optimism*²² (Rossatto, 2005), not only in their personal happiness and education, but also as powerful game-changers for the betterment of society.

Thus, the value of changing the competitive, regurgitative, one-dimensional, and assembly-line tradition of fine arts curriculum is, in essence, saving imagination, creativity, and ultimately humanity. Apple (2014) argues that these types of traditions silence individuality and culture in favor of seeking economic pursuits. Moreover, he argues that the purpose of education should be to “dignify human life” (Apple, 2014, p.3). To accomplish these goals, however, requires resilience and hope (Rossatto et al., 2020). As Freire (2017) enlightens, “without a vision of tomorrow, hope is impossible (p. 45). Further, Greene (2001) argues that without imagination, one cannot begin to envision what the world could be like. I interpret this to mean that hope can benefit from creativity—creativity that we cannot afford to see diminish if meaningful learning and optimism is to thrive.

²¹ According to Freire (1970), developing a *Critical Consciousness, conscientization, or conscientização* in Portuguese, means developing an in-depth understanding of the world which may include exposure of social ills or political contradictions. This concept is grounded in neo-Marxist critical theory.

²² According to Rossatto (2005), *Transformative Optimism* is the ability to perceive oneself and their role within society as a fluid process. In other words, individuals find knowledge learned in schools, as well as their participating in co-constructing it as relevant to their lives. Therefore, they realize their potential to create change within themselves and society.

The Seed is Planted: My Experience as a Visual Arts Teacher

The topic of my study is aesthetic experience and how it is defined and facilitated in high school visual arts classrooms. My interest in this topic began as a collaborative journey with a colleague when I taught art at a public high school some twenty years ago. Initially, we would share stories about our personal aesthetic experiences when creating works of art, and then we began to wonder if our students experienced the same elation in our classrooms. We hoped that they did, but we asked ourselves the following questions: How would we know? What evidence is there that someone is having an aesthetic experience? How would our students go about validating that they had one? Is it important that they do? Having felt the euphoric satisfaction of an aesthetic experience and the connections that would elicit when engaged in conversations about them, we both felt a responsibility to share our understandings about this phenomenon with our students. The original goal was to create a classroom space that would encourage students to better understand the processes that led to these experiences and share this knowledge so that we could facilitate more of them and engage in dialogue to appreciate them.

What began to emerge was a fascination for creative process over product. I quickly designed inquiry forms entitled, “The Five-Steps of an Aesthetic Experience.” It also became known in the class as the “Validation Paper,” in which my students would acknowledge every decision made in each artwork for each part of their creative process from start to finish. The steps were as follows: (1) Inspiration, (2) Research, (3) Work, (4) Self-Gratification, and (5) Sharing with Others. I didn’t know it at the time, but these steps are quite like Parsons’ Stages of Aesthetic Development (Parsons et al., 1978). My students’ ability to articulate this hierarchy of experience and their developing appreciation for their work ethic and commitment involved in seeing their idea through to completion became more important than being competitive in art shows and

portfolios. Not that we were *not* competitive—but winning was just no longer our number one concern. Rather, our shared priority became seeking our next aesthetic experience and being enthusiastic about sharing it with the class. I found my students’ developing confidence in articulating their artistic decisions and stories through a series of stages to be more fruitful than me strategizing their best techniques to be better than someone else at artmaking. In other words, exploring aesthetic experience seemed to be a more meaningful alternative. My research is influenced by all these contemplations.

The Elephant in the Room

Within these new and exciting spaces, the “elephant in the room” for me, personally, has always been the expectation to enter my students’ artwork in competitive shows, and of course, the goal was to win. Although I have most certainly played that “game” with some success, those initiatives always felt shallow with short-term benefits for students. There are two examples that need to be shared which illustrate this superficiality. Once, at an art college fair, in which high school seniors would share their portfolios with various prestigious art schools in hopes to land a scholarship, a space was provided the day before so that they could present their portfolios and practice what they would say to recruiters the following day. Although much of the work was representative of great technical skill, I became disappointed with teachers (myself included) as their students struggled with how to articulate reasons for artistic directions, use of materials, and intentions for their work. It was almost as if they were speaking about art that they didn’t create—totally disconnected from the experience of making it and their creative processes. On a different occasion, which was another art college fair, I observed student-after-student who shied away from recruiters’ questions and resorted to say, “Well, I’m not sure, the teacher told me to do it like this,” or “I don’t know, it was an assignment, and that’s what I was given to draw.” I need to add that

although there were a handful of students who could eloquently speak about their *original* works of art, many students at this event shared reproductions of popular teen culture, such as sports players, related logos, superheroes, or anime characters. These types of works may have been helpful in practicing and demonstrating students' technical skill, but they also (to me) spoke to the teachers' lack of commitment to develop their students' ingenuity and understandings of their creative process.

The intention in sharing these two experiences is not to attack students nor their art teachers' efforts. I have also had my share in facilitating these types of often shallow experiences. Rather, it is to draw attention as to where the focus of artmaking tends to be and question what influences the classroom to become a space in which students are not validated with complete ownership of their artmaking process and opportunities to understand it. I taught visual arts for five years at a public high school and 15 years at the elementary level. And it is during this tenure that I never fully embraced the tradition of art competitions as I have come to understand that they are heavily influenced by dominant ideologies of *Neoliberalism* and *individualism*²³ (Apple, 2014; Au, 2012; Pinar, 2012). As mentioned previously, the focus of these competitions was *always* on the final product in which there would be very few “winners” amongst many “losers” who, it seems, might not have had the opportunity to explore their creative processes in an aesthetically, *experiential* way. Rather, they were allowed to build on already established works of art to practice their technical ability in an *experimental* way—one in which teachers could predict and wield the outcomes (Edwards, 2010; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020).

²³ According to Apple (2014), *Individualism* emphasizes on the intrinsic worth of an individual. Independence and self-reliance are valued more than those of a social group.

In addition, there was a hyperfocus on competitions as if they were the best means to assess the achievements of students, as well as teacher accountability. To put it another way, an art teacher who did not enter their students' work in shows, or did, but their students rarely won, received the label of a mediocre or even an awful teacher. Similarly, if students did not win portfolio reviews, get offered art scholarships, or receive awards at art shows, they too, were likely to be labeled mediocre or awful artists—a process that Lowenfeld & Brittain (1987) contend happens during the grade levels of middle school and early high school and results in children never attempting visual arts again. In my professional experience, this perception of teachers and students is not out-of-the-norm, especially within a community who takes pride in being recognized as *the* customary champions when it comes to the Arts.

Through the years of taking all these experiences into consideration, I have sought out alternatives to traditional approaches in teaching visual arts—the tradition of *individual* pursuits and success. During my third year of teaching high school, I began to appreciate the value of shared, lived experience, or the spaces in-between the teacher and student to shape curriculum before I learned the term—*Curriculum as Lived* (Tilley & Taylor, 2013). This approach is interested in spaces created within the learning environment to encourage dialogue about student identity, interests, and culture. Upon opening my mind to the potential my students had in teaching *me*, I begin to recognize the significance of co-constructing knowledge. It would be several years until I understood this practice as an *Engaged Pedagogy* in which educators teach *for* and *with* students, rather than teaching *at* them (Berry, 2010). Moreover, it was only a few years ago that I came to an understanding of the concept, *modeling vulnerability*, or being open to sharing who we are beyond the context of the classroom in front of our students—even if this means exposing our emotions and taking a risk of being judged (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016). I realize that this

has been my mission since I first began teaching. This background is at the very heart of my interest in aesthetic experience because I feel teachers need to model the vulnerability necessary to engage it, invite students' interpretations about it, and work together on the most meaningful way to utilize it.

The integration of aesthetic experience in my classroom was transformative in the way I would interpret the purposes of art and the time my students and I would spend together. Sharing our aesthetic experiences with each other became a way for us to appreciate each other as human beings beyond the confines of the school. In this way, I have always been interested if other art teachers had similar experiences with their students and wondered of their successes with incorporating them into their classroom—as well as their purposes for doing so. Particularly, I am curious to know what life-long experience or initiative they hope to develop in their students? How do they facilitate aesthetic experience to empower students with the necessary appreciation, compassion, and motivation to create societal change (Kincheloe et al., 1999; Medina, 2012; McLaren, 2003; Stinson, 1985).

Purpose & Significance of the Study

Drawing from my professional experience as a visual arts teacher and my positionality in the field, my research examined the meaning that teachers placed on aesthetic experiences. The aim was to comprehend how their understanding of aesthetic experiences and use of them in the classroom created their reality, particularly their daily interaction with their students and how they utilized time and materials to make best use of their students' aesthetic experiences. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how high school visual arts teachers defined and interpreted the aesthetic experiences their students had in the classroom, how they defined their role in

facilitating those experiences, and toward what ends? Discovering teacher interpretations and ways in which they utilize aesthetic experiences in their classrooms contributes to the minimal amount of literature at the high school level currently available. The hope is that this work will provide missing knowledge that may be utilized to better support teacher preparation, art education practices, and professional development. In this way, a consideration of this scholarship may lead to the opening of additional spaces for students' creative processes in the face of Neoliberalism and point to directions for supporting these spaces in which both teacher and students can develop deeper understandings of the aesthetic experiences in the classroom.

Context & Scope of the Study

My research examined the interpretations of aesthetic experience through the lived experiences of high school visual arts teachers in a borderland community of West Texas. Participants included five teachers who have taught at least three years of advanced-level visual arts at the high school level. Data was collected by way of three, one-on-one interviews. These five teachers are all from the same school district and have collaborated in many of the same engagements, such as art teacher workshops, teacher development training, student competitions, art shows, and art college portfolio reviews. They have also cooperated with the same administrators, such as the department fine arts director, the visual arts facilitator, the fine arts faculty, and staff. With all of this in mind, I realize that the scope of my study was constrained within a very specific community.

Since I utilized a qualitative method of inquiry, my intention was not necessarily on generalizability—although with my use of *descriptive* phenomenology along with an *interpretive* approach (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022), I did highlight universal characteristics of an aesthetic

experience, according to my participants. On the other hand, the scope of this study relied on purposeful sampling to grasp an in-depth understanding of aesthetic experiences from participants who had the most knowledge within the context of high school. This study did not consider the views of policy makers, administrators, parents, or even students applying *their* voice—all these individuals were considered, but *only* through the perspective of the teachers interviewed.

While the aim of this study was intended to better inform teachers of the most meaningful practice for their students, bearing in mind the relationship and co-construction that happens between the teacher and their students, the facilitation of aesthetic experience and its role was articulated only by the teacher. A great deal of trust was placed on teachers to perceive, to the best of their ability, the interpretations of their students' aesthetic experiences. Since aesthetic interpretation was told through teachers' voice, it may appear that this study indicates a *teacher-centered pedagogy*²⁴. However, this is *not* the case. The study aims to empower teachers so that they, in turn, can facilitate a *student-centered* classroom in which student voice and agency within the Arts is heard and employed.

Current literature on aesthetic experience has yielded a focus on teachers modeling how to approach and engage with an artwork to encourage an encounter in which one's senses can operate at a heightened state. Although there were diverse definitions that surfaced about aesthetic experience, my focus was to highlight its *pragmatic* and *Democratic* nature within the classroom. A concern that took precedence in this study was examining how teachers *intentionally* planned for the facilitation of aesthetic experience. A limitation of this study is that while it acknowledges

²⁴ According to Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020), *teacher-centered pedagogy* consists of lessons that are highly structured and assessed through standardized patterns. Teachers provide models for students to copy and have firm control of learning environments. It is the teachers who determine what the subject is and how it should be taught aiming toward acquisition of specific skills.

other interpretations and purposes for aesthetic experience, the focus of my study was on *intentional* planning to further support *teachers' practice* for open-ended approaches in which students are empowered to interpret based on *their needs*—yet the hope is arts toward *societal change*.

Part of my theoretical framework purposefully contains Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's (2020) conceptualization of four different aesthetic integration approaches within art education. These include, (1) Representationalism, (2) Expressionism/Cognitivism, (3) Formalism, and (4) Postmodernism/Contextualism. Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020) go on to explain each of these approaches. Representationalism emphasizes how students make connections between art and what it represents. Teachers may seek to assess the aesthetic based on how realistic students' artwork is, as well as the skills necessary to achieve that realism (Charlton, 2016; Fleming, 2012). Expressionism/Cognitivism has to do with understanding how an artwork represents the unique feelings and states of an individual (Barrett, 2017). Hence, the aesthetic in this approach is about students developing the ability to express their feelings and emotions through their artwork, as well as transform one's ways of perceiving (Greene, 2001; Mouriki-Zervou, 2011).

The *formalist* approach disregards the personal, moral, cognitive, or practical reflection of an art object (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). Instead, the aesthetic is assessed on the form of the artwork as described by art elements and principles (Bell, 1913; 1958). Postmodernism/Contextualism acknowledges that art is part of culture and embodies social, historical, and political influences (Duncum, 2000; Freedman, 2000). Consequently, the aesthetic, in this case, acknowledges students' identities, social awareness, and lived experiences. Viewing artwork and creating it would be aimed toward facilitating a self-understanding, a reinterpretation

of art purposes, and a transformative approach to enhancing the quality of life (Anderson, 2003; Sandell, 2009).

These approaches were used to analyze teachers' interpretations of aesthetic experience, as well as their aesthetic levels presented in chapter five (this will be explored further in chapter six and seven). Yet, the scope of this research was not necessarily to highlight aesthetic engagement toward realistic representations, to solely capitalize on students' creative expression, or even to acknowledge an artwork's form by way of art elements and principles of design. Instead, the goal of this study was to utilize the viewing and making of art to better understand the social, historical, and political influences that interweave between one's aesthetic experiences and their capacity to enact change in themselves and society. Therefore, my research study and attention to aesthetic experience mostly encompasses the *Postmodernism/Contextualism*²⁵ approach.

This is where the main component of my theoretical framework was employed. I utilized Stinson's (1985) levels of aesthetic experience: (1) a mere appreciation, (2) a transcendental moment of connectivity between self and others, and (3) the artwork and connection with it becomes a catalyst for change. Stinson's (1985) levels were used to categorize the levels that teachers applied to gauge their students. Along with Stinson's (1985) three levels, Medina's (2012) definition of aesthetic experience was also considered in connection to teachers' perceptions in how they facilitated it and what it was to be utilized toward. For example, when students' senses are operating at their peak, and they are fully aware of the artwork in front of them—what were

²⁵ According to Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020), a *Postmodernism/Conceptualism* approach to aesthetic differs from Representationalism, Expressionism, and Formalism in that emphasis is placed on the context of artworks that children view, as well as create. Within this approach, aesthetic experience underscores how students reinterpret education goals, themselves, and social relationships toward transformative endeavors. As mentioned previously, this approach underscores the motivation of this study.

they encouraged to do? In addition, how were teachers able to facilitate this process? How did teachers and students know that this process was taking place? How did they share this experience appropriately and how was it used as part of the students' learning process?

Research Questions

This study examined how teachers interpret aesthetic experience and how they facilitate it in their classrooms. From my previous research (pilot study), I began to develop a preliminary understanding of the role of aesthetic experience in high school visual arts classrooms. This led to the development of the current study which is to go into greater depth of how teachers' perception of their relationship with students and their planning process influences the presence and use of aesthetic experiences. The guiding questions of this research were:

1. What is aesthetic experience according to high school visual arts teachers?
 - How do they recognize it?
 - How do they facilitate their students in recognizing it?
 - How do they plan for and facilitate it?
2. How do teachers construct meanings with their students about aesthetic experiences?
 - What goal(s) do teachers place on aesthetic experiences?
 - What role do teachers play in the dialogue initiated by aesthetic experience?
 - Is aesthetic experience recognized in a novel way that differs from the literature?

Dissertation Summary

This dissertation is organized into the following nine chapters:

Chapter One: This introductory chapter provided an overview of the study, its goals, and the organization of the research. In addition, it included some personal reflections on my own location in relationship to this study. Throughout this dissertation, researcher reflections about the importance of situating myself within my research will continue to be integrated.

Chapter Two: In this chapter, a literature review and conceptual framework to ground the study is presented. Several bodies of literature are brought together from the emerging field of aesthetic experience studies, visual Arts Education, Arts Education toward citizenship and democracy, Feminist education, aesthetic literacy, and intentional planning for aesthetic experience. Further, gaps in these bodies of thought that frame our understanding of aesthetic experience and its facilitation in public K-12 Arts Education are identified. In addition, this literature review chapter drew on Feminist scholars to critique and problematize some of the dominant, linear, and static theories of aesthetic education.

Chapter Three: In this chapter, the conceptual foundation that drives this research is laid out. Reflection on literature that underscores how Neoliberalism influences the current educational landscape through commonsense themes such as high-stakes testing, meritocracy, privatization, and compartmentalization was included, as well as how influences may be countered by the inclusion of critical pedagogy scholarship and reconstruction of visual arts curriculum. Also presented is a theoretical framework that brings together some of the literature on aesthetic experience and varying levels of the creative process to examine data presented in later chapters. This was accomplished by integrating the frameworks of Stinson (1985) and her three levels of

aesthetic experience, as well as Greene (2001) and Medina's (2012) scholarship in facilitating aesthetic experience toward the transformation of self, to in turn, help others. To encompass other pedagogical practices that may extend beyond Medina's (2012) and Stinson's (1985) frameworks, a discussion is also included on the integration of the four aesthetic theories that Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020) utilized in their study.

Chapter Four: In this chapter, the research design, demonstrating the need to use a hybrid phenomenological qualitative approach (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022) to best understand the perspectives of teachers as it pertains to their personal experiences and their classroom experiences with the phenomenon of aesthetic experience is presented. My rationale for choosing one-on-one interviews and *two* distinct member checks is explained. Further, the setting and research participants are described, and my analysis process is detailed. Finally, this chapter concludes with some reflections on the integration of *descriptive* and *interpretive* phenomenology as my methodology.

Chapter Five: This chapter represents the first part of my data analysis in which only the *descriptive* findings will be presented. The second part of the analysis is continued in chapter six. This division was intended to stay aligned with Alhazmi & Kaufmann's (2022) hybrid phenomenology which consists of two distinct analytical approaches.

Chapter Six: In this chapter, part two of my data analysis is thoroughly explained through the presentation of the *interpretive* findings. The process involved in my data analysis to include coding selections and development of themes is described. In addition, how the various lenses of my theoretical framework were employed throughout the analysis are elaborated on. This chapter concludes with the key themes that emerged and general implications of the findings.

Chapter Seven: In this chapter, final reflection from the project is presented, with expanded implications explored. I elaborated on how these considerations might impact both students' short-term and long-term aesthetic development, as well as teacher perspectives and pedagogical approaches. Limitations of the study are highlighted. Further, recommendations—inspired by my participants—for teachers, administrators, and policymakers about ways to better support the facilitation of aesthetic experience toward critical awareness and active participation both within the classroom and society are provided.

Chapter Eight: In this chapter, conclusions, implications, and suggestions for future research are presented.

Chapter Nine: Finally, this dissertation is closed with personal reflections and *my* interpretation of aesthetic experience. This chapter offers a brief look into aesthetic experience as it might be recognized beyond the walls of the classroom and *even* the art world.

Chapter 2

Aesthetic Experience: A Review of Literature

Perspectives on Aesthetic Experience

Two main definitions of aesthetic experience may be identified in the literature. The first definition views it as a pragmatic and Democratic endeavor. Within this view, aesthetic experience is understood as a sensory involvement with emphasis on the exploration of materials, and a process that all humanity should be involved in because it has come to be valued as a component of human development (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970; 1987). Moreover, its integration in general education curriculum is seen as beneficial. The second definition is an extension of the previous to include an engagement of vulnerability, reflection, and action within the art viewing/making process. Emphasis is on relationships, not only between students and artwork, but also between students and the world. Rather than viewing the aesthetic as a gift to bestow upon schools and the children that attend, it is seen as a catalyst to develop morality and empathy in which students can give back to the world. Also, within this perspective, aesthetic experience is not a passive happenstance or a mere frill (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1986; Schaeffer, 2015). On the other hand, it takes *effort* to be achieved, and although it is not to be forced, *what* one chooses to do with that phenomenon should engage a consideration of their civic responsibility—and most importantly—action (Greene, 1980; 1986; Medina, 2006/2009/2012/2016; Stinson, 1985).

An examination of theoretical scholarship (e.g., Edwards, 2010; Gulla, 2018; Lim, 2004; Medina, 2009; Newman, 1980; Ortiz, 2022; Schaeffer, 2015; Stinson, 1985, 1995) reveals that current perspectives of aesthetic experience are heavily influenced by the perspectives of Dewey (1934), Eisner (1998; 2002; 2004), and Greene (1980; 1986; 1995; 2000; 2001). This scholarship

has led to conceptualization within empirical studies highlighting aesthetic experience as pragmatic, disciplined-based, relational, inquiry-based, and embodiment. These studies have encompassed elementary school levels, college, and even beyond. Yet, there is little scholarship at the high school level. As will be discussed later, there are three studies within this review that include participants within the age-level of high school (Ingram, 2013; Ingram & Drinkwater, n.d.; Sossin et al., 2010). However, much of the focus in these studies is on the type of artworks and materials involved in artmaking and sharing these considerations with classmates. Although these studies highlighted the use of artwork toward aesthetic inquiry and re-envisioning society in alternate ways, there is little detail on the engagement of experience itself. Most significantly, these three studies speak little of the relationship between teachers and students and how that partnership plays a role in the facilitation of aesthetic experience in the classroom. Therefore, there is currently a limited view of aesthetic experience as a process toward a relationship with one's artwork, developing a level of commitment to one's experience with the artwork, and dialogue about aesthetic embodiment.

This literature review begins first by acknowledging the major definitions of aesthetic experience, and then analyzes themes within those definitions. A total of six themes were identified. They include Pragmatic and Democratic, Interdisciplinary, Relational, Inquiry: A Dynamic Shift, Alternative Visions of the Future, and Embodiment and Self-Empowerment (See Figure 1. for main themes and connected theoretical underpinnings). The first two subheadings are identified as encapsulating the pragmatic and Democratic definition of aesthetic experience. Relational Aesthetics is intentionally placed in the middle as a reflective point to highlight the focus of art goals evolving from emphasis on final products toward creative process. From Inquiry:

A Dynamic Shift and onward, themes include a pragmatic and Democratic approach, but also expand the aesthetic toward a civic responsibility and call to action.

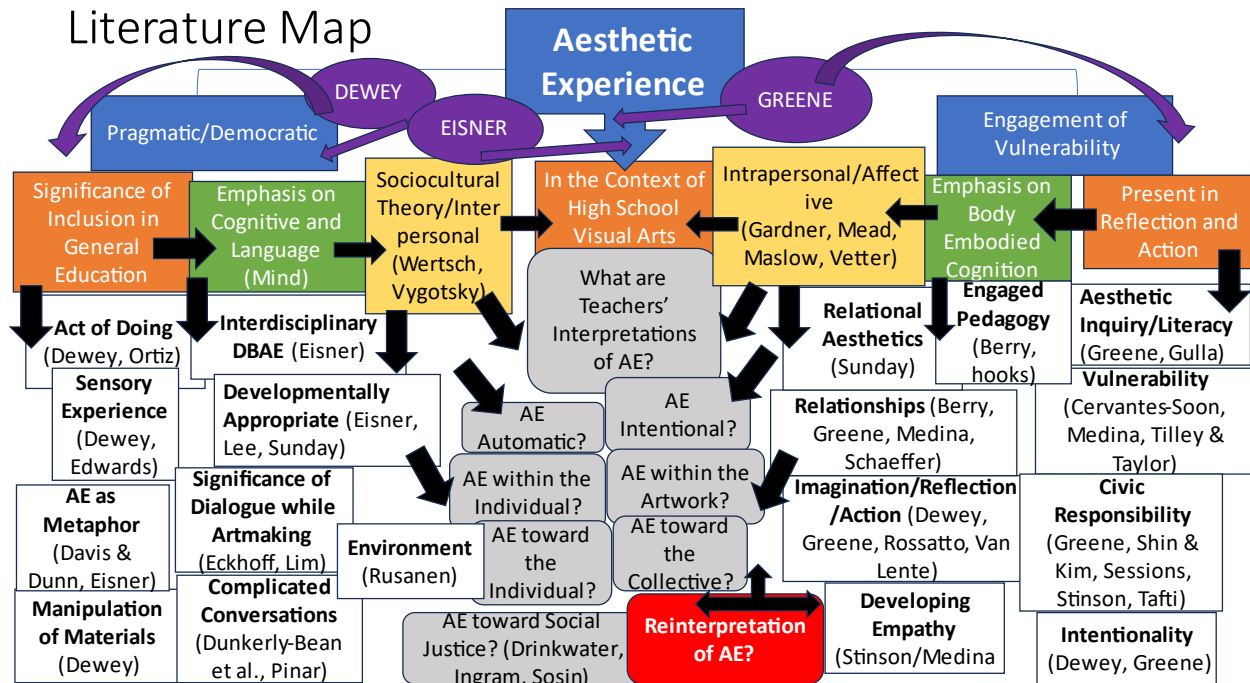


Figure 1: Identified Themes of Aesthetic Experience

Aesthetic Experience as Pragmatic and Democratic

It is difficult to talk about aesthetic experience without acknowledging the work of John Dewey (1934). In fact, the majority of literature highlighted Dewey as *the* pioneer who advocated that art experience extends far beyond the confines of museums and the fine arts (Chang, 2017; Greene, 1986; Lim, 2004; 2005; Stinson, 1985). Rather, Dewey saw aesthetic experiences connected to everyday experiences, acting as a vehicle for reflection, as well as informing one's future engagement with the world (Greene, 1986; Van Lente & Peters, 2022). Dewey (1934) condemned a disconnected view of experience which he termed the “compartmentalization of art,” or a ‘museum conception of art’ (p. 3). Instead, his argument is situated in a *temporal* consideration

(Van Lente & Peters, 2022) which not only distinguishes humans from animals, but also highlights aesthetic experience as a *practical* development toward a Democratic view of society. Dewey (1934) elaborates: “What the live creature retains from the past and what it expects from the future operate as directions in the present. The past absorbed into the present carries on; it presses forward” (p. 17). In other words, aesthetic experience is not limited to an elitist frill, but it is “an affair primarily of doing” (Dewey, 1934, p. 4), a purposeful activity to engage in the “transactional relationship between person and environment” (Lim, 2004, p. 475), as well as “a continuous becoming” (Ortiz, 2022, p. 135). For Dewey, aesthetic experience is about a co-construction of knowledge between self, the art object, and the environment. In addition, he describes this process, not as a one-time event, but operating along a continuum of recurring reflection and action. Dewey (1934) asserts that an artwork “is recreated every time it is esthetically experienced” (p. 108). He is also forthcoming that this development is to be applicable toward our everyday lives explaining that it “enables us to know what we are about when we act” (Dewey, 1910, p. 125).

Greene (1986) expands on this pragmatic concept by calling experiences with art “informed encounters” in which “new possibilities of seeing, hearing, feeling are revealed.” Greene (1986) continues: “when they [students] learn how to let their energies go out to the works in an enlarging perception and a focusing of attention, the fields over which their imaginations can play deepen, diversify, and expand” (p. 57). Here, aesthetic experience is not a passive event, it is regarded as a task that requires one’s “imaginative capacities” and “ability to take initiatives and attend actively” (Greene, 1986, p. 60). Even Dewey (1934) elaborated on this exertion of engagement; describing it as “an experience expressed to its pinnacle,” “something realized,” a “mixture of emotions,” and that an “individual is immersed in the event” (p. 112). Therefore,

Dewey's approach to aesthetic experience requires effort to realize something and to engage in experience—it is a matter of *doing*.

Applying Dewey's (1934) pragmatic view of aesthetic experience within educational contexts is two-fold—it inspires a progressive outlook about art viewing and artmaking, and it also provokes considerations about classroom environments and what they nurture. As Ortiz (2022) puts it, “a pragmatist thinker also knows about art's educative function” (p. 136). To put it another way, when reflecting on *what* is to be realized in art classrooms and for *what* purposes, it is significant to note the *Democratic* foundation in which the following movements developed. Likewise, this study resides within a Deweyan, pragmatic footing of aesthetic education which is open-minded about what students bring to their aesthetic encounters, what they are used for, and even acknowledges the absence of aesthetic experience when art viewing/making. To elaborate, although Greene (1986) describes the practical engagement with aesthetic experience and its benefits for students in detail, she is cautious about defining it, as well as providing an explanation of what may give rise to one. In Dewey's footsteps, she argues that the space of aesthetic education must remain open, and attempts should be avoided to use calculated measures to understand or attempt to force an aesthetic experience. This consideration will be revisited as later progressions in aesthetic education tend to follow a homogenized pathway as it is integrated in K-12 contexts.

Aesthetic Experience as Interdisciplinary

Much scholarship (Eckhoff, 2006; 2011; 2012; Greene, 1980; 1986; Güvenç & Toprak, 2022; Heid, 2008; Lee, 2022; Lim, 2005; Miralay & Egitmen, 2019; Ortiz, 2022; Sessions, 2008; Shin & Kim, 2014) concede that the work of Elliot Eisner is deeply situated within Dewey's pragmatic and Democratic views of Art Education. Eisner (2004) expanded on Dewey's stance to

make the Arts accessible to children by arguing that the “arts can serve as a model for [all facets of] education” (Eisner, 2004, p. 9). Stinson (1985) agrees with Eisner that any area of education can be considered art if “it is engaged in with sensitivity, intelligence, and creativity” (p. 8). Eisner recognized that creative engagements not only developed emotional and perceptual sensitivities, as well as aesthetic awareness, but they also contributed to the development of one’s cognitive abilities. Eisner (2002) offers his definition of aesthetic experience as “the natural high and contributes the energy we need to want to pursue an activity again and again and again” (p. 576). Viewing the Arts as an intellectual endeavor, as well as an engaging process that children would be self-motivated to do repeatedly, Eisner proposed that general education could significantly benefit from aesthetic integration.

A similar movement was pioneered by Lowenfeld & Brittain (1970; 1987) which provided a way to see engagement with the Arts as an innate and significant component of human development that warranted inclusion in the curriculum of general education. They proposed artistic developmental stages, very similar to Piaget’s stages of child development (Piaget, 1954; 1975), that acknowledged the *artistic* development of children. The stages include: the Scribbling Stage, the Preschematic Stage, the Schematic Stage, the Gang Age, the Pseudo-Naturalistic stage, and the Period of Decision (Ortiz, 2022). Going further still, Parsons et al. (1978), saw the need to establish a hierarchy of stages involved in the *aesthetic* development of children. The stages include Favoritism, Beauty and Realism, Expressiveness, Style and Form, and Autonomy. These headways not only supported the integration of the Arts and phenomenon of aesthetic experience into K-12 Arts Education, but also its fusion into the world of education in general.

Expanding this mission even deeper into the public-school curriculum, Eisner engaged in collaborative work with the Getty Center and initiated the Disciplinary Based Arts Education

(DBAE) movement. DBAE is intended to highlight the creative thinking involved in artmaking and validate this process as being relevant to all disciplines in education (Dobbs, 2004; Eckhoff, 2006). DBAE, while supporting Studio-Based Arts, perhaps puts greater emphasis on supporting an interdisciplinary approach. These disciplines include Aesthetics, Art Criticism, Art History, and Art Production. To put it another way, the DBAE approach offers a more consistent scope that is comparable to the curricula of other disciplines in education regarding making, appreciating, understanding, and making judgements about art. In addition, this effort was intended to make art education a reality for *all* students, to offer a more holistic view of the Arts, as well as to provide a more standardized framework for the evaluation of it (Dobbs, 2004; Eckhoff, 2006; Eisner, 2004; Miralay & Egitmen, 2019).

The initiative to engage the Arts and aesthetic experience as a pragmatic approach into K-12 educational settings has come with its share of Neoliberal influence because integration tends to make the phenomena of the aesthetic normalized as an individualistic pursuit rather than a Democratic one (Au, 2007; Drinkwater, 2014; Greene, 1980; Ingram & Drinkwater, n.d.). Even Eisner (2002) was aware of this influence regarding standardization, regarding this view as an “anesthetic” (p. 81) rather than a liberating experience. This sentiment has also been expressed by two other scholars, Eckhoff (2006) and Sunday (2015), but more so in the form of criticism about Eisner’s linear view of the aesthetic. While Eckhoff (2006) acknowledges Lowenfeld & Brittain’s (1970; 1987) contribution, as it is very much in line with Eisner (2002) and Dewey’s (1934) perspective on aesthetic development, she also states that his stages of artistic development view art as studio-oriented, a tool for *self-expression*, and developing creativity rather than a move toward collective initiatives. Sunday (2015) also contends that Lowenfeld suggests a linear artistic development which is more in line with cognitive and visual thinking. Instead, she sees the need

to engage with the aesthetic toward the spiritual, physical, and societal (Bourriaud, 2002; Bourriaud & Schneider, 2005; Sunday, 2015). It is significant to note that I am not suggesting any of these deliberations were Eisner's intention, but I am simply acknowledging that Neoliberal influence may narrow respectable initiatives to support students when it is capitalized on with the goal to make money out of it.

Moving forward, the following definitions of aesthetic experience, while still deeply rooted in Dewey (1934) and Eisner's (2002) pragmatic views, began to focus even more intently on the *Democratic* function of the Arts—more so regarding one's social responsibility when engaged with them. In many respects, the literature goes back to Dewey's concept of *temporality*, utilizing aesthetic experience to reflect and question one's past, present, as well as future endeavors toward a better society. Ortiz (2022) concurs, stating that this lens emphasizes the “learner's integrity, including morality, individuality, and, above all, democracy” (p. 134). Sessions (2008) also highlights two points about Dewey and Eisner's work that corresponds with this *collective* and *temporal* progression. She mentions that Eisner connects both *informal* and *formal* learning through aesthetic literacy and that inquiry emerges from one's lived experience. Sessions (2008) continues that Dewey's notion of aesthetic experience is bounded in personal experience and includes an emotional attachment with emphasis on community-based inquiry. Moreover, as the consideration for aesthetic experience began to make its presence known in the general educational world, its function continues to be geared toward nourishing “our need to give order to the world” (Eisner, 1998, p. 38), as well as a way to rehabilitate our vision of self and society and transform it (Eckhoff, 2006; 2011; 2012; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1995; 2001; Medina, 2012).

Aesthetic Experience as Relational

Both Eckhoff (2006; 2011; 2012) and Sunday (2015) agree that Lowenfeld's artistic developmental stages may position art experiences as too linear and studio-art oriented with not enough emphasis on the dynamic nature and social processes of the aesthetic. Respectively, these scholars focus not so much on student products, but more so on conversational pedagogy, relationship building, and creative processes of students. Sunday (2015) highlights *Relational Aesthetics* (Baurriaud, 2002; Baurriaud & Schneider, 2005) as a progressive view and defines the concept as a perspective in which the art object is not the center of focus, but rather the conversations that are to be had about it. Sunday's (2015) work with primary grade levels is analogous with Medina's (2012) study which engages pre-service teachers in conversations while artmaking for the purpose of inspiring compassion for change. Eckhoff (2006; 2011; 2012) is analogous with Rogoff (1994) and Vygotsky's (1978) work in that they all focus on process over product and the mediational ability of children to interpret practice rather than merely repeat it.

In addition, Eckhoff's (2006; 2011; 2012) work complements Liu and Vadeboncoeur's (2010) as they all incorporate Vygotsky's (1978) *Sociocultural Theory* and *Interdependence Hypothesis* in demonstrating that a child utilizes their agency to recreate and invent new approaches to classroom activities. This involves interweaving physical words with visual representations to create new symbols and add to a dynamic language repertoire. Sunday (2015) expands on this mediational experience as she illuminates how relational processes with art support the connectivity between teacher and student, student and peers, and student and artworks. These social relationships are very much like the "metacommunicative" concept of Olmedo (2003; p. 146). This relational capacity is also demonstrated in Moll's (2013) text as he highlights the significance in empowering children to connect and cross worlds. Sunday (2015) comparably

emphasizes how children mediate existing structures and change them through representational means of drawing. She goes on to elaborate that this capacity is accelerated when multilanguage and multimodalities are used (i.e., sketchbooks, process-folios, unfinished drawings, sculptures, videos, employing a variety of materials, etc.), when adults take children seriously, and when adults see children as active agents of change.

Heid's (2008) work with primary grade levels compliments the concepts of relational aesthetics with attention to dialogue while artmaking amongst peers and supports a variety of language styles—be it internal or external. To do this, she situates her views of aesthetic experience to be in line with Dewey (1934) and Eisner (2002) but also includes *Care Theory* (Noddings, 1995) and *Sociocultural Learning Theory* (Lave, 1988, Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). With this framework, Heid (2008) argues that aesthetic experience is a sociocultural practice, and it supports cognitive function. A key feature of her work is the integration of metaphor with aesthetic experiences, which she claims is the highest form of cognition. Heid (2008) builds upon Dewey and Eisner's definitions of aesthetic experiences adding that it involves a relationship with senses housed within one's body (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). She shares two examples in which metaphor works in conjunction with aesthetic experience. One kinder student created a name for a color—"Forest Green." Heid (2008) elaborates that this student utilized a combination of feeling emotion, sensory perception, and integrating personal experiences about colors of a forest. Another child named his color "Lawrence Blue"—referring to his peer who had a blue tongue from a lollipop. Heid (2008) highlights this process as symbolic naming (Siegesmund, 2005) and recognizes that this child chose a metaphor embedded in language. It is noteworthy that both these occurrences are underscored as being aesthetic experiences, yet they do not involve considering the art product itself. Rather, the emphasis is on the *intrapersonal*, as well as the *interpersonal* communication of

the art experience within the space of storytelling. This perspective is very much in line with Sunday's (2015) advocacy of relational aesthetics.

Although Moll's (2013) work is not necessarily within the field of aesthetics, he does offer a relational view, like Sunday (2015) about student products. He does this by giving significance to the creative processes of children through learning that involves embedded, connected, distributed cognition (Lemke, 1997; Nathan, 2012; Nathan & Sawyer, 2022). In other words, Moll (2013) argues that by storytelling, collaborating, and creating fictional worlds—processes that are likely to take place in art classrooms—children can connect prior experiences and build bridges toward new knowledge and conceptual change (diSessa, 2022). This development also brings attention to the significance of the body as a mediating force because there is potential for children to employ their *body awareness* (Medina, 2012) as they elicit emotions and experiences to facilitate storytelling when creating works of art. It is significant to note that these developing pedagogies are utilizing Dewey (1934) and Eisner (2002) as a foundation for pragmatic and Democratic pursuits, but now there is an indication of viewing children as *active agents* that maintain autonomy within educational contexts to interpret art experiences for themselves. Upon reviewing the following interpretations of aesthetic experience and their proposed function in the Arts education world, it is important to note their diverse dimensions. On the one hand, they still remain very much an individual matter, yet, they are also a social endeavor. As one confronts an artwork and reflects on their understandings of the encounter, a responsibility emerges, not only to oneself, but also to society. In addition, although there is much autonomy in one's aesthetic experience, the scholarship that follows speaks about the need to develop a particular language to communicate these experiences within a classroom setting. Nevertheless, the goal of aesthetic experience is always toward reflection and action and is always *intentional* in educational context.

Aesthetic Experience as Inquiry: A Dynamic Shift

A significant amount of research (Eckhoff, 2006; 2011; 2012; Güvenç & Toprak, 2022; Ingram & Drinkwater, n.d.; Ingram, 2013; Miralay & Egitmen, 2019; Sessions, 2008; Sosin et al., 2010) is situated within the theoretical framework of Maxine Greene (1980; 1986; 1995; 2000; 2001) and her view of aesthetic experience as *Aesthetic Inquiry*. Greene (1980) views an aesthetic encounter, not as a passive experience, but one that requires effort to be “achieved” (p. 316). This view of aesthetic experience somewhat contrasts with Tatarkiewicz (1980), in which appreciating an artwork is not to be forced, or even intentional, but is intrinsically motivated. While Greene (1980) does not advocate for aesthetic inquiry to be coerced, it can be argued that her position is not synonymous with perspectives which tend to interpret aesthetic experience as a disengaged happenstance (Chou, 2010; Ortiz, 2022; Schaeffer, 2015; Tatarkiewicz, 1980). Perhaps, a disconnected encounter might happen in a museum—a situation in which Dewey (1934) might suggest is the result of a “museum conception of art.” However, regarding educational contexts, where art should be rooted in everyday experiences (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2002), Van Lente & Peters (2022) argue that “this detachment is a fallacy” (p. 3). Moreover, Gulla (2018) elaborates that to completely consider an artwork “requires curiosity, patience, and a willingness to challenge oneself to extend one’s perceptions beyond the comfortable and familiar” (p. 108). Greene (1980) concurs as she describes this process as *lending an artwork your life*. Hence, aesthetic experience as inquiry takes engagement, it’s an act of “doing” (Dewey, 1934), and being vulnerable with the art object. Simply put—aesthetic experience as inquiry takes work.

Viewing aesthetic experience as inquiry places a sense of responsibility on the viewer, the artmaker, as well as the art teacher. This is particularly significant within educational settings because this type of engagement may support students to play a role in their own learning, to

develop an awareness of their role in communicating the aesthetic and empower them with an additional language—a metaphoric language (Almqvist, 2019; Chang, 2017; Dufrenne, 1953; 1954; 1973; 1978; Fang et al., 2018; Heid, 2008; Kübra Ozalp, 2018). Greene (1980) highlights that aesthetic inquiry is “a distinctive mode of literacy” (p. 319)—or an *Aesthetic Literacy*. Dunkerly-Bean et al., (2017) refers to this ability as “symbolic capital” (p. 680). This literacy approach should motivate teachers as they need to become accustomed with this language and be comfortable with it to model it for students. Davis & Dunn (2023) similarly utilize a *Living Literacies* approach and *New Literacies Studies* in their research to engage primary grade levels with the language necessary to participate in art experiences. They elaborate that to empower students with a sense of belonging, familiarity, and confidence with arts engagement, there needs to be *intentional* planning for aesthetic experience and related responses. Similarly, both Dunkerly-Bean et al., (2017) and Sunday (2018) utilize an aesthetic inquiry/literacy approach by encouraging children to “script” imagined worlds and build reality through play and artmaking. As previously mentioned, this intentionality is divergent to the view that appreciating, pondering, and reflecting on an artwork is to be unintentional (Chou, 2010; Tatarkiewicz, 1980).

Aesthetic Experience as Alternative Views of the Future

Recently, aesthetic experience has been positioned as an alternative method in the field of *Future Research*—the systematic study of social and technological advancement exploring the possibility of future events and trends, such as in the case of global warming (Van Lente & Peters, 2022). Aesthetic experience is becoming increasingly utilized in this field as opposed to traditional methods, such as extrapolations, Delphi, surveys, simulations, and scenarios. Van Lente & Peters (2022) assert that current methods are unproductive and basically reveal more of the same information with no implication for engagement. These authors employ the pragmatist

understanding of Dewey (1934) and argue that experiencing the Arts while contemplating the future will go beyond mere information—the practice will also elicit transformation. The main argument against engaging the Arts in Future Studies, as in the case with climate change art, is that these attempts reduce art to an instrumental value and take away from the autonomy of art. Van Lente & Peters (2022) respond by reminding that Dewey’s (1934) focus is not solely on the artwork itself, but on *what* the artwork encourages viewers to do. Therefore, the inclusion of the aesthetic in the field of Future Studies offers a space, a space that Dewey (1934) suggests is intuitive of human beings in that we interweave past experiences with the present and future to create new realities (p. 17; p. 144; p. 284). In other words, Van Lente & Peters (2022) propose that rather than regurgitating more of what is already known about issues, such as climate change, engaging in these contemplations aesthetically prompts individuals, not only to reconstruct the past, but also to envision the future creatively toward changing it.

Such scholarship is significant to Art Education research because it confronts and disrupts the status quo of emphasis placed on Neoliberal, market-based principals of standardization, as well as societal and aesthetic autonomy (Apple, 2004; Drinkwater, 2014; Ingram, 2013; Ingram & Drinkwater, n.d.; Van Lente & Peters, 2022). Morley (2014) agrees that current pedagogic attention is geared toward material outcomes which “downplays or neglects the role of secondary sensible properties in artmaking—those properties more closely connected with the somatic, affective, emotional and valuing tone of experience and attitudes” (p. 103). As arts competitions immerse the high school setting, such deliberations about Neoliberal influence may motivate a refocus of art educational goals. To view student artwork with the mindset of *what it can do*, rather than *what it looks like*, may open relational spaces for social engagement and reflecting on what the future could be like and how to go about changing it (Bourriaud & Schneider, 2005; Greene,

2001; Sunday, 2015). Ironically, while creativity and imagination are generally associated with the Arts, Van Lente & Peters (2022) enlighten that these are the very qualities which are “distrusted because they are by their very essence subversive; they represent a constant threat to the status quo” (p. 7). Perhaps Neoliberal influence has driven art education to be, as Dewey (1934) argues, a ‘museum conception of art,’ detached from everyday experiences. Moreover, the overwhelming focus to maintain competitive endeavors may not only suggest one of the reasons why there is a gap in literature about aesthetic experiences at the high school level, but it may also be an indication as to why such experiences of reflection, re-envisioning society, reeducating our vision, and transforming the ordinary (Eckhoff, 2011; Eisner, 2002) are left out of arts curriculum.

It is appropriate to recognize the work of Greene, who was also influenced by Dewey and Eisner, as the inspiration for arts integration in Future Studies. Greene spent a great deal of effort in fostering a sense of hope by utilizing the Arts as a means to re-envision what the world could be and how we might go about changing it. Almost any literature that relates to aesthetic experience as a vehicle toward social responsibility and action will incorporate Greene’s stance on art’s role in society in some shape or form. For example, Drinkwater (2014) employs Greene’s (1995; 2001) contribution to *Critical-Democratic Theory* and proposes a new pedagogical model, very much inspired by Greene—*Transformative Arts*—to argue against arts toward market-based approaches. Eckhoff (2006) and Sessions (2008) utilize Greene’s (1995) significance of prior experiences and imagination during interaction with visual arts and relaying personal stories. In Eckhoff’s (2006) study, she moved from a life-span focus of aesthetic development, and instead, examined the wonder, discovery, and innovation that takes place within a primary school environment.

In addition, Güvenç & Toprak (2022) apply Greene's (2007) view of aesthetic experience to raise awareness about changing the world, as well as developing empathy toward alternative realities and social transformation. These authors also highlight aesthetic experience as taking effort to achieve—that it takes “expending energy” and one needs to be “consciously participating in the work” (Greene, 2007, p. 21). Ingram & Drinkwater (n.d.) and Ingram (2013) use a Critical-Democratic framework and Greene's (1995; 2000) concept of a common vision and voice to argue in favor of alternative views of citizenship and position one's civic duty toward decolonization. Lee's (2022) work on *Place-Based Art Pedagogy* with preservice teachers, integrates Greene's concept of aesthetic experience as being devoid of self-interest and in support of an ethical society. Finally, Medina (2012) employs Greene's (1995; 2001) significance of experiential knowledge, developing compassion, as well as a *Critical-Democratic* lens. As demonstrated in the above scholarship, Greene's influence to *envision the world otherwise* is highly visible today in the literature.

Aesthetic Experience as Embodiment and Empowerment

This last definition of aesthetic experience has been reserved until now because it encompasses all the above for its footing. Susan Stinson (1985) acknowledges all the mentioned authors but introduces a unique aesthetic model which is intended to respond to human morality and the way we view the art object. She acknowledges the consideration of an aesthetic relationship between the perceiver/maker and the artwork—be it through pragmatic (Dewey, 1934), interdisciplinary (Eisner, 2002), relational (Sunday, 2015), as well as inquiry and alternative views of self and society (Greene, 1995; 2001). Although Stinson's work was written prior to some of the frameworks that have been discussed, she still recognizes the value of developing one's

obligation as an ethical citizen through aesthetic experience. Stinson (1985) offers a model which comprehends the

relationship between the perceiver and the larger world, with the aesthetic object as the lens through which we see/make sense of the reality of being a person-in-the-world, is suggested as the only kind of aesthetic model which sufficiently responds to moral concerns in curriculum (p. 7).

Stinson (1985) repeatedly speaks of “an awakening of her moral concerns within arts education” (p. 7) which she describes as a journey she had to take and encourages other arts teachers to be on a path toward a similar endeavor. She shares that her personal experience in dance education went through a period of being “not only trivial, but also dehumanizing and even dangerous (Stinson, 1985, p. 8). She continues that Arts Education has the potential to rob children of their voice and replace it with what adults consider worthy. She goes even further saying that the Arts can be used to manipulate students rather than liberate them *if* learning is done through “passivity, obedience, and rigid thinking” (Stinson, 1985, p. 8). Medina (2012) corresponds with this thought sharing that she also went through a period in her educational career in which she admits to applying the *Banking Method*²⁶ (Freire, 1970), and describes an awakening upon realizing her error.

One of Stinson’s (1985) critical contributions to this scholarship is recognizing that art teachers can become overly fixated on aesthetic objects rather than focusing on developing meaningful relationships with others. Stinson elaborates that too much attention on the final

²⁶ According to Freire (1970), the *Banking Method* of education consists of viewing students as empty vessels in which teachers make deposits of information. Instead of students learning to think critically and seeing themselves as transformers of the world, they instead learn to patiently receive and memorize the information deposited by their teachers.

product narrows our vision to recognize the Arts to be utilized for other purposes, such as helping someone in need or framing creative processes toward addressing social issues. To do this, she incorporates Dewey (1934), Newman (1980), and Ross' (1981) ideas that imagination is the root of morality and an instrument of goodness in society, and that aesthetic experience should be based upon reflection and action with *love*. Stinson quotes Dewey (1934), "imagination is the chief instrument of the good...a person's ideas and treatment of his fellows are dependent upon his power to put himself imaginatively into their place" (p. 348). Understandably, Stinson is referring to *putting oneself in the shoes of others*—or developing empathy toward others. Correspondingly, Medina (2012) implemented this concept of empathy in her study. Though, what is interesting about Medina's study is that her participants are not art students, and the study is not situated in an art classroom. Rather, they are preservice teachers from underrepresented minority populations. Medina comes to realize that her students have developed a *fatalistic optimism* (Rossatto, 2005) and lack the imagination to see the world differently, as well as the confidence to change it. By engaging her students in both the viewing and creating within various genres of art, Medina provided a safe environment that welcomed aesthetic experience toward compassion and change.

A major development in Medina's (2012) work is her regard to one's body as a valuable contributor of knowledge and experience—which she terms "body knowledge" or "body awareness" (p. 14). Medina (2012) goes on to elaborate that when experience becomes *embodied*, one's feelings and emotions do not remain stale. Rather, the body has the ability—through exercise—not only to retain memories and experience, but also to make use of them to inspire compassion and create change within one's world. Medina is not the only educator to integrate these embodied art experiences toward societal change beyond the context of art classrooms. Take for example the work of Lee (2022). She engaged pre-service teachers in embodied learning

through art to broaden their perspectives on potential discipline choices. She integrated conceptual artmaking with place-based pedagogy to highlight how social-relationships, when involved in community art projects, can have a positive impact on one's civic outlook. By grounding her work in Dewey's (1934) view of aesthetic process as "emotional responses" (p. 82), Lee (2022) focuses on the lived experiences that are embedded within the community, as well as the co-construction of ideas that ensue. The primary goal is experience that is devoid of self-interest and imagination toward an ethical society. This validation of the body to experience the aesthetic is extremely substantial as it connects across many other facets of scholarship beyond the art world that speak to the embodiment of knowledge as a means of agency. These scholars give credence to the power the body has in retaining and responding to experience. For example, the work of Anzaldúa (1987; 2007), Bhabha (1994), Blommaert (2008), Davies (2000), and Medina (2010) explored students' capacity to move across time and space; across geological and social spaces; all within their bodies.

Other literature places importance on the development and articulation of inner speech. This is something celebrated in Hornberger and Link (2012) and Vygotsky's (1978) texts as these scholars underscore the value of an individual's *inner voice* and its relevance to literary curricula. In line with this, Enriquez (2014) reveals that experiences from reading performances of struggling readers are not just cognitive, but they become "embodied engagements that contribute to identity construction" (pp. 107-108). Enriquez (2014) goes on to explain that when students participate in reading practices—whether positive or negative—those experiences become "part of one's very being" (p. 105). Emotions will influence how students position themselves within classroom reading exercises. Medina (2010) encourages that time and space should be allowed for students to reflect, transfer, and recreate their inner voice into written forms or speech. Vetter et al., (2011) refers to this process as the *space of authoring*. It is within this space that valuable learning

experiences are taking place in imaginative worlds within the body. Medina (2010) eloquently enlightens on this concept stating, “reading and writing become a space to experience the already known, rearticulated and “spoken for the first time” (p. 57). Medina (2010) is implying here that because experience is embodied and has already undergone the process of being authored and rewritten—reading and writing merely allow us a peek into one’s journey *already* lived or *already* imagined. It is noteworthy that this “non-art-related” scholarship on embodiment should motivate more research as it relates to art viewing/making and the phenomenon of aesthetic experience. Although Medina (2006) initiated this effort regarding aesthetic experience, there is still very little research about it.

Major Theoretical Frameworks in the Literature

Dewey’s Pragmatic and Democratic Ideals

Eight studies (Adu-Agyem & Enti, 2009; Heid, 2008; Ingram, 2013; Lee, 2022; Mashizi et al., 2019; Sessions, 2008; Shim & Kim, 2014; Tafti et al., 2020) were identified as utilizing the foundations of Dewey and his pragmatic and Democratic lens. It is significant to note that all the scholars integrated the work of Dewey (1934), Eisner (2002), and Greene (2001) as part of their framework. However, an attempt was made to situate each work within a specific lens to better understand their arguments and classify major themes. The following studies, while encompassing elements of all the theorist mentioned previously, are noted as accentuating specific Deweyan ideals regarding practical consideration that compose a socially aware and skilled Democratic citizen. Two themes developed within this identification. Four studies (Adu-Agyem & Enti, 2009; Heid, 2008; Mashizi et al., 2019; Sessions, 2008) are identified as considering one’s awareness of emotions, relationships, and aesthetic skills. While the other four (Ingram, 2013; Lee, 2022; Shim

& Kim, 2014; Tafti et al., 2020) are more comprehensive about the value of democracy and meaning of citizenship.

Awareness of Emotions, Relationships, and Aesthetic Skills

A total of four studies concentrated on the curious nature of children and enhancing that capacity with additional skills to better understand their relationship with others and their world. This is a process that Dewey (1934) emphasizes is vital for a Democratic member of society. Adu-Agyem & Enti (2009) are one of several scholars in this literature review who capitalize on the significance of dialogue in which to reflect on views of self and others. These scholars examined the link between learning art and the creative nature of children by acknowledging, not only the artwork of children, but also the dialogue that children have about them. Adu-Agyem & Enti (2009) view this capacity as a way for children to make the most of their senses toward developing into “emotionally sound people” and applying an appropriate “emotional release” (p. 163).

Both Mashizi et al. (2019) and Heid (2008) speak to the aesthetic skills that Dewey regards as necessary for a Democratic society. For example, Mashizi et al. (2019) advocates that through aesthetic experiences, children can become better educated human beings that are developed holistically. As these scholars compared the art approaches of Canada and Iran, their scale of measurement is based on Dewey’s consideration for an individuals’ awareness of emotions and whether an art approach considers the relationships between art and everyday life. Similarly, Heid (2008) considers the holistic development of children while adding the significance of developing aesthetic skills. Heid (2008) does this by highlighting that aesthetic experience supports cognitive function—very much in line with Eisner—using metaphor and symbolic naming. In addition, by integrating Gardner’s *Communication Theory*, Heid (2008) explains that through interpersonal and

intrapersonal capacities of aesthetic experience, children also develop social skills to nurture a better society.

Several studies ground their work with more than one theorist. Sessions (2008) is an example of this. This author utilizes the theoretical frameworks of Dewey, Eisner, and Greene. However, I position Sessions (2008) under the subheading of Dewey because her work emphasizes the awareness of emotions and one's capacity to respond and navigate through the world through aesthetic skills. As her participants gave their specific approaches to their art through dialogue, she underscores that aesthetic experience is personal experience and that ideas become meaningful through an emotional attachment. Sessions (2008), through both Dewey and Eisner, advocates an aesthetic literacy developed through *Community-Based Education*—one in which focus is placed on connecting informal and formal learning.

The Value of Democracy and Meaning of Citizenship

Shim & Kim (2014) and Tafti et al. (2020) utilize both Dewey's (1934) and Eisner's (2002) views on pragmatic, Democratic, and cognitive development through their comparative studies. While Tafti et al. (2020) explored the general art curricula across the countries of Brazil, Greece, Iran, and South Korea, Shim & Kim (2014) specifically examined the non-school art experiences between South Korea and Tucson, Arizona. These scholars utilized the lens of Dewey to consider the value of K-6th art programs beyond the school and whether the development of creativity, self-expression, and fun activities is more beneficial for students than those that are more educational, economic-oriented, and have intellectual benefits. Another consideration is that South Korea utilizes local artists to teach classes, while Tucson tends to utilize enthusiastic, art-minded individuals. This consideration speaks to Eisner's point of art needing to be fused together with

general education. Although South Korea views art in afterschool programs as inclusive to their children's overall education and complimenting it, Tucson's programs view art more as a special and fun activity. The work of Tafti et al. (2020) also utilized the framework of Dewey in that they consider the Democratic value between each of the countries' approaches to teaching art. For example, South Korea not only integrates native artworks in their curriculum, but artworks beyond their country are also taken into consideration. As Dewey (1934) advocates, the Democratic lens should extend beyond boundaries. On the other hand, it was found that Greece and Iran overemphasize on their own art history and offer their students very little beyond that (Tafti et al., 2020).

While the scholars noted above underscore the value of democracy in their work, others took it a step further to emphasize the meaning of citizenship and how to go about utilizing aesthetic experience toward a better society. This can be seen in the work of Ingram (2013) and Lee (2022). Ingram (2013) offers a critical lens as to the purposes of artmaking in public schools. Ingram fuses the work of Freire (1970), Gallagher (2008), and Mignolo (2000; 2009) with Dewey's ideals to argue that countering Neoliberal influence will take a rebuilding of current goals for the Arts. In addition, Ingram builds upon Dewey's Democratic citizen by arguing that it is a part of one's duty as a citizen to become critical and reflective about the purpose of artmaking. Similarly, Lee (2022), also building upon Dewey and Greene's concepts of lived experience and co-construction of knowledge, offers an overarching perspective of aesthetic experience as an approach that encompasses the interests of others more than the self. Moreover, Lee (2022) sees aesthetic experience as the means for social transformation toward a more ethical society.

Eisner's View of Aesthetic-Cognitive Functioning and Skills

Throughout the literature, several studies (Heid, 2008; Kübra Ozalp, 2018; Morley, 2014; Sessions, 2008; Wanzer et al. 2020) place emphasis on the connection between aesthetic experience and cognitive functioning. Essentially, these studies employ the lens of Eisner and build upon his work that underscores the Arts as the building blocks to support all fields of education and styles of learning—thus providing students with practical skills. As mentioned earlier, Heid (2008) and Sessions (2008) compliment Eisner's view that aesthetic literacy is a language that can be utilized for all educational subjects. Sessions (2008), in Eisner's fashion, advocates that aesthetic experience is a culmination of information that comes from both formal and informal learning contexts. Heid (2008) and Kübra Ozalp (2018) support this idea, highlighting aesthetic experience as a form of cognitive function that can be facilitated through embedded language and use of metaphor. In harmony with Eisner's value on cognitive functioning, the work of Wanzer et al. (2020) explored how adults perceive their emotions in connection with their cognitive processes when viewing works of art. In addition, their work considered how individuals describe what it means to “be lost in the moment” or “being in the zone” when considering the aesthetic. Similarly, Morley's (2014) comparative study on art approaches speaks to the differences in cognitive styles between the United States and South Korea.

Greene's Aesthetic Inquiry Skills, Development, and Planning

Building on Eisner's aesthetic-cognitive development and skills, Greene continued her line of work through a pragmatic approach. Yet, she offered more descriptive groundwork for the significance of aesthetic literacy. Scholars that utilize Greene's framework go even further by suggesting that aesthetic experiences are to be intentional and require sophisticated planning to

elicit such experiences and learn from them in a collective manner. Three themes were identified when considering the layers that studies draped on top of Greene's concepts. They include Development and Significance of Aesthetic Inquiry Skills; Developmentally Complimenting the Nature of Children; and Intentional Planning and Facilitation of Aesthetic Experience.

Development and Significance of Aesthetic Inquiry Skills

Several scholars utilize Greene's framework to articulate the need for a language to discuss aesthetic experience. Take for example the work of Chang (2017) and Wanzer et al. (2020). Both these researchers applied questionnaires to explore the meaning of aesthetic experience and generate a way to evaluate aesthetic experience. The result is developing an aesthetic-measurement scale by adding onto one already in existence. For both scholars, emphasis is on how individuals absorb themselves in an aesthetic object to bring one to happiness or elicit other types of feelings. Greene (1995; 2001) highlights that these considerations need a specific language—an aesthetic literacy—and although aesthetic experience is a natural phenomenon, one needs to develop the skills to talk about the processes involved within educational settings.

This endeavor is highlighted in the work of Acer & Ömeroğlu (2008), Kaube et al. (2023), Lee (2022), Miralay & Egitmen (2019), and Sessions (2008). For example, Acer & Ömeroğlu (2008) utilizes the *Taylor-Helmstadter Pair Comparison Scale of Aesthetic Judgement* in their experimental study after providing only some children with aesthetic skills. These scholars build on Greene's ideas by validating that the capacity to see and question is enriched through a development of aesthetic literacy. The experimental study of Kaube et al. (2023) is also relevant to Greene's work because it investigates how various knowledge about artists influence one's aesthetic experiences. This consideration validates the nuances of how one's experiences, in

combination with their ethics and knowledge of art processes, inform their aesthetic experiences. The work of Sessions (2008) and Miralay & Egitmen (2019) also compliment Greene's concepts by highlighting the link between emotional attachment, personal experience, and various learning contexts. For example, by interviewing art professors, Miralay & Egitmen (2019) examined their personal relationship with art and their perceived role in bringing society closer together through aesthetic experience.

Developmentally Complimenting the Nature of Children

Both Rusanen et al. (2012) and Eckhoff (2006) build on Greene's framework as they speak to the holistic nature of aesthetic experience. Most importantly, both these scholars validate the nature of children as curious and full of wonder and encourage an art curriculum that allows the culture of children to remain visible by way of self-oriented art. They continue that this endeavor can take place only when space is given for children to develop their own interests when composing drawings and stories. These scholars also incorporated the process-folio concept of Gardner (1993), as this type of art collection favors mistakes and artwork-in-transition along with more completed works. The efforts of Eckhoff (2006) compliments Greene's sociocultural nature of aesthetic experience, as she argues that children between the ages of 4-11 are, indeed, developmentally ready to view and discuss works of art and recognize their aesthetic abilities. Eckhoff (2006) continues that it is through the dialogue between teacher and student that visual literacy can develop Democratically and as a collective experience.

Intentionally Planning and Facilitation of Aesthetic Experience

Most literature detours from the view of aesthetic experience as a happenstance (Chou, 2010; Tatarkiewicz, 1980). Still, while no one is claiming that it should be forced, aesthetic

experience is being encouraged as a phenomenon worthy of getting the most out of it through purposefulness, especially within educational contexts. Davis & Dunn (2023) highlight that while aesthetic experience is not something to be coerced, it does take intentional planning to first, create the environment that elicit these types of experiences, and two, to take progressive steps to facilitate and learn from them. Very much in line with Greene's idea of aesthetic literacy, these authors consider the need to develop a language for participation with these experiences. In addition, these scholars highlight that children need to feel safe, comfortable, and have a sense of belonging within dedicated spaces for aesthetic experiences—be it museums or classrooms.

Dunkerly-Bean et al. (2017) and Eckhoff (2011; 2012) highlight Greene's consideration about the significance of dialogue while art viewing and artmaking. Dunkerly-Bean et al. (2017) goes as far as to call a child's negotiation and mediational process while artmaking as a form of "symbolic capital" (p. 680) as they develop their capacity to renegotiate and reimagine real places through the concept of "scripting" (p. 680). In addition, while emphasizing process over product, Eckhoff (2011; 2012) utilizes Eisner's work about transforming the ordinary by reeducating our perspective of the status quo. Eckhoff (2011; 2012) also extends this idea through Greene's framework by highlighting that this effort can be accomplished through cooperative relationships in the classroom. This process involves teachers modeling how to approach artwork through inquiry, conversational engagement, and co-constructed initiatives.

The work of Sunday (2015; 2018), Sosin et al. (2010), as well as Dunkerly-Bean et al. (2017), all build on Greene's (1980; 1986) concept of making learning relevant by way of aesthetic inquiry—which takes a *critical* eye or a "double vision" (Stinson, 1985, p. 10). Here again, developing this critical eye requires intention, planning, and creating the environment for facilitating aesthetic experiences in such ways. Sunday (2015; 2018) describes this progression

through *Relational Aesthetics* in which aesthetic experience is seen as a nomadic journey; one in which both the internal and social spaces are reflected upon, as well as considering the potential to disrupt boundaries and transform spaces. This is very much in line with Greene's (2001) concept of developing one's imagination to visualize alternative realities. Sunday (2015; 2018) adds that such approaches are established when drawing is viewed as a social practice that includes open-ended dialogue. She encouraged that teachers suspend their adult role and allow children to be the guides through collective spaces of hybridity. This is a theme that will be explored in more depth later. Finally, the work of Sosin et al. (2010) compliments Greene's (2001) stance that dialogue about creative process can serve as an activist tool toward social justice.

Medina and Stinson on Embodiment, Empowerment, and Social Transformation

The following scholarship all include the underpinnings of Medina (2012) and Stinson (1985), which is heavily influenced by Greene, regarding *Embodiment, Empowerment, and Social Transformation*. However, it is significant to note that certain studies highlight one of these areas over the others. Just because a particular scholar encompasses either Medina or Stinson's framework, doesn't necessarily mean that the study addresses all three components simultaneously. For this reason, a total of three subheadings were created to distinguish the differences and approach toward each. They include Awareness of Embodiment, Empowerment, and Social Transformation. It is also noteworthy that these categories are intentionally placed in a sequential order. In other words, one must first become aware of the capacity to embody. Then, when one acknowledges this ability, they have the potential to become empowered when reflecting on oneself and their relationship with the world. And, finally, when one develops empathy through the process of aesthetic experience and "putting oneself in the shoes of others," then a move can be strategized toward social transformation.

Awareness of Embodiment

Medina (2012) grounds her framework in the work of Stinson (1985) and Greene (1986; 1995; 2001) with a substantial emphasis on aesthetic experience being utilized as a catalyst toward self-awareness, reflection, and action. Medina (2012) acknowledges the tendency to rely on the “banking” approach of education and moves toward an intentional integration of aesthetic experience in which students are shown artworks and engaged in artmaking themselves. She argues that aesthetic experience is an approach toward “self-actualization” and engagement of the body. Fang et al. (2018) do not recognize Medina or Stinson as a framework. However, their case study still encapsulates the *somatic* level in how the body, through dance performances, conveys the essence of beauty and elicits aesthetic experience.

Similarly, Almqvist & Andersson (2019) focus on dance as aesthetic communication and how this process facilitates body awareness of self and others. While grounding her work in Dewey and Eisner’s concepts, Lim (2004; 2005) supports that an aesthetic awareness through one’s body facilitates a transcendence and spiritual transformation. Just as Medina (2012) suggests, Lim (2004; 2005) elaborates that this process of becoming aware is heightened through an exploratory dimension of art materials and choice. Güvenç & Toprak (2022) also advocate for this exploratory dimension, adding that opportunities to express one’s personal stories and imagine multiple realities support the development of self-confidence and empathy. A key component of Medina’s (2012) work is that awareness isn’t just about the self. Medina (2009) argues that “open spaces” in which to hear others’ aesthetic experiences are just as vital, and perhaps, even more important in “becoming wide-awake” about ourselves (p. 21). As Stinson (1985) so eloquently illustrates, to fully understand what our bodies are capable of, we must be cognizant to how the bodies of others are affected by how we choose to navigate our own.

Empowerment

Some studies go to the next level and endorse that an aesthetic awareness can foster a holistic type of empowerment—one in which mind and body are fused. Drinkwater (2014) and Ingram's (2013) case studies, for instance, advocate that aesthetic experience integration within schools elicits critical thinking about purposes for artmaking. Through this empowerment, market-based approaches toward art can be exposed and alternative visions of one's identity can be considered. For example, Ingram (2013) discusses the value of the Arts in offering adolescent girls the space in which to discredit traditional femininity and establish their own identities—articulated with their own words and creativity. In addition, Drinkwater and Ingram advocate that aesthetic experience offers an empowerment toward decolonialization. These scholars are analogous with Medina's (2012) line of thought regarding infusing aesthetic experience into critical pedagogical practices that support a social consciousness and social change.

It is significant to note that all the scholars utilizing Medina's framework acknowledge the value of developing aesthetic literacy, as Greene suggests, to navigate and understand aesthetic experiences in coming to an awareness. However, it is important to establish that empowerment from Medina's standpoint isn't necessarily about the ability to discuss art elements or qualities within an artwork that might contribute toward initiating an aesthetic experience—although those considerations are most certainly a component of aesthetic literacy. Instead, empowerment for Medina is a mindset (“imagining the world otherwise”) in conjunction with body authority. To put it another way, an aesthetic experience may very well develop through one's aesthetic literacy and cognitive ability, but *how* or *if* that knowledge is utilized depends on transcendence and action that requires both mind and body. Hence, aesthetic experience in this light moves beyond the artwork itself.

Social Transformation

The following scholarship goes even a step further beyond empowerment to propose action to be taken in the name of social justice. Ingram & Drinkwater (n.d.) and McDermott et al.'s (2012) qualitative work, utilize *Critical Pedagogy* and related frameworks of Freire (1970), Gallagher (2008), and Mignolo (2000; 2009), to move past the “banking methods” and market-based approaches of the Arts toward a transformative curriculum. Just like the studies focusing on empowerment, these authors also emphasize a co-construction of knowledge about relevant topics which can be reflected upon while art viewing and artmaking. They go on to elaborate that utilizing aesthetic experience in such a way will help to develop, as Greene (2000) expresses, a common vision or voice, or as Dewey (1954) affirms, “an articulate public” (p. 184). McDermott et al. (2012) argues that a transformative curriculum can be accomplished by educating teachers about aesthetic experiences and reflecting on immigrant voices.

Social transformation, according to Medina (2012) and Stinson (1985), can only happen through *empathy*. Therefore, it wouldn't matter to what detail curriculum was restructured to be transformative or how elaborative schools could be in teaching aesthetic inquiry or aesthetic literacy skills. Without empathy, there is no real change to be had. This is why the themes in this subheading are structured the way they are—first is awareness, then, empowerment, and finally action toward change. This notion about the next steps beyond empathy toward social change will be mentioned later as a gap in the literature.

Key Arguments in the Literature

All the thinking and scholarship on aesthetic experience have profound underpinnings from Dewey, Eisner, and Greene's work. This, in turn has been influenced by pragmatism, Democratic

views, valuing formal and informal knowledge, the Arts as interdisciplinary, as well as significance in developing a language to understand aesthetic experiences through aesthetic inquiry and literacy skills. Again, although the literature is interconnected by these frameworks, they still hold distinctive arguments, which have been highlighted this far, but need to be addressed again in even greater detail. Upon analyzing the distinctiveness in focus of each study, a total of seven key arguments were identified. They are: The Need for Aesthetic Skills; Children are Developmentally Ready for Aesthetic Experience; The Significance of Countering Neoliberalism; Facilitating Aesthetic Experience and Intentional Planning; Dialogue and Relationships; and Embodied Learning. These themes will be thoroughly addressed first and then specific gaps in the literature will be acknowledged.

The Need for Aesthetic Skills

The most reoccurring of all arguments found within this scholarship is the emphasis placed on the need for aesthetic skills in Arts Education. These skills have been identified by using various terminology but have similar implications. This terminology includes: aesthetic literacy (Sessions, 2008), aesthetic inquiry (Drinkwater, 2014; Güvenç & Toprak, 2022; Miralay & Egitmen, 2019; Sessions, 2008; Sosin et al., 2010) aesthetic awareness (Almqvist & Andersson, 2019; Mashizi et al., 2019), aesthetic skills (Acer & Ömeroğlu, 2008), aesthetic abilities (Adu-Agyem & Enti, 2009), aesthetic qualities (Lim, 2005), an aesthetic communication or language (Almqvist & Andersson, 2019; Davis & Dunn, 2023; Eckhoff, 2011; 2012; Fang et al., 2018; Morley, 2014; Sunday, 2015; 2018), cognitive function through metaphor (Heid, 2008; Kübra Ozalp, 2018), symbolic capital (Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2017), visual literacy (Eckhoff, 2006), and aesthetic perception (Wanzer et al., 2020).

Regardless of how one might classify these skills, these authors acknowledge that to understand aesthetic experience requires a specific skillset that takes training, exposure to art viewing and artmaking, space for creativity, dialogue about creative processes, as well as teacher modeling. Take Güvenç & Toprak (2022) for instance, they argue that through aesthetic inquiry, which includes articulating choices about directions in artwork, children become open to their own learning, build confidence and empathy, and foster social imagination to change society. Acer & Ömeroğlu (2008) builds on that line of thought but argues that aesthetic skills, such as critical thinking, questioning the status quo, and developing free thinking, is advanced by discussing artworks with children. Sessions (2008) argues that while aesthetic experience may spark an emotional attachment to a work of art with little effort, the process in connecting background information and applying it to formal contexts takes practice and requires aesthetic literacy. She continues that this kind of literacy is developed by organizing environments to be inquiry and community based.

Something noteworthy is that this aesthetic literacy, as it is presented by these scholars, is not only intended to help a student become aware of *their* capacity to utilize aesthetic experience for their *personal growth*. Rather, it is stressed as a *collective* endeavor. To put it another way, one attains the aesthetic literacy needed to articulate with others about their experience and the motivation behind that is toward alternative visions of self *and* society. Heid (2008) would agree. Her work maintains that aesthetic experience supports cognitive functioning, as well as intrapersonal and interpersonal communication (Gardner, 1983). Therefore, the primary goal is always toward collaboration with others. Morley (2014) would concur that to share one's aesthetic thoughts with their classmates requires a verbal language necessary to put feelings into words. Still, other scholarships are more about developing aesthetic qualities to become more

sophisticated, not in making art products, but in becoming more aware of artmaking processes of self and others. Lim (2004; 2005) explains that these kinds of aesthetic qualities come through continuous opportunities in choice, exploring various art materials, manipulating art tools and environments, as well as watching and hearing of others' experiences.

Children are Developmentally Ready for Aesthetic Experience

There are some studies that highlight the creative nature of children and advocate that children are, indeed, ready, not only to have aesthetic experiences, but also to engage in complex conversations about them. Additionally, engagement with aesthetic experience and the consistent utilization of one's senses is highlighted as an age-appropriate, coping strategy for children. In other words, through aesthetic experience, children can release emotions in a positive way and become "emotionally sound people" (Adu-Agyem & Enti, 2009, p. 163; Edwards, 2010). Aesthetic experiences are also recognized as a means toward a more holistic art education, one that encourages children to create art based on their interests and incorporating their feelings and emotions while telling their own stories (Mashizi et al., 2019; Tafti et al., 2020). In addition, these authors argue that although children are developmentally ready to engage in aesthetic experiences, this approach needs to be integrated in specific ways—especially when it comes to building an art portfolio. To elaborate, because aesthetic experience encourages creative processes over final products, portfolios are not seen as a place for masterpieces. Rather, process-folios (Gardner, 1993) are utilized to showcase mistakes and unfinished works that are *in the process of becoming*. For example, Rusanen et al. (2012) elaborates that art needs to be self-oriented—and, as mentioned earlier—children need to be given opportunities to create art that revolves around their personal stories (Edwards, 2010). Moreover, these scholars argue that aesthetic experience needs to be recognized, not as an independent, but a collective endeavor. Eckhoff (2006) goes on to advocate

that these experiences are very much a sociocultural initiative in which children are developmentally ready to discuss their cognitive and aesthetic abilities in classroom settings for *all* to benefit.

The Significance of Countering Neoliberalism

This scholarship is sometimes identified as exposing market-based approaches to art, decolonializing, providing spaces of hybridity, or viewing purposes of art through a Critical-Democratic lens. Most of the studies within this realm propose some sort of a reconstruction in art pedagogy toward a more transformative type of arts. This is the case with Drinkwater (2014), Ingram & Drinkwater (n.d.), and Ingram (2013). Their argument is that the Arts have become just another market-based commodity in which society expects students to be molded into efficient, product-oriented designers and consumers. They continue that this commonsense ideology is not just influencing the art programs of schools, but it goes even deeper to shape the identity and roles of individuals in society (Medina, 2012). For example, Ingram & Drinkwater (n.d.) contend that the “banking” style of education has essentially robbed the individual of creative thinking so that they become inclined to view themselves as society wants them to. Their case study, which included adolescent girls between the ages of 14-19, avers the need to confront Neoliberal views and break down traditional views of femininity and citizenship. In addition, they argue that approaching art education as a co-construction of knowledge within communities will also break the tradition that learning only comes from top-down models.

The scholarship of McDermott et al. (2012), Medina, (2012), and Sosin et al. (2010) offer details on how this reconstruction of arts pedagogy is possible, not just as a theoretical initiative, but also as practical application within schools and classrooms. For example, in order to build

transformative curriculum through aesthetically grounded experiences, McDermott et al. (2012) integrated elements of Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed" in teacher workshops to reflect on immigrant voices and develop empathy for students in their classrooms. Similarly, Sosin et al. (2010), to make learning relevant for students, has students explore labor unions and related tools. Through collaborative responses of art history, art becomes an activist tool for social justice in the classroom setting. Finally, Medina (2012) integrates a critical, pedagogical practice in her classroom—a process she calls *Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy*—by fusing aesthetic experience opportunities as part of her course curriculum. These opportunities included engaging in theatrical performances, creative writing, as well as viewing and creating personal artworks. Her reasoning for aesthetic experience incorporation was to support the reconstruction of her students' identities, which have been torn down by Neoliberalism, toward a development of compassion for social transformation.

Facilitating Aesthetic Experience and Intentional Planning

Several studies view the phenomenon of aesthetic experience not as an automatic endeavor, nor a happenstance. Rather, it is viewed as an initiative that requires vigilant effort and intentional planning. Along with this thought is considering how aesthetic experience should be facilitated. Is it by way of a dance choreographer modeling body awareness (Almqvist & Andersson, 2019)? Does the likelihood of an aesthetic experience increase when a teacher creates the space for safe dialogue amongst primary school children (Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2017)? Does it help that a teacher establishes routines so that children get accustomed to the specific language when describing their emotions or to feel a sense of belonging within the environments that aesthetic experiences are most likely to happen (Davis & Dunn, 2023; Kübra Ozalp, 2018)? Or is there a consideration on whether the aesthetic should be facilitated toward economic and intellectual benefits or more so

for self-expression and pure joy (Shim & Kim, 2014)? Some studies even deal with the aesthetic relationship they have with their students (Miralay & Egitmen, 2019). Moreover, consideration is taken as to the purposes of the aesthetic, what role individuals should take in engaging with them, and how they should be facilitated in the classroom.

It seems appropriate to pose yet another question: Is it the sole responsibility of a student to elicit their own aesthetic experiences in the classroom, or should the teacher be obligated to facilitate them? Within this scholarship, one will find that the responsibility lies very much in the hands of those who are already aesthetically literate. Afterall, this literature is within the context of art education—and those who have valuable knowledge should share it. The work of Fang et al. (2018) highlights this deliberation and would most likely answer the question above with a resounding, yes. These scholars go on to elaborate that aesthetic experiences of audience members are influenced by way of strategic coding. The performers, through years of developing aesthetic literacy, encode their performance with the right amount of attraction and visual accuracy for the audience to decode and reach an emotional level to elicit an aesthetic experience. Still, some studies, such as Chang (2017) and Wanzer et al. (2020) are interested in developing assessments to explore the meaning of aesthetic experiences of adults by constructing scales. Even though this effort has yet to take place in PK-12 settings, it is an indication that teachers are exploring avenues, not only to facilitate aesthetic experiences, but also to assess them.

Dialogue and Relationships

There are several studies that highlight the most recurring method of aesthetic facilitation found within this research—dialogue. It is argued that dialogue is only possible when a meaningful relationship and an understanding of aesthetic perception has been established between

participants (Miralay & Egitmen, 2019). Eckhoff (2011) contends that in order to move away from a craft-based approach to artmaking requires that a relationship be established between teacher and student. The basis of this relationship comes in the form of a teacher being vulnerable with their feelings and emotions and modeling what process-based approaches to art look like. Eckhoff (2012) continues in another study to underscore the significance of teachers moving away from eliciting desired outcomes and work toward informal conversations while artmaking. Therefore, classroom interactions are not teacher-directed, but become a negotiation and a co-construction of art experience.

The work of Sunday (2015; 2018) places much emphasis on children's approaches to art and the purpose of the art product through conversations about their artmaking process. Through the integration of relational aesthetics, Sunday argues that the focus in the classroom should be, not on the art product itself, but on dialogue taking place about it. Sunday describes this process as a non-linear, nomadic exploration that spans throughout the duration of the course. She argues that aesthetic experience is not a one-time occurrence, but it is an endeavor which includes an open-ended, ongoing dialogue. It is a progression that gets revisited in every sketch, drawing, painting, mistake, or conversation about the creative process. Sunday adds that adults should be inclined to step down from their teacher role and allow children the opportunity to tell stories as they draw—thus, supporting their reality building and providing a safe place for hybridity.

Embodied Learning

Only a few studies highlight the learning process in such a way as to give the body its due credit for its collaboration with the mind. The work of Lee (2022) touches the surface for this validation of the body as she advocates for an embodied learning approach when artmaking in

community-based settings. While the emphasis is on lived-experience, co-construction, and bodily movement toward an ethical society, there is other scholarship that provokes a deeper level of somatic learning. Güvenç & Toprak (2022) stated that there are just some experiences that cannot be verbally articulated, or even cognitively understood, sometimes, an experience is best described as “felt.” Medina would consider this concept as a *somatic* sensibility—one in which the body is acknowledged for retaining and accessing knowledge. When one recognizes their capacity to utilize their body to feel and articulate experience, they become conscious of their “body awareness.” In addition, when one knows how to wield this ability, Medina (2012) considers this “body authority.”

Medina (2012) argues that because of the Neoliberal influence on our society, individuals, especially minority groups who are underrepresented, have developed a *fatalistic optimism* (Rossatto, 2005) about themselves that has become embodied and part of their identity. Medina (2012) elaborates that this is a result of generational use of the “banking-style” of education (Freire, 1970). She continues that this outlook on life has contributed to individuals viewing themselves as powerless in creating change in society. Medina turns to aesthetic experience as the approach for these students to develop the compassion to first see change within themselves and then be moved to create change in society. This idea of compassion is a key feature of Medina’s embodied learning. If compassion is not present in an aesthetic experience, then one’s body cannot be motivated to action—the effort does not move much beyond self-interest.

Gaps in the Literature

There is a solid grasp on the significance of aesthetic awareness and developing the skills necessary to understand aesthetic experience. There are also sufficient studies advocating aesthetic

experience as relevant and developmentally appropriate for very young children from PK-6th grade (e.g., Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2017; Eckhoff, 2006; 2011; 2012; Sunday, 2018). There is even scholarship in the realm of college and beyond in which college students, pre-service teachers, art teachers, dance instructors, college professors, adults who do not consider themselves artists, audience members, and the elderly who are interviewed about their aesthetic perceptions and personal stories (e.g., Almqvist & Andersson, 2019; Barker, 2010; Chang, 2017; Fang et al., 2018; Medina, 2012; Rusanen et al., 2012; Wanzer et al., 2020). However, when it comes to the context of secondary education, to include a limited amount of research at the middle school level, but even more so at the high school level, there is a definite absence of scholarship on aesthetic experience. Furthermore, I highlight a few subtle gaps in the literature, but they are still significant for consideration. A total of four themes are offered to address each concern. They include: (1) Lack of Literature at the High School Level; (2) Relationships, Embodied Learning, and Development of Empathy; (3) Lack of Literature on how to Counter Neoliberalism; and (4) Lack of Student Voice.

Lack of Knowledge at the High School Level

There are two studies, Ingram & Drinkwater (n.d.) and Ingram (2013), that suggest their research could include high school students. The participants are identified as adolescent girls ranging in age from 14-19 years old—so the implication is that these girls could be high school students. However, the researchers do not identify that they are. Subsequently, we are left with only one other study, that of Sosin et al. (2010), in which case there *is* an acknowledgement that the context is high school. After a thorough review of the literature, to my knowledge, there is a lack of additional literature within the high school context.

Investigating further into the work of Sosin et al. (2010), in which the context is specifically identified as high school, reveals an additional absence for the consideration of students' creative processes or the processes involved in their aesthetic experiences. Also, there was nothing to be said about the relationships between teachers and students toward their co-construction of aesthetic perceptions. Their work focused on the viewing of artworks within the theme of *labor unions* and the impact they had in developing an approach toward reflection and change. Although their work is significant in advocating for aesthetic inquiry as a facilitator toward social justice, it does not regard the complexity necessary to gain insights as to what teachers or students' interpretations of aesthetic experiences are. Their inclusion of the aesthetic regarding art curriculum gives surface details, not about the aesthetic experiences that were had, but about the potential of the subject matter. To put it another way, a glimpse was offered within this specific context about how aesthetic experience facilitated students' attitudes and perceptions about labor unions and related tools. Sosin et al. (2010) do build a solid argument in favor of social justice on top of Greene's aesthetic inquiry concept. However, continued research is necessary to explore the nuances of the student/teacher relationship to facilitate these types of endeavors.

There are two studies that speak to the nuances of aesthetic experiences and relationships in-line with my investigation. They are the work of Lim (2005) and Sessions (2008). Lim's (2005) study is in the context of early childhood pre-service teachers and Sessions (2008) is in the context of primary grade levels. Both these studies ask very similar research questions reflected in my study. More-or-less, the questions are: (1) What is the definition of aesthetic experience; (2) How are these experiences being facilitated; and (3) For what purposes? Although these questions get at the root of how aesthetic experiences are facilitated in the classroom and toward what ends, the studies exploring these research questions are not within the context of high school.

Based on my 20 years teaching visual arts and being involved in competitive art initiatives, I posit that the absence of studies conducted at the high school level must have something to do, not only with the expectation to enter competitions, but also with the autonomy high school art teachers have. Based on my professional experience, the role of an elementary art teacher is very much connected to the overall mission of the school and the art teachers' approach is expected to be supplementary to the curriculum of core-content areas. On the other hand, high school visual arts teachers seem to take advantage of the independence associated with departmentalization and perhaps embrace the freedom and sense of entitlement to approach art according to their own principles. Again, in my experience, high school visual art teachers tend to not favor the integration of other subjects in their art classroom or be in support of other subjects—unless it compliments art history. Perhaps researchers are cognizant of this and because they might be in line with Eisner's (2002) framework of Interdisciplinary Arts, this may have depressed research in the high school context.

Another supposition for the lack of studies at the high school level is that early childhood literature on aesthetic experience is very much geared toward a life-long, learning benefit—which consists of empowering student voice and agency. At the college level, emphasis is also on life-long learning and—even in teacher education—it is also on empowering future students toward the same. Post-college research tends to deal with a reconnection of the aesthetic as it is usually perceived as being lost, or never attained, through the process of “growing up” into adulthood. In these contexts, researchers usually take an approach of developing the aesthetic toward personal growth or seeking one's value and role in society. Perhaps the high school realm presents an atmosphere of “an already decided path,” a space in which students are consumed with competitive views of the Arts, or perhaps, students have deviated from the Arts altogether and have learned to

“do school” without engaging their body and emotions. As highlighted in the work of Lowenfeld & Brittain (1970; 1987), it is usually around the teenage years in which youths have already decided whether, or not the Arts are for them (Decision Stage, 13-16 years-old). By the time they get to high school, if they have not yet developed a robust aesthetic awareness and literacy to last a lifetime, perhaps all that is left to consider are arts competitions, or no art at all. Since there are only two studies that pose these sorts of considerations, but neither are in the context of high school, this motivated me to research within this setting and fill the void.

Relationships, Embodied Learning, and Development of Empathy

Another secondary, yet significant absence in literature exists. Of all the literature there is about utilizing aesthetic experience towards reflection and action, Medina (2012) is the closest research to the focus of my study and that captures the interactions between student and teacher when it comes to facilitating these experiences. It is significant to note that much of her emphasis of this facilitation is on the capacity of the body to contribute to the cognitive. I am not aware of other work that connects aesthetic experience with the body—while utilizing the visual arts—as she does. There is essentially very little scholarship about aesthetic experience as embodied learning in the context of art education. The work of Lee (2022) comes close as she talks about embedded learning through community-based art projects. However, Medina (2012) goes to the extent of incorporating *Somatic Theory* to illustrate sequential processes of body authority throughout varying levels of aesthetic experience. Moreover, Medina’s (2012) study encompassed three major facets of aesthetic experience. First, she explored how aesthetic experiences are facilitated as a partnership between teacher and student in the classroom. Secondly, she examined what that collaboration looks like. Finally, she took note of the vulnerabilities elicited between them that are necessary to nurture the body through reflection and transformation. Her study

provides critical knowledge for professors of all subjects, as well as those they teach—building upon their repertoire of teaching approaches.

Medina (2012) offers more than a theoretical understanding of aesthetic experience and its facilitation in classrooms. She also provides a practical guide for educators in the form of sequential steps of aesthetic experience by incorporating the work of Stinson (1985). Within this scholarship is a cry for empathy toward creating any real change in society. As mentioned in detail previously, much research has incorporated Greene’s concepts about alternative views of self and society. In other words, we have become familiar with how aesthetic experience has the potential to develop the skills to build our imaginations—but how do we ignite it and engage it? This is something that Medina (2012) offers, yet other than her contribution on developing compassion through pragmatic steps toward social change, no other scholarship that I am aware of addresses this consideration. This is potentially another area that needs additional exploration, not just at the high school level, but across *all* levels.

How to Counter Neoliberalism

Other than the work of Ingram & Drinkwater (n.d.), Ingram (2013), and Drinkwater, (2014), to my knowledge, there exists no other aesthetic-based literature that specifically addresses Neoliberalism in schools at any educational level. I speculate the lack of literature on aesthetic experience at the high school level, may indicate that Neoliberalism is alive and thriving because of the tradition of art competitions within this context. This may motivate arts-minded researchers to believe that more work needs to be done at the high school level to explore what steps, if any, are being taken to counter market-based art approaches. In addition, it would also be of benefit to conduct more studies at this level to learn how students might navigate art competitions in or out

of the classroom. Even by employing the anti-Neoliberal work of pedagogues, such as Apple (1990; 2004; 2014), Aronowitz (2004), Bale & Knopp, (2012), Bowles & Gintis (2011), Fischman, (2009), Freire (1970), Giroux (2010; 2016), and McLaren (1998; 2003), into the studies of Arts Education (as in a top-down fashion), the artworld might benefit more so from art teachers and art students who co-construct scholarship—providing testimony about countering hegemony from within the schools and outward.

Lack of Student Voice

Practically all the literature found, for the exception of work by Sunday (2015; 2018), Dunkerly-Bean et al. (2017), Heid (2008), Kübra Ozalp (2018), Sessions (2008), and Sosin et al. (2010), engaged adults who voice the importance of aesthetic experience, aesthetic literacy, and related processes. It is significant to note that much of the studies just mentioned that do not focus on adults are in the context of primary grade levels. These scholars provide many examples of students participating in dialogue about their artmaking process and even offer excerpts about what was said. Yet, there is little in the way of narrative to be found beyond the PK-6th grade realm, and again, especially in the context of high school. Insufficient literature exists in which students voice their interpretations of aesthetic experience to include opportunities to share personal experiences that facilitate them. Even some of the studies mentioned here that do give voice to student experience are done so by way of including student artwork in their manuscripts. This is a critical focus but speaks to the potential absence of *verbal* dialogue.

Connecting the Literature to My Positionality

I highlight a consideration that triggers a deep reflection of my positionality as an art teacher. Morley (2014), one of the scholars in the literature, poses two thought-provoking

questions: “Is it a form of colonialism to demand that [students] perform verbally and share their thoughts with their classmates” (p. 109)? And do “we over-value an ability to present clear, distinct, rational, objective, and analytical ideas through the medium of verbal language, believing that if we put our thoughts and feelings into words, we are in control” (p. 107)? As in the case of South Korea, Morley (2014) elaborates that aesthetic meaning is embedded and internal to the artwork. I interpret the implication to mean that in the East there is little value placed on the effort to articulate one’s aesthetic experience through verbal language because the artmaker will transfer their embedded meaning to the art product—which can “speak for itself.”

To answer Morley’s (2014) questions, as they are presented, I would have to answer both—yes. However, I want to note that his use of words: “demand, perform, and control,” have negative connotations. I would imagine that most art teachers do not perceive the facilitation of aesthetic experience in such ways. If his words were replaced with “encourage, share, and agency,” I believe encouraging the articulation of aesthetic experience with verbal language could be seen as a sincere and respected pedagogy. As to the culture of the East not articulating aesthetic experience through verbal language, as Morley (2014) describes, I will say that the ability to voice one’s agency in silence is something in which I have the most profound respect. Ironically, though, I believe that Morley (2014) may be inadvertently posing these questions through a lens still very much influenced by a Western perspective. He may be overlooking significant scholarship, that was mentioned earlier, about an individual’s *inner* voice (Anzaldúa, 1987; 2007; Bhabha, 1994; Blommaert, 2008; Davies, 2000; Enriquez, 2014; Hornberger and Link, 2012; Medina, 2006; 2012; Medina, 2010; Vetter et al., 2011; Vygotsky, 1978).

Based on this scholarship, it could be said that even though children are not actually speaking out loud, they are still putting their feelings into words and articulating their own

language within their bodies. Whether children choose to speak, an aesthetic experience becomes embedded (Medina, 2012; Stinson, 1985), it becomes a part of them, and shapes their identity (Enriquez, 2014; Medina, 2010). Upon considering this, an educator may not come to view encouraging children to share their embedded experiences, with the intention to understand who they are to better meet their needs, as “over-valuing.” Additionally, I question the idea that colonialism and control are associated with encouraging children to share with their peers and teachers. Yet, I am thankful that Morley (2014) invites this discussion because it speaks to the authenticity of aesthetic experience, as well as the vulnerability involved in sharing them.

My attempt to address this discourse concludes referring to Dewey (1934), Eisner (2002), and Greene’s (2001) determination to make aesthetic experiences tangible and usable for all students. This is what motivates my study, more so in the context of public high school visual Arts Education. However, I also recognize Morley’s point that the efforts of the West to better understand aesthetic experience could be perceived as trying to make this phenomenon measurable, standardized, and yet another avenue to maintain hegemony. Yet, Dewey (1934) eloquently offers his philosophy of experience as a *temporal* process—one in which we utilize a continuum of our past, present, and future to reimagine all three. It is a distinct characteristic that sets us apart from animals and, as has been discussed, it is a process that is vital for aesthetic awareness and literacy. My intention within this scholarship is not to be in control or wield someone else’s aesthetic experience toward my personal goals. Rather, my standpoint is that since I have acquired aesthetic skills throughout my years teaching and because I see the value in them, I would like to share this literacy with my students, as well as learn from their views. In the footsteps of Greene (2001), my determination is to equip children with the skills necessary to view their temporality within a *transformative optimism*, not a *fatalistic* one (Rossatto, 2005). In

addition, I hope to prepare my students with the ability to successfully articulate their affective needs because doing so is another headway toward self-actualization and giving back to the world (Maslow, 1968; 1970; Rossatto et al., 2020).

With current definitions of aesthetic experience and gaps identified in the literature, I now locate my study. The lack of emphasis on student-teacher relationships, embodied learning, and the development of empathy regarding facilitating aesthetic experience in high school visual arts classrooms motivates me in this direction. The deficiency of literature addressing Neoliberalism in high schools is also of great concern because it may indicate that the competitive tradition within this realm has become so *commonsensical*—it serves to maintain the hegemony. Preservice teachers in Medina’s (2006) study felt similarly, and yet, the opportunity to articulate their aesthetic experiences and hear the stories of others—including those of their teacher—created space for the development of compassion and alternative ways of being in society. This endeavor may be greatly needed in high schools so that students’ voice can be heard at this level. By interviewing participants in high school visual arts classrooms, valuable insights can be gained as to the nuances of their definitions of aesthetic experience, their relationships with each other, how they co-construct these meanings, how their partnership aids in facilitating these experiences, and finally, what goals they strive for. Furthermore, it is of great significance to consider how both teachers and their students might navigate obstacles of censorship relating to aesthetic experience that is fashioned by Neoliberal influence. This scholarship is about using art classrooms as battlegrounds (Carnoy & Levin, 1986) to fight for the capacity of aesthetic experience as a space for embodied learning, as a *third space* for hybridity, and as a pedagogical pathway toward change.

Aesthetic Experience as Third Space

Given the definitions of aesthetic experience highlighted thus far, there is an extension to its meaning that I would like to add which may encompass the value in all these interpretations. In the spirit of Greene's (1980; 1986; 1995; 2000; 2001) encouragement to utilize aesthetic experience in *imagining the self and the world otherwise*, I offer a suggestion to understand aesthetic experience as *Third Space*. I propose that aesthetic experience might be regarded as an activity that can be defined, not only in *multiple* ways, but might also remain a space that is difficult to put *one* label on. In other words, perhaps aesthetic experience—within the context of education—should be considered a space so undeveloped that it can embrace limitless hybrid interpretations of what students' goals of the Arts could be.

Although it is likely that many already come to view the Arts as a pathway for imagining the world otherwise—essentially as a space for creative thinking—this endeavor might not necessarily see its way through in schools toward *long-term* benefits of students' aesthetic development. As mentioned previously, the influence of Neoliberalism may shape student voice and frame purposes for imagination toward market-based goals, but not necessarily developing aesthetic skills, critical consciousness, or critical voice (Apple, 2014; Au, 2007; Drinkwater, 2014; Foley, 2014; Green, 1980; 1986; 1995; 2000; 2001; Ingram, 2013; Ingram & Drinkwater, 2013). In addition, although Eisner (2002) views schools as the best place to teach art, Kerdeman (2005) suggests that using art education as a tool for specific purposes can limit aesthetic experiences because educational environments are bounded, moments are short-term, and experiences are highly predictable. However, viewing aesthetic experience as third space within the stark binaries and intentionality of educational settings, may provide the openness to consider a variety of epistemological views—be it those of students, teachers, administrators, curriculum writers, policy

makers, etc. In conjunction with Greene's (2001) encouragement to employ aesthetic experience to view alternative realities of self and society, Soja (1996) also sees third space as an approach to "new alternatives" (p. 5).

One of the most significant elements of third space is its refutation of binaries. Through the examination of aesthetic experience thus far, there have been several binaries identified. These include *Product* versus *process*; *experimental* versus *experiential*; *happenstance* versus *intentional*, *analytic* versus *holistic*, *individual* versus *collective*; *emphasis on artwork* versus *emphasis on what artwork motivates us to do*. (Edwards, 2010; Greene, 1980; 1986; 2000; 2001; Gulla, 2018; Morley, 2014; Nathan & Sawyer, 2022). On the other hand, regardless of society's push and pull to offer the most meaningful learning experiences for students, third space offers more than just a "middle-ground" to binary views—it offers a place to construct something *new* about oneself (Bhabha, 1994). Additionally, viewing aesthetic experience as third space isn't just about rejecting binaries or new perspectives of the self. Seeing aesthetic experience as third space might also encourage new explanations for how we come to understand it. For example, while most scholars define aesthetic experience as a feeling of fulfilment and happiness (Chang, 2017; Dewey, 1981; Eisner, 2002; Fenner, 2003; Lussier, 2010; Lin, 2009; Yang, 2009), there are some who acknowledge that individuals might experience both *pleasant* and *unpleasant* emotions at the same time (Averill et al., 1998). This line of thought can be situated harmoniously with Dewey's (1934) concept of *temporality*, in that a person might need to reflect on negative experiences—be it in the past or present—in pursuit of constructing new approaches toward hope. This insight may initiate an evaluation as to whether art an aesthetic experience in schools could be utilized as an intentional space to reflect on the negative aspects of one's life—of course, with the intention to seek a resolve and feel a sense of freedom from past anxieties (Fenner, 2003).

The concept of third space has been explored by several scholars, such as Bhabha (1994), Gutiérrez et al. (1999), Lefebvre (2016), Moje et al. (2004), and Soja (1996; 2009). Third Space is a concept that derives from *Hybridity Theory* (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996) in which the spaces of individuals are explored within a globalized world to understand how they come to view it. Hybridity theory observes the “in-between” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1) spaces within one’s interaction with the world—be it through relationships with others, within various discourses, and with one’s identity. It is significant to note that this concept of “in-betweenness” is also evident in the way Greene (1980; 1986; 1995; 2000; 2001) describes the space amid the viewer and an artwork. Moreover, it is within this space that an individual will choose to be present and reflect on their connectivity to the world. Aesthetic experience is like third space in that they both offer an alternative realm to evaluate, reinterpret, and add novel insights to previous knowledge.

Understanding aesthetic experience as third space not only aids in recognizing the value of individuals as they contribute new concepts to old ways of thinking, but it may also acknowledge their potential as *change-agents*. This means that individuals develop an optimistic view of self and society as they see the value of their contributions toward affecting the world (Rossatto, 2005). Although the theoretical frameworks of *Critical Pedagogy* and related lenses when viewing the world through Neoliberal influence can feel deterministic (Medina, 2012), the concept of third space may provide a sense of hopefulness when considering aesthetic experiences in educational settings. To elaborate, students can be welcomed to embrace their own spatiality as they construct meanings of their aesthetic experiences. In other words, just as Soja (1996) highlights that people are “intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities” (p. 1), the same might be achieved as students name their aesthetic experiences as they choose to—based on their developing spatialities and identities. Moreover, just as third space can

encompass a diversity of epistemological ideas without judgement (Soja, 1996), aesthetic experience might also be such a space in which students can invent new selves and not have to feel apprehension about how they visualize themselves or their artwork within school settings.

The concept of third space appears to work in concurrence with aesthetic experience particularly when bearing in mind the Neoliberal influence on the Arts, as well as the framework Bhabha (1994) utilizes. Bhabha's (1994) views on hybridity are considered within the discussion of *Postcolonialism*—in which the colonizer determines appropriate ways of knowing and expects the colonized to assimilate. This line of thought is like Apple's (2014) terms of “official knowledge” or the “commonsensical.” Again, Apple (2014) uses this terminology to speak to the traditions and expectations that rarely get questioned. Greene (1980) also remarks on how the Arts get pushed out of the way for subjects that are typically seen as more objective and tangible, such as core subjects. Similarly, Bhabha (1994) explains that academic traditions and related material may act as colonizers that limit students' capacity to learn.

In conjunction with both Stinson (1985) and Greene's (2001) argument that aesthetic experience is a civic responsibility to think for oneself and develop a critical consciousness toward the benefit of society, Bhabha (1994) also proposes that students think critically about traditional ways of knowing. He goes on to explain that this becomes a process in which students engage in a “splitting” development—this is where they simultaneously *accept* and *reject* privileged ways of knowing (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 98-99, 131). In other words, as students struggle in constructing their identity and selfhood within spaces of domination—a “newness enters the world” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 212). Fenner (2003) offers an illustration of this. He elaborates that one level of an aesthetic experience is feeling a sense of freedom from concerns that have dominated us in the past and we now come to a place of relaxation, harmony, and empowered with a sense of choice. Viewing

aesthetic experience as third space can offer a fresh perspective on the way students see themselves within the confines of assimilation, as well as purposes of art to navigate through them.

Moje et al. (2004), while offering a slightly differing view of third space, is still worth considering in connection with aesthetic experience. These scholars use third space to build a bridge between the “first space” (home and community) and the “second place” of knowledge and discourse—that of work and school. Moje et al. (2004) and Moore et al. (1999) argue that contemplation of multiple funds of knowledge—those of the *first* and *second* spaces—will better support students as they develop the skills necessary to navigate practices in secondary schools. This scholarship speaks to the funds that are accessible to students beyond the realm of the classroom—something that has not been explored fully in the literature reviewed. I suggest that aesthetic experience might be integrated with concepts of third space when bearing in mind the extensions of this phenomenon, not just beyond the boundaries of school, but also beyond the boundaries of students’ homes. Moreover, this attention might lead us to consider a middle-ground, a new “third space” of aesthetic experience to be acknowledged.

Aesthetic Experience’s Alliance with Border Pedagogies

Taking into consideration that the context of this study resides within a *transborder* community, it is significant to note that global Neoliberal policy continues to focus on efficiency and standardization causing transformative initiatives to get moved to the wayside (Mignolo, 2009). Current *Comparative/Transnational Education Research* underscores the value of border pedagogies, such as third space and nepantla to counter the ideologies of Capitalism, ethnocentricity, globalization, patriarchy, and what has become established as official knowledge (Abraham, 2014; Alexander, 2009; Apple, 2004/2014; Bale & Knopp, 2012; Cashman, 2021;

Cervantes-Soon & Carillo, 2016; Cortina, 2019; Giroux, 2010; 2016; Koopman, 2006; Mignolo, 2009). Although this scholarship extends well beyond the scope of my study, the potential of third space and nepantla should be taken into consideration regarding the phenomenon of aesthetic experience. This is because border pedagogies have the potential to empower individuals toward reflection, healing, hope, and creating hybrid identities—which are similar endeavors of aesthetic experience and are pertinent to the geographical spaces of the instructional classroom (Greene, 1985; 1995, 2001; Gulla, 2018; Medina, 2012).

Nepantla is a term that became established by Nahuatl-speaking individuals in Mexico during the time of the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century (Mignolo, 2000). Nepantla can be employed to navigate deficit views, authoritative discourse, and provide a space of “in-between-ness” for reflection (Bakhtin, 1981; Bhabha, 2009; Cashman, 2021, p. 33). Nepantla is not only a space for reflection, but also a space to harness the energy for action. One way that energies are enacted through nepantla is by way of *Testimonios* which engage experiences that are embedded within one’s body. Essentially, the body is viewed as a “vehicle of self-authorship and resistance”—to name oneself and tell stories using one’s own words (Cervantes-Soon and Carrillo, 2016, p. 288; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). Similarly, Third Space is not only described as a middle-ground for alternative approaches to thinking through “critical, geographical imagination, and consciousness of spatiality” (Soja, 2009, p. 53), but it is also considered a space to create and enact hybrid forms of being (Abraham, 2014; Anzaldúa, 1987). As mentioned previously, Moje et al. (2004) contribute that third space is where competing knowledge, discourse, and practice can be discussed, challenged, and reconstructed. Moreover, through third space, teachers, and students (or even oppressors and the oppressed) can confront contradictions of knowledge, build bridges

between old and new knowledge, as well as consider formal and informal learning contexts (Soja, 1996; 2009).

Correspondingly, aesthetic experience is defined by Medina (2012) as “a moment of perception when our senses are functioning at their peak, because we are fully aware and fully awakened by the artwork in front of us” (p. 44). Ken Robinson (1982, 2001) likewise contends that aesthetic experience is a process that encourages all the senses to operate at their peak and that this process is critical to nurture embodied experience toward creative endeavors. It is significant to note that through the lens of Medina (2012), an artwork itself is not necessarily the facilitator, but more so, it is the *encounter* one has with an artwork—or the *space in-between* the viewer and the artwork—that acts as the catalyst to open-up space for reflexivity. Similarly, Stinson (1985) explains that the encounter with artworks acts as a means for “appreciating, connecting, [and] self-reflecting in critical awareness and moral agency” (p. 5).

Aesthetic experience is very similar to the concepts of *nepantla* and third space because they are all realms in which imagination inspires simultaneous, alternate forms of reality for change (Anzaldúa, 1987); they all act as a stage for ideological transitioning (Abraham, 2014); and they allow “opportunities for reimagining oneself and one’s role in society” (Cashman, 2021, p. 138). Fusing these three pedagogies in the context of K-16 classrooms might very well support the engagement between teachers and students as they reflect on experiences and co-construct new knowledge. Dewey (1910) is adamant about this reflective, co-constructive, and pragmatic process as he asserts that it “enables us to know what we are about when we act” (p. 125). Likewise, Abraham (2014) is in line with this sentiment as she enlightens that one needs opportunities to reflect on their ideological becoming and confront their internally persuasive discourses.

As seen in recent studies (Abraham, 2014; Anzaldúa, 2002; Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016; Cervantes-Soon, 2017), it is evident that the border pedagogies of *nepantla* and third space *are* making an impact on countering colonialism and deficit views, as well as providing space for hybrid identities and discourse to evolve. Much of this scholarship encompasses topics specific to bilingualism, literacy, translanguageing, and borderland identities. Yet, what can be said about applying *nepantla* and third space within art classrooms and when considering aesthetic experience? Can artmaking processes, whether in homes, schools, or elsewhere be considered an opportunity for reflection and hybridity to combat Neoliberal discourse? Is aesthetic experience currently being taken advantage of for its capacity as a third space? These contemplations are not necessarily the primary focus for this study. However, taking the advice of Maxwell (2005), it may be fruitful to expand and contemplate the scope of teachers' definitions to encompass novel views of aesthetic experience and possible endeavors to navigate potential censorship. As Maxwell (2005) encourages, it is important to consider *participants'* theories during the interview and data analysis process and embrace these as part of a researcher's conceptual framework.

Reflecting on aesthetic experience through the concepts of third space and *nepantla* may be beneficial moving forward—especially within the context of a borderland community. To view aesthetic experience as a critical, decolonial, and hybrid pedagogy, might aid in redefining art programs as *possibilities machines* toward emancipatory education (Lefebvre, 2016). This work will be accomplished by integrating Medina's (2012) *Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy*, Stinson's (1985) levels of aesthetic experience, as well as taking into consideration the theoretical foundations of third space and *nepantla* (Abraham, 2014; Bhabha, 1994; 2009; Cashman, 2021; Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016; Delanty, 2006; Gutiérrez et al., 1999; Lefebvre, 2016; Moje et al., 2004; Soja, 1996; 2009). This undertaking is essential to ascertain if aesthetic experience has

the capacity to be a third space and if it might be of significant support to border pedagogies (See Figure 2. for a visual of the integration of Stinson’s aesthetic levels, Medina’s Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy, and Third Space concept within the context of my study). Hopefully, this effort opens-up dialogue toward practical classroom initiatives which employ artmaking and processes of aesthetic experience as *third space*; providing not only *art* students, but *all* students with opportunities for reflection, reinterpretation, and hybridity. By taking this innovative view of aesthetic experience into consideration, the Arts might be integrated with other critically engaged learning spaces and be acknowledged as an authentic pedagogy to promote transborder dialogue, critical cosmopolitanism, and emancipatory education.

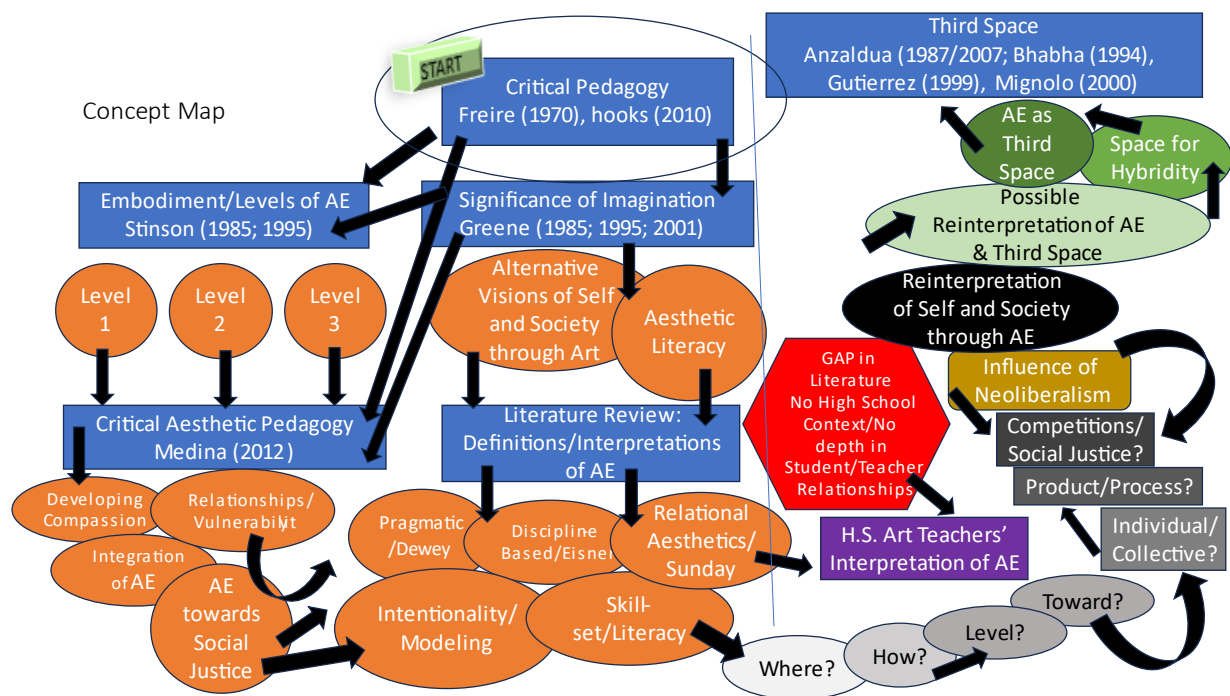


Figure 2: Concept Map of Conceptual Lens Integration

Chapter 3

Analysis of Conceptual Lens & The Theoretical Framework of this Study

This research pulls from various understandings of aesthetic experience in the literature. The following figure (See Figure 3.) is a visual representation of my conceptual framework for grounding the analyses of this study. The scholarship that my conceptual framework is based on is discussed in detail below.

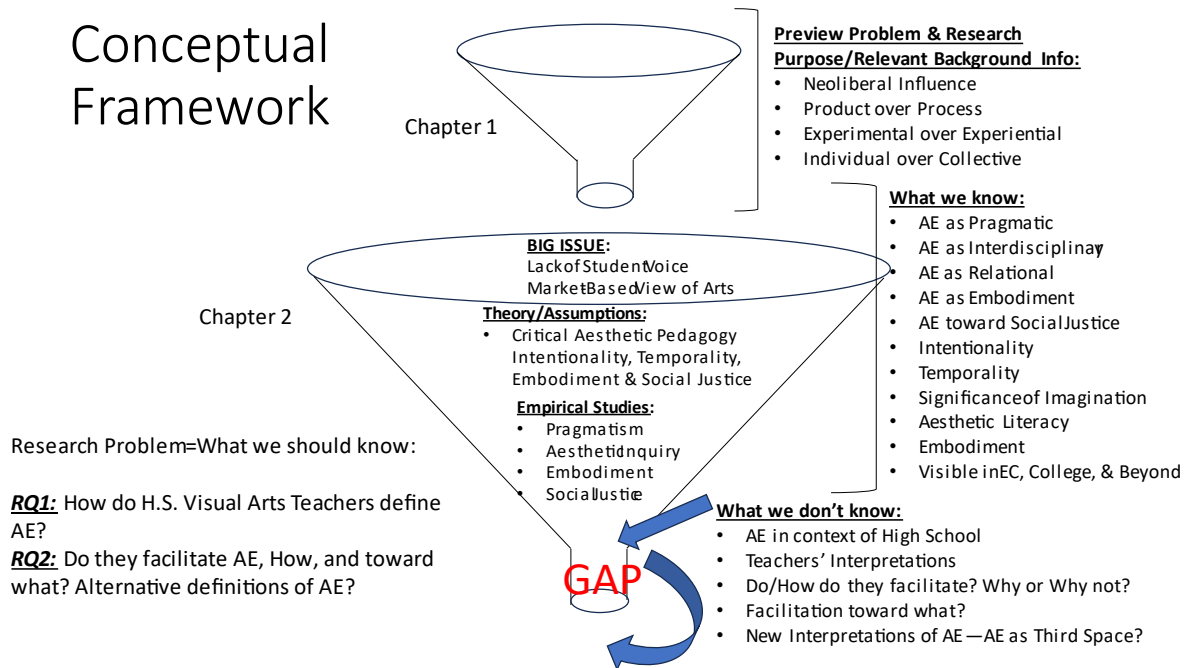


Figure 3: Conceptual Lens Addressed in this Study

The Neoliberal Education Landscape: An Environment of Despair

A quick look into Neoliberal economics of U.S. schools and its influence can leave one feeling dismal about what the future holds for education in general. Especially when big corporations find loopholes to make profits off educating children (Apple, 2013; 2014; Bradbury et al., 2013). Carnoy and Levin (1986) explain how the *Capitalist State* utilizes the

“superstructure” of schools to reproduce their norms and values. The Arts are not immune to the impact of this endeavor (Au, 2007; Drinkwater, 2014; Ingram, 2013; Rose, 2014), particularly when schools expect the tradition of making and showcasing beautiful products for competitions to be upheld. Through Neoliberal initiatives, visual arts teachers may preserve the status quo by conforming to the culture of *performativity*; Ball (2003) illustrates this concept as a mechanism to reform teachers and change their social identity.

Apple (1990) refers to teachers who succumb to this mechanism as *institutional abstractions* and the dialogue they have in schools as *neutral commodity language* in which they talk to students presenting themselves as transparent and unaffected by the *social and economic reproduction* imposed by people in power. In addition, Pinar (2012) regards these teachers as *posthuman*, indifferent, and insensitive. Aronowitz (2004) argues that this disconnected attitude is a result of losing connectivity for a “love of the world” (p. 16) and results in students also feeling the same way—not inspired to *reconstruct* experience, only *endure* it. Greene (1980) educates that “learning is forced down narrower and narrower channels,” and that young people are “alienated from the appearances of the world, distanced from their feelings, caught between sensory indulgence and a bored passivity” (p. 318). In addition, Freire (1970) asserts that educators may come to view teaching as merely depositing *official* information into barren depositories.

Tangible is Commonsensical

The consideration of Neoliberal influence is significant to this research because it may shape teachers’ view of aesthetic experience and its purpose. For example, Pinar (2012) avers that if schools do not encourage their teachers to participate in *complicated conversations* about various social issues, subjective matters, or perhaps, phenomena—such as aesthetic experience—what is

left tends to be *official* or *commonsensical knowledge* (Apple, 2014). This knowledge is usually regarded as the only type to get assessed because it tends to be tangible, objective, (Greene, 2001) and it is easier to standardize. Encounters with the Arts have the power to “create occasions for new beginnings,” leading to results that can be “unpredictable” (Greene, 1980, p. 316). In this way, art competitions could be perceived as the “mandated tests,” as well as the “standardization” of Arts Education in public schools. The problem with this is that when the value of competition motivates economic agendas of schools, we are left with the shortcoming of *meritocracy* (Aronowitz, 2004)—or the common saying: “If you work hard, you can accomplish anything.”

Pull Yourself Up by Your Bootstraps

Markovits (2020) contends that the flaw of this concept is that the wealthy can buy education and training for their children that disadvantaged students will never be able to compete with. So, if children of poor communities are literally creating art with pencil and paper while the more affluent are supplied with the highest quality art materials, private lessons, extra time to build their portfolios, and money to attend the best art schools, the disadvantaged students may never stand a chance unless under unusual circumstances. If art teachers were to view competitions as the primary, or the *only* art experience for students, this reinforces the stress put on producing and consuming products and not on creative processes of experience. McLaren (2003) would view this perspective of artmaking as *ideological hegemony* in that it primarily serves as a reproduction of what students might expect at art colleges or future collegiate competitions. Ultimately, art competitions represent a *commonsensical* tradition or what Apple (1975) also refers to as “assumptions that do not get articulated or questioned” (p. 99).

Compartmentalization Devalues the Visual Arts

Capitalist influence on schools tends to isolate content areas by compartmentalizing the curriculum. Apple (2003) contends that the Arts are considered “thrills” and are commonly removed altogether from the curriculum if budgets are tight. Apple (2003) also states that the Arts are considered a waste of time because they are not believed to be contributing to an “economically strong nation” (p. 3). Therefore, the Arts are intentionally disconnected from tested core-subjects and vice versa. In line with this, Greene (1980) states that education in the Arts, when it exists at all, is viewed by many as “self-indulgent play” rather than how to develop essential cognitive skills (Green, 1980, p.318). These scholars mentioned above argue that this trend disserves students as it goes against Freire’s (1993) concept of learning in a holistic manner. This is problematic, because connecting the Arts to core subjects through an interdisciplinary approach supports students in understanding and theorizing their world to change it (Darder, 2021; Edwards, 2010; Freire, 1993; Medina, 2012). This begs the question: What role do visual arts teachers play in this determination of what is deemed valuable enough to measure? How are teachers influenced in this consideration?

Upholding the Aesthetic Needs of Children Amid Privatization

The push for privatization of public schools with the increase of charters has a detrimental effect on the Arts (Au, 2007; Drinkwater, 2014; Ingram, 2013). The reason is that winning the race is not dependent on what the Arts have to offer—what matters is tested subjects and schools that excel in those test scores. Therefore, the Arts get shoved out of the way (Apple, 2003; Au, 2007; Greene, 1980). To elaborate, Fabricant and Fine (2015) illustrate competitive initiatives, such as NCLB, during the Bush administration, or RTTT, during the Obama Administration, entice, not

only public schools, but entrepreneurs to open for-profit charters, or to turn public schools into charters by way of *co-location* (Jankov and Caref, 2017) to get a piece of the pie. Even if some Arts programs survive in schools, the weight of those tests hover like a dark cloud on the creativity of teachers and students (Foley, 2014).

Fabricant and Fine (2015) go on to explain that such initiatives only prove to segregate Black and poor communities, disadvantage English language learners, and special needs students. Moreover, these students are likely to receive inadequate Arts programs, or no art at all. This consideration is significant as such youth can benefit immensely from aesthetic experience. For example, arts-integration in Los Angeles schools have significantly improved English Language-Arts test scores in which there are high populations of students of color, economically disadvantaged, and English-language learners (Peppler et al., 2010). In addition, participation in the Arts have positively influenced language development of English-language learners with a focus on reading comprehension, word retention, and retention of language (Marino, 2018). Moreover, through engagement in creative arts processes, emergent bilinguals have taken advantage of semiotic richness inherent in multiple languages (Spina, 2006).

Especially when it comes to meeting the physiological needs of students, it is imperative to consider how aiming classroom practices toward engaging in aesthetic experiences can aid in the process. Some scholars inform that students of a higher socioeconomic status may have greater chances toward cognitive development and self-actualization because they might be less likely to preoccupy over basic needs when attempting to engage themselves in school activities (Maslow, 1968; 1970; Rossatto et al., 2020). Rossatto et al. (2020) elaborate: only “[When] physiological primordial needs, along with safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, cognitive and aesthetic needs are met; this [can] lead to self-actualization” (p. 4)—or realizing one’s full potential (Maslow,

1968; 1970). Like self-actualization, aesthetic experience can also be perceived as a process of understanding oneself as an agent of change and realizing their capacity to help others (Greene, 2001; Medina, 2012; Stinson, 1985). Therefore, it is vital that *all* students receive the opportunity to engage with artworks so that they might reach self-actualization or an aesthetic experience—in which their senses are operating at their peak and their body is fully awakened (Medina, 2012).

Hopefully, it is evident that it would be of great advantage for a student to have their physiological needs met so that they could get “lost in a moment” when creating or viewing artworks (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Gulla (2018) elaborates that when educators nurture classroom environments can get lost in their senses and creative capacities, it “enable students to release responsive energies in the face of actual works of art” (p. 320). It is critical, then, that *all* children, including those who are disadvantaged or underrepresented, have opportunities to “lend works of art their lives” and respond with their own creative expressions (Greene, 1980; Gulla, 2018). Gulla (2018) continues, “to teach according to the principles of aesthetic education is to recognize the potential for meaningful encounters with works of art to release students’ imaginations and to help them find their voices” (p. 110). Moreover, to nurture aesthetic needs is to also nurture physiological needs toward self-actualization.

Capitalism Invading Time and Space within the Visual Arts

Harvey (2010) argues that Capitalist agendas are about the conquest of time, space, as well as human nature—he refers to this as “time space compression” (p. 21). Peck and Tickell (2002) refer to this subjugation as *Neoliberalizing space*. Harvey (2010) also talked about how Capitalist investors look for “space” and when there is none, they will look overseas to sell products to consumers or take advantage of urbanization overseas and utilize their space to make profits. Apple

(1999; 2006) illustrates an example of this when he talks about farmland in parts of Asia that are used to grow potatoes for American fast-food restaurant chains. The Arts are not immune to this invasion of time and space. Utilizing Pinar's (2012) concept of *posthumanism*—an era in which technological dominance is replacing *experience* with *space*, it can be acknowledged that encounters with the digital world consume the space of one's body.

In detail, Rossatto (2005) elaborates that when students are never given the opportunity to see the power of their decisions and the potential of their own experiences for social mobility, they see their time and space within the world as irrelevant and are, therefore, tormented with a fatalistic optimism. The engagement with artworks through critical thinking and complicated conversations must be accompanied by hands-on artmaking (Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2017; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1980; Medina, 2012; Pinar, 2012; Sunday, 2015; 2018). Greene (1980) elaborates that this process is necessary to enable students to “confront aesthetic objects with a quality of attention different from what they would have been capable of if they had not themselves experimented and explored” (p. 319). Giving students the opportunity to create their own works of art is an essential part of the aesthetic experience.

Re-culturing with an Engaged Pedagogy

Recreating Perspectives of Teachers

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) illuminate the need to *re-culture* existing educational environments through our view and investments of teachers. They assert that *individualism*, which is reinforced by high stakes and competitive initiatives, creates attitudes of *self-preservation*. This process makes educational structures frail for Democratic efforts. Instead, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) contend that part of the process of reinvention and re-culturing is dissecting the types of

current capital revolving around perspectives of teachers—and ultimately, choosing the best type to invest in. They highlight two kinds of capital—*business* and *professional*. The business capital is obviously influenced by the Neoliberal ideology and views teachers as mere assets for quick turnaround of revenue. Professional capital, on the other hand, is what the authors propose, which includes: *Human*²⁷, *Social*²⁸, and *Decisional Capital*²⁹. These kinds of capital view teachers as long-term investments that need to be nurtured and developed for permanence.

Another concept that Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) highlight which is necessary for reconstruction is the need to support the qualitative nature of the teaching profession. They elaborate how competitive initiatives attempt to quantify teaching to make it appear more professional or more relatable to non-educators for funding purposes. Ball and Forzani (2009) and Ball (2003) explain that *performativity* initiatives attempt to *de-professionalize* and *re-professionalize* teaching by taking the “art,” the “magic,” and the “improvisation” out of it. Essentially, teachers conform to the idea that their sole worth is dependent on their institution’s self-interests and performative capability (Ball, 2003). On the other hand, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) counter that ideology emphasizing the significance of teachers having the capacity to improvise swiftly in the classroom environment. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) assert, “Making decisions in complex situations is what professionalism is all about. They come to have

²⁷ According to Hargreaves & Fullan (2012), *Human Capital* is investing in *people* rather than *what* people can produce. This is accomplished by truly understanding their knowledge, skills, culture, and circumstances that shape them.

²⁸ According to Hargreaves & Fullan (2012), *Social Capital* is the catalyst between an individual’s assets and what influences their ability to nurture them, access them, or develop new ones—through interactions and their networks.

²⁹ According to Hargreaves & Fullan (2012), *Decisional Capital* is the capacity to trust one’s instincts and improvise when making decisions—often while being presented with unclear evidence.

competence, judgment, insight, inspirations, and the capacity for improvisation as they strive for exceptional performance” (p. 5). As these scholars defend—improvisation *is* professional!

Tilley and Taylor (2013) assert that when teachers are trained to enter the classroom “empty”—only teaching what the curriculum provides—this becomes such a disservice to students. Rather, teachers should learn to intertwine *planned curricula* with *lived experience*. Berry (2010) asserts that teachers must be taught to share their life experiences with their students, as well as allow students’ life experience to shape their lessons. This is done by teachers modeling *vulnerability* and incorporating an *engaged pedagogy*. Furthermore, Tilley and Taylor (2013) continue that teachers should employ, not only their expertise of content, but also their curiosity, creativity, and desire to learn from their students.

Another area of consideration in which there needs to be change in teacher education is teachers need encouragement to have *complicated conversation* (Pinar, 2012, p. 233) with their students, rather than regurgitating facts. In addition, Pinar (2012) asserts that *real learning* is a discourse of intelligent dialogue between teacher, student, and the classroom. He rationalizes that with any conversation there is *work* amongst the participants and there is utilization of prior knowledge to discern, question, reinforce, and reinvent new meanings—it is an intellectual process—a process very similar to aesthetic experience (Edwards, 2010; Eisner, 2002; Heid, 2008; Kübra Ozalp, 2018; Medina, 2012; Stinson, 1985). Pinar (2012) asserts that this dialogue between students, teachers, parents, and school community can ignite a *subjective reconstruction*³⁰ and lead us to a more Democratic education (p. 226).

³⁰ According to Pinar (2012), *Subjective Reconstruction* (similar to the concept of *Currere*) is an active reflection of academic knowledge and lived experience. The reflection is intended to prompt change in attitudes about approaches to education and teaching.

In conjunction with Freire (1970), Au (2009) and Kincheloe et al. (1999) reject teaching methods that consist of rote memorization. Instead, they encourage *contextualized teaching*³¹. In addition, they assert that teachers should learn how to frequently apply a *textured reflection* upon themselves, in which they examine their biases, stereotypes, as well as the way they approach their classes and teach their students—or through the process of *currere*³². Kincheloe rejects *objective* assessment instruments, such as high-stakes tests. Instead, he promotes the evaluation of students' authentic interpretations—experiences told from *their* voices, and more importantly, using *their own* language.

Countering Neoliberalism with Freire

In his text, *Pedagogy of the City*, Freire (1993) outlines several recommendations that can aid in countering the selfish, individualistic, and money-hungry advances on schools and their inhabitants. Much like Dewey (1934) and Apple (2014), Freire echoes the concept of moving away from a *conservative restoration*—assimilating students to the world as it is presented—to being a *progressive* teacher. This means incorporating students' lived experience in classroom approaches. According to Freire (1993), this incorporation not only allows students to feel comfortable learning new material as they embrace and utilize what they know in making connections, but also helps students to develop a critical eye, speak up, and encourages them to initiate changes to the way the world is presented. Freire (1993) elaborates that when students are included, they feel empowered because they get to connect their experiences, assets, and culture with the content they learn in

³¹ According to Kincheloe et al. (1999), *Contextualized Teaching* means educating students in such ways to connect new material with their past experiences. The idea is that students learn best when they can relate class lessons and activities with their daily lives.

³² According to Pinar (1994), *Currere* is an autobiographical reflection of one's educational and life experiences. This self-assessment is intended to evaluate how one's experiences have shaped current views, attitudes, and educational practices—and adjust future pedagogy.

these programs. This concept is analogous with Berry's (2010) reference to *engaged pedagogy* in that lived experience from students is welcomed and they are encouraged to shape assignments and reinvent planned curricula.

Freire (1993) emphasizes the significance of *educating the whole child* through multi-dimensional pedagogy. With this approach, a teacher is not just educating children's minds—but also their souls. He elaborates that this can be accomplished by way of presenting content through *interdisciplinary* means. In other words, infusing all subjects rather than utilizing only one content area to present a concept. In this way, Freire (1993) explains, children are better able to see the connections presented through a variety of subjects about the same concept. Perhaps even more important than making connections between content, Freire argues, is the accessibility of relevance to students' lives. Thus, Freire advocates that students be guided to understand their relationship to the world. For Freire, the seriousness of teaching and learning does not mean being overwhelming, complicated, and unreachable.

Finally, Freire (1993) elaborates on the *significance of language* to empower both the school and community. Although he sees the relevance of the language that is taught in schools, he emphasizes that educators embrace the language of the community. Freire emphasizes that students should want to learn the standard language taught in school, not because they feel forced to, but because they see the relevance in doing so—they see it as empowering for their lives, their families, and their community. Freire (1993) explains that children of poor communities communicate through *action* rather than through *words*. This is saddening, as there are so many rich experiences to be lost if an educator does not incorporate *play* in their classroom—for example, sensory activities, role-playing, music, or dance. *Play* invites lived experience and elicits action or hands-on initiatives (Edwards, 2010). However, if all learning is to be presented and

assessed based on how well a child regurgitates the standard language, then children who show what they know through action might be immediately silenced.

This argument is reiterated in both Apple's (2003) and Lareau's (2003) work in which they argue that students of poor and working-class families do not do as well as middle-class students because the schools are, in fact, based on middle-class knowledge. Bernal (2005) reverberates this concept highlighting that 'old and stable' markets act as a mechanism of social class reproduction. In other words, economically disadvantaged students wind up attending public schools, while middle and upper-class students go to private schools. However, Gee (1989), with his concept of *Discourse*³³, encourages educators to incorporate students' *secondary* discourses which bridge the gap between lived experience and new, formal content to be learned in schools. Gee (1989) suggests that *secondary* discourse becomes perhaps even more significant than one's primary discourse. In other words, non-verbal gestures, communication with peers, and the way one acts in certain contexts can be even more significant than what is formally learned in schools. Freire (1993) contends it is through this teaching methodology that lived experience allows one to make their own connections with planned curriculum (Wong, 2009). This approach is vital especially for disadvantaged children that might not articulate knowledge with the same proficiency and within the same arrangements as more affluent students.

³³ According to Gee (1989), *Discourse* is distinguished as two different components—*Primary* discourse and *Secondary* discourse. Primary Discourse usually refers to interactions within one's home, i.e., discourse with family members, friends, and one's immediate community. Secondary discourse generally happens in other social spaces, such as school, communicating with peers and teachers (academic discourse), or even in other social groups beyond the school.

Utilizing Schools as Battlegrounds for the Fight

Carnoy and Levin (1986) argue that although schools are very much a venue for Capitalist reproduction, they are *not* a Capitalist instrument (p. 14). Moreover, these scholars underscore that education *is* the middle ground for conflicts to be fought— “the product of conflict between dominant and nondominant groups” (Carnoy and Levin, 1986, p. 14). They assert that education *is* the space in which social movements break through to meet their needs. In this way, schools can be viewed as the social space to counter Capitalist hegemony. Indeed, schools don’t have to be the place for conformity—they can be the place of resistance (Berry, 2010). Apple (2006) suggests, that although it would take a great amount of flexibility and collaboration, the “right” and “left” can join forces in what he calls *tactical alliances*. He argues that through these alliances, critical pedagogues can counter Neoliberal initiatives that target children at school as captive audiences for consumerism.

To drive home just how much of an impact the visual arts, through the utilization of aesthetic experience, can have in countering Neoliberal economic policy, I briefly illustrate two examples. The following scenarios are how two educators incorporate such counter narratives in elementary school—utilizing that space as a battleground to fight social injustices. In Sunday’s (2018) text, she tells of a regular ed elementary teacher that utilizes rich dialogue between teacher, student, and peers as children sketch their ideas on issues of inequalities and social justice. The teacher emphasizes most of her attention on conversation, unfinished drawings, and drawings that evolve out dialogue between peers. At times, students laugh, are pensive, get upset, challenge each other, but most importantly, they compromise and work things out. Significance is placed on the collaboration, creative processes, and aesthetic experiences that result as the children find resolutions that make sense to them and are developmentally appropriate—not on the finished

drawings that are approved by the teacher. Just as Bourriaud and Schneider (2005) advise, this form of art is inspired by human relations and their social context.

Similarly, in Dunkerly-Bean et al. (2017), an elementary teacher presents different scenarios of poverty and children collaborate with one another as they draw out possible solutions to counter the problem. While some solutions proposed by children could be viewed as unrealistic or romanticized ideas of closing inequality gaps in our society—that is beside the point. The point is that teachers of kindergarten, first and second grade are having *complicated conversations* with their students; something that Pinar (2012) suggests teachers must have in order to ignite a *subjective reconstruction* which can lead us to a more Democratic education. Furthermore, Freire (2017) enlightens, “without a vision of tomorrow, hope is impossible (p. 45). Those ideas of young children that seem out of reach are the necessary trigger to inspire a revolution.

The value of changing the competitive, regurgitative, one-dimensional, and assembly line tradition of the visual arts is, in essence, saving imagination, creativity, and ultimately humanity. Apple (2014) asserts that the purpose of education should be to “dignify human life” (p.3). In other words—it’s worth fighting for! Apple (2014) argues that the types of competitive traditions mentioned in this paper silence individuality and culture in favor of seeking economic pursuits. Moreover, to successfully counter Neoliberal goals in education, not only do we need resilience and hope—we also need transformative action (Rossatto, 2005). Greene (2001) educates that without imagination, one cannot begin to envision what the world could be like. In other words, creativity is necessary to find our role in the fight against Capitalism, as well as to empower our vision and voice.

Positioning an Appropriate Definition of Aesthetic Experience

Since aesthetic experience can be a very broad term, it is important to operationalize it for this study. In the context of Art Education, a typical way to describe visual arts process regarding design elements and principles is to use the word “aesthetic” or words “the aesthetic” rather than including the “experience” part (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). The term “aesthetic” usually implies anything involving how one interprets or appreciates an artwork—most likely for its beauty or lack of it. For example, in the study of Acer & Ömeroğlu, (2008), aesthetics is regarded as the “science of beauty” and that it has to do with the “sensitivity” or “awareness” of responses to artistic qualities, such as “color, figure, form, texture, size, balance, volume, movement” (pp. 335-336). This utilization of the word aesthetic is sufficient for a broad context about elements and principals of art and one’s response to them but does not provide insight as to the goals of aesthetics *as an experience* and specifically within visual Arts Educational settings.

It is significant to note that framing aesthetics as described by Acer & Ömeroğlu, (2008) may suggest that an artwork acts as the primary facilitator of meaning and the viewer’s response is contingent on their aesthetic development (Parsons et al., 1978). This perspective is also in alignment with a more representationalism approach to the aesthetic in which emphasis in the classroom is placed on how well students understand and create artwork in relation to what they see within society (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). While this consideration does have merit as one strengthens their capacity to articulate their aesthetic awareness by developing knowledge of artistic qualities in artworks, for the context of this study, I incorporate a more *constructivist* approach. To elaborate, I suggest that aesthetic experience is about co-constructing a rapport between the artwork and viewer. Gulla (2018) confirms this thought explaining that an aesthetic experience is about having a “reciprocal relationship” with a work of art (p. 108). For

these encounters to be initiated, a certain level of engagement or commitment is required from the viewer. In other words, the artist has done the work of creating, now the viewer (or even the artist) must do their part by allowing themselves to “surrender” to it and be open to having their emotions affected (Eisner, 2002, p. 87).

The implication here, and especially in the case of this study, is that aesthetic experiences are *not* passive. Rather, they take effort, or as Greene (1980) put it, they are “achieved” (p. 316). Therefore, an aesthetic experience is attained when the individual takes the initiative to absorb himself/herself in the aesthetic object, integrating every type of stimulation and information, which may bring about happiness or other feelings (Chang 2017). One must be vulnerable to expose their life to the artwork—almost as if looking in a mirror but allowing the artwork to guide our interpretation and response. Gulla (2018) eloquently describes this process as “lending a work of art your life” (p. 108). Hence, in the context of my study, the focus is not on the artwork itself, but more so, on the *encounter* one has with an artwork, the *space in-between* the viewer and the artwork (i.e., as previously noted, potential third space), and the lived experience that is brought to it. As Greene (2001) elaborates, this sort of experience happens “in a space between oneself and the stage or the wall or the text” (p. 128). By interpreting aesthetic experience in this light, we can better appreciate the value of them within K-12 educational contexts as an alternative way to view goals for artmaking. Moreover, creating art, viewing, and discussing it becomes a catalyst to open space for reflexivity and imagination.

More specifically, I employ Medina’s (2012) definition of aesthetic experience: “a moment of perception when our senses are functioning at their peak, because we are fully aware and fully awakened by the artwork in front of us” (p. 44). Robinson (1982; 2001) likewise contends that aesthetic experience is a process that encourages all the senses to operate at their peak and that this

process is critical to nurture embodied experience toward creative endeavors. Correspondingly, Stinson (1985) explains that the encounter with artworks acts as a means for “appreciating, connecting, [and] self-reflecting in critical awareness and moral agency” (p. 5). Like Parsons’ five levels of aesthetic experience, Stinson (1985) also has stages of aesthetic experience. Stinson (1985) goes on to illustrate the depth of an aesthetic experience by categorizing it in three phases: (1) An experience limited to an appreciation of a particular beauty of the artwork; (2) A transcendental moment in which one discovers connectivity between themselves, their world, and their role in it; and (3) The work of art becomes a vehicle for appreciating other’s suffering, connecting it with one’s own, and motivates one with the compassion to enact change.

In Stinson’s (1985) levels, the implication goes well beyond the artwork and even the aesthetic development of the viewer—the emphasis is on reflexivity and a commitment to one’s community. In addition, Stinson’s (1985) concentration is only on three stages which are very explicit, not just about the encounter one has with an artwork, but also how each type of encounter influences the viewer’s reflection. The levels also imply that the goal in advancing through each one strengthens the connectivity, not just between the artwork and viewer, but also between the individual and their consciousness. Just as Güvenç & Toprak (2022) assert, this process goes “beyond the work of art to establish connections with [their] own life experiences” (p. 22). This development suggests that the artwork kindles a reflection of one’s relationship between self, community, and role within it. The development is not only three-dimensional, but it is also very much introspective, and even spiritual in that the experience transcends from an external encounter to an internal one. Lim (2004) and Kaelin (1989) also interpret aesthetic experience as a heightened sensory awareness which provokes deeper pleasure from routine experience, encourages spiritual transformation and transcendence, and happens before an aesthetic critique or judgement is made.

It is worth mentioning that the process of an aesthetic experience described by Stinson (1985) is very much in line with Freire et al. (1987) concept of *reading the world*, or the idea that one must come to an understanding of how to interact with their world so that they can relate to it and visualize their potential to change it. This connection is important because, again here, one's ability to *read their world* and developing one's repertoire of agencies to change it is central to my investigation of understanding aesthetic experience in such ways.

Medina's (2012) definition, in connection with Robinson's (1982; 2001) and Stinson's (1985) definitions, speaks to the significance of empowering the *body* as the means for attaining, retaining, and retrieving knowledge—or in other words—taking into consideration the capacity of one's body authority when viewing or making art. Medina's (2012) *Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy* framework is about the co-construction between the teacher and her/his students as they intentionally enter imaginary worlds in which they: (1) attempt to step inside the shoes of others, (2) envision what it's like to experience the world through their eyes while reflecting on how our actions affect others, and (3) utilize the openness of this experience to inform our next course of action through compassion. Further, this process is facilitated through the experience, or aesthetic experience, as they view or create works of art. As mentioned previously, the purpose of art within this context is not to admire the final product, but to use art as a catalyst to spark conversation, reflection, and action toward positive change in society. To put it another way, traditional ways of viewing and making art are challenged with this pedagogy, as the space in-between the body and an artwork becomes even more substantial than the artwork itself. Central to Medina's (2012) *Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy* framework is the willingness to view the *space* in-between the body and a work of art, not only as the supporting pillars of art curriculum, but also *the* place in which teaching and learning initiates in art classrooms.

Not only is the way we view art challenged within Medina's (2012) lens, but also the way aesthetic experience is to be interpreted in visual arts classrooms. This process becomes a matter of what can be done with an aesthetic experience toward the benefit of society rather than what the experience can merely do for one's *personal* aesthetic development. Artists' intentions and teachers' interpretations are not deposited in the minds of students. On the other hand, students are invited to enter this new space and employ their agency to develop their own interpretations. These considerations speak to my interest in gaining deeper understandings of how high school visual arts teachers not only define aesthetic experiences, but also how they interpret their role and use of classroom space toward facilitating them.

Included within this reflection is exploring the relationship that teachers seek to develop to support their specific facilitation of aesthetic experiences, as well as what co-construction looks like to nurture their purposes. For example, is it a teachers' intention to facilitate aesthetic experiences toward creating beautiful artworks; to develop an awareness of their existence; to discuss their potential; to win at competitions; to develop a personal aesthetic; to develop an aesthetic literacy for classroom purposes; to employ them in portfolios and class critiques; to nurture a life-long appreciation for the aesthetic; or utilize them toward social change? These contemplations motivate me to utilize Medina's (2012) framework to address the two main research questions, in concise form, which are: How do high school visual arts teachers define aesthetic experience? Also, how might aesthetic experiences be facilitated in their classrooms and toward what purpose(s)? Medina's (2012) framework, in conjunction with Stinson's (1985) three levels of aesthetic experience support my investigation on how teachers' personal values and educational experiences influence their approach and goals in facilitating aesthetic experiences in their classrooms.

Four Aesthetic Approaches Framework

To remain open to novel ways in which aesthetic experience can be interpreted by high school visual arts teachers, I also employed Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's (2020) four aesthetic approaches as part of my theoretical framework (See Figure 4. below). Using Medina's (2012) definition of aesthetic experience, or Stinson's (1985) three levels might have been limiting participants' lived experiences if I *only* focused on how artworks can become a catalyst for change. Though I was hopeful to discover and explore purposeful and collective aesthetic experiences toward a critical consciousness and social transformation, this proved not to be teachers' core mission. As will be discussed in detail, teachers facilitated aesthetic experience in other ways besides intentional reflection and what art experiences might motivate them to do toward a better society. I did not want this study to be limited to merely phenomenological or theoretical groundworks that completely miss the mark toward *practical* approaches for classroom settings. My experience as a K-12 visual arts teacher motivated me to take into consideration that while teachers might approach their classrooms with the best intentions for aesthetic experience, there are several challenges to contend with. For example, content must be taught within certain courses in alignment with State standards; teachers are likely to have several students in advanced art classes that never had art before; teachers may struggle to get their students engaged in collective efforts and art activities that do not encompass replication of popular art; some students may desire the traditional methods of practicing art technique to be competitive; and teachers may value and prefer approaches based on their specific areas of expertise. Therefore, the four aesthetic approaches were intended to acknowledge the variety of ways that teachers facilitate aesthetic experience within realistic classroom boundaries or their preferred methods.

Four Aesthetic Approaches

(Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020)

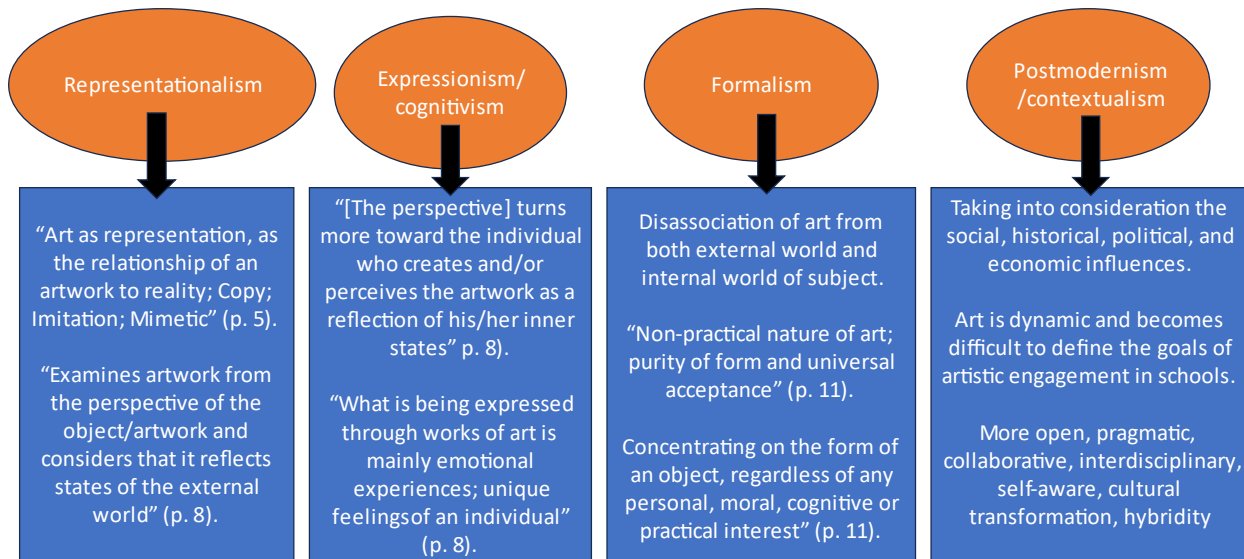


Figure 4: The Four Aesthetic Approaches Framework Adapted from Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020)

In Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's (2020) study, they acknowledge four different ways in which the aesthetic might be approached in the classroom, and they design their interventions based on these. The approaches are: (1) Representationalism, (2) Expressionism/Cognitivism, (3) Formalism, and (4) Postmodernism/Contextualism. Integrating these theories within my study are intended to support the process of analyzing the data while providing additional spaces to recognize and categorize a variety of approaches in engaging aesthetic experience. These four approaches do not necessarily encompass the definition of aesthetic experience, nor do they underscore a strategic plan to facilitate it. The concentration in Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's (2020) study revolves around how these theories inform both teachers' and students' approaches to *art*—not necessarily how aesthetic experiences are facilitated. In addition, these scholars explore various activities that embrace *the aesthetic* as a set of principles to describe artwork, artists' intentions, or art movements. They *do* highlight different

aesthetic approaches and the theory that drives them. On the other hand, they *do not* underscore aesthetic experience as a *pedagogy* as I did in my study.

The scope of my study investigates the interpretations of aesthetic experience, the intentional planning of it, and its purposes—all these considerations understood through the perspective of visual arts teachers. Even though the exploration of aesthetic experience itself, as a phenomenon to facilitate in the classroom, is not at the core of Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's (2020) study, I still view the integration of these theories as relevant to my analysis. This is because my pilot data revealed that participants *do* use some of these approaches to facilitate aesthetic experiences. Thus, it is reasonable to broaden the scope of my theoretical framework to account for a variety of epistemological views of educational practice and perceptions of aesthetic experience so that the widest possibilities may be embraced (See Figure 5. for a visual on my adaptation on how Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's (2020) *Four Aesthetic Approaches* were integrated within my theoretical framework). I previously introduced and briefly defined these four aesthetic approaches in chapter two. However, they are briefly reviewed once more here.

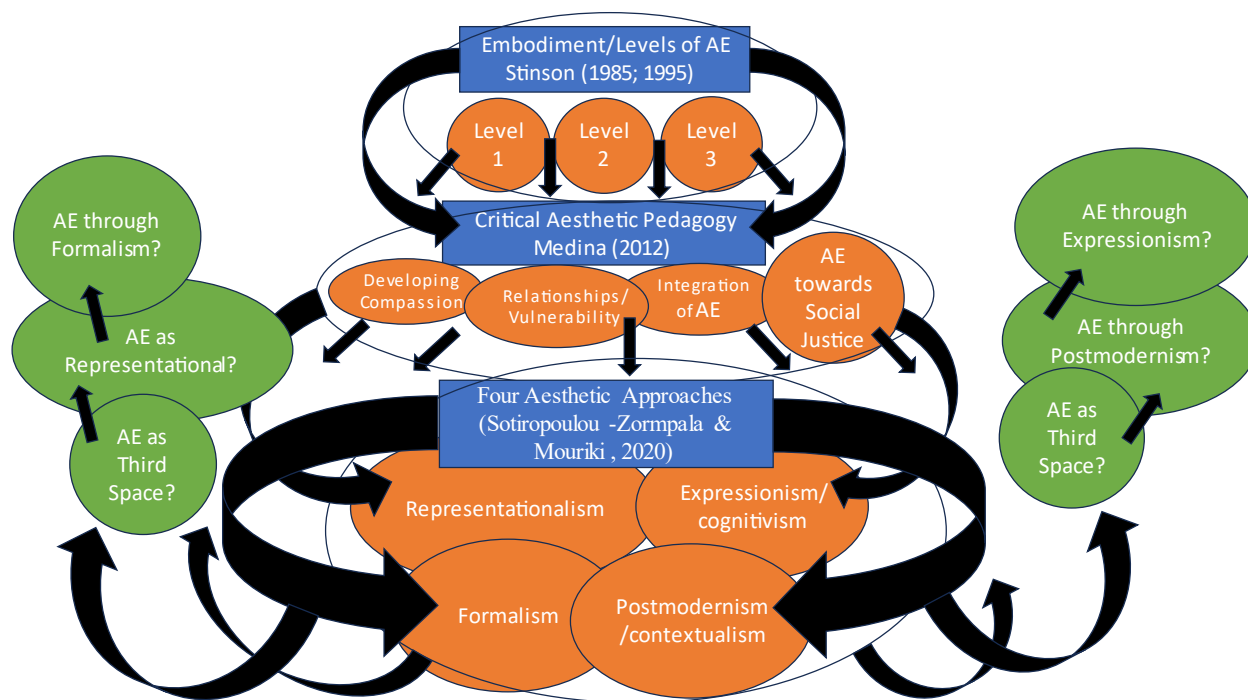


Figure 5: My Full Theoretical Model

Representationalism

Representationalism emphasizes how students make connections between art and what it represents. Teachers may seek to assess the aesthetic based on how realistic students' artwork is, as well as the skills necessary to achieve that realism (Charlton, 2016; Fleming, 2012).

Expressionism/Cognitivism

Expressionism/cognitivism has to do with understanding how an artwork represents the unique feelings and states of an individual (Barrett, 2017). Hence, the aesthetic in this approach is about students developing the ability to express their feelings and emotions through their artwork, as well as transform one's ways of perceiving (Greene, 2001; Mouriki-Zervou, 2011).

Formalism

The formalist approach disregards the personal, moral, cognitive, or practical reflection of an art object (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's, 2020). Instead, the aesthetic is assessed on the form of the artwork as described by art elements and principles (Bell, 1913; 1958).

Postmodernism/Contextualism

Postmodernism/Contextualism acknowledges that art is part of culture and embodies social, historical, and political influences (Duncum, 2000; Freedman, 2000). Consequently, the aesthetic, in this case, acknowledges students' identities, social awareness, and lived experiences. Viewing artwork and creating it would be aimed toward facilitating a self-understanding, a reinterpretation of art purposes, and a transformative approach to enhancing the quality of life (Anderson, 2003; Sandell, 2009).

Integrating the work of Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020) with the frameworks of Stinson (1985;1995), Medina (2012) and my own theorizing, yields my full theoretical model that includes the reduced lenses that guides my analyses (See Figure 5. once more).

Chapter 4

A Phenomenological Study of Aesthetic Experience

Aim of the Investigation

The aim of this phenomenological qualitative study was to investigate aesthetic experience within the context of high school art classrooms, and how it is defined and enacted (or not) by high school visual arts teachers. The main purpose was to identify the essence of teachers' lived experience, as it pertains to aesthetic experience. This includes an inquiry of experiences that may have led to the shaping of their understandings, such as their K-12 Arts experiences, teacher education, or through everyday life encounters. In addition, this inquiry is interested in the influences that may hinder teachers from facilitating aesthetic experience. At the heart of this investigation was to gain knowledge as to how teachers come to view the learning environment they create and its role in facilitating aesthetic experience. Moreover, there is deep interest in the nuances of the teacher-student relationship, and how that partnership, in connection with their understanding of aesthetic experience, shapes their approach to it.

This exploration builds upon a *pragmatic* and *constructivist* foundation which was aimed at purposefulness, as well as understanding the co-construction of knowledge between teacher and student and cognitive learning processes that are embedded, distributed, and extended (Dewey, 1934; diSessa, 2022; Nathan & Sawyer, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978). Yet, it was also open to the possibility that aesthetic experience may not be intentionally facilitated by the teacher; that aesthetic experience might not be described as Greene (1986; 1995; 2001), Stinson (1985), and Medina (2012) do—which is toward social justice; or that aesthetic experience might be presented in some novel way. To identify such perceptions and explore highlights and beliefs of the lived

experience of teachers when engaging with aesthetic experience, this study included a semi-structured interview protocol and a structured debriefing protocol process. The study aimed to answer the following research questions.

1. What is aesthetic experience according to high school visual arts teachers?
 - How do they recognize it?
 - How do they facilitate their students in recognizing it?
 - How do they plan for and facilitate it?
2. How do teachers construct meanings with their students about aesthetic experiences?
 - What goal(s) do teachers place on aesthetic experiences?
 - What role do teachers play in the dialogue initiated by aesthetic experience?
 - Is aesthetic experience recognized in a novel way that differs from the literature?

This chapter includes the discussion of the chosen research methodology and design, the selection process of participants, and the materials and instruments that were used in the study. Further data collection procedures, limitations and assumptions, and ethical assurance will be presented, including the efforts made to bracket researcher bias.

Method of Inquiry

The method of inquiry for this study was through a qualitative, phenomenological research approach. A Qualitative method offered the best means for exploring and understanding phenomenon—in this case, aesthetic experience—by way of an “inductive style” focusing on “individual meaning” (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). Creswell (2014) elaborates that this process involves

“emerging questions and procedures, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (p.4). Therefore, it is the researcher who will arrive at understandings and possible theory based on the interpretations of participants views about the phenomenon. This approach offers a differing perspective than a quantitative design, such as a survey, questionnaire, or experiment. Qualitative methods lend themselves more toward open-ended questions intended to encourage participants to share their views (Creswell, 2014). While a quantitative approach might provide information as to the relationship between variables or an opportunity to test a theory, the goal of this study was to fill the knowledge gap on aesthetic experience at the high school level emerging through participant’s lived experiences.

Along with utilizing a qualitative, phenomenological approach, it is significant to note that a *Constructivist* worldview was also integrated throughout this study. This worldview acknowledges that people construct their reality through social interaction and that subjective meanings are negotiated socially, culturally, and historically (Berger & Luekmann, 1991; Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998; Guba, 1978; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lincoln et al., 2011; Mertens 2010). Moreover, the context of a particular group needs to be taken into consideration when exploring the divergence in perspectives of the same phenomenon. As Creswell (2014) goes on to elaborate that “meanings are “not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others and through cultural and historical norms that operate in individuals’ lives” (p. 8). Moreover, it is through this social constructivist lens, that I acknowledge how individuals place value and meanings upon objects and processes, while at the same time, the various experiences with objects and processes within certain contexts are likely to shape individuals as well (Creswell, 2014).

While taking the social constructivist lens into consideration, it is vital to acknowledge that a researcher's personal experiences with a phenomenon can also shape the interpretation of findings that emerge from the study. Creswell (2014) recognizes that a researcher's interpretations of how others come to understand the world is part of the phenomenological research process. However, this scholar also recommends that extra care be taken to "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning," from participants views rather than, "starting with a theory" as in quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Given that I was once a visual arts teacher for 20 years at the same school district as my participants, it was more imperative that I put in place additional measures toward validity. While I would not consider this study to be "backyard research" (Glense & Peshkin, 1992), which is studying within one's immediate work setting, I acknowledged the possibility that some participants might know of me as I only left the setting as a fulltime art teacher a few years ago.

As another measure to promote research validity within this study, I employed a relatively recent phenomenological qualitative approach intended to promote researcher reflexivity within complex contexts such as this. This study of aesthetic experience is complex not only because of my experience with this phenomenon in the context I investigated, but also because of the nature of my research questions—as they took on both a *descriptive* and *interpretive* inquiry. As indicated by Lopez & Willis (2004), it is common practice to commit to only *one* philosophical method. However, through examining the philosophical basis of both approaches, I believed that a fusion of both would strengthen my purpose and the structure of this study. This attempt at blending both approaches greatly benefited from *Hybrid Phenomenological Methodology* (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022) (See Figure 6.). Before I elaborate further on this particular methodology, it is

significant to link it with the philosophical underpinnings that guide the process (Stubblefield & Murray, 2002).

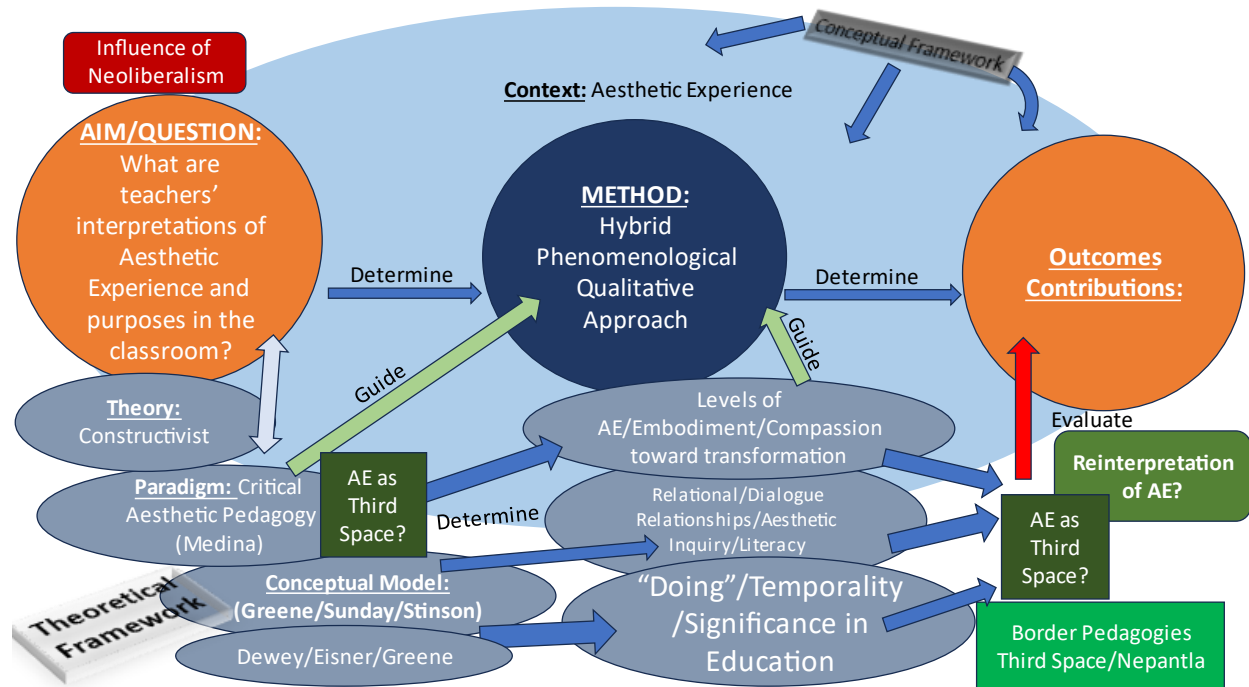


Figure 6: Hybrid Phenomenology Integration within the Study

Husserl: The Descriptive Method

The motivation behind Husserl, an Austrian-German philosopher who established the school of phenomenology, was to bring validity to the study of human consciousness as a legitimate component of scientific research. This is because Husserl (1970) believed that individuals' actions within everyday living are shaped by how they perceive reality. Hence, to gain understandings about why a specific group of people respond to phenomena the way they do, it is beneficial to grasp “essential components of the lived experiences” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 727).

A major element of Husserl's line of thought is that to successfully grasp the critical nuances of the lived experiences of participants, the researcher must actively suspend their consciousness, to include expert knowledge, preconceptions, and personal bias (Natanson, 1973) through the concept of *bracketing* (Drew, 1999; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Husserl (1970) viewed this process as *transcendental subjectivity* in which bias and preconceptions become deactivated and a transcendence of understandings from participant to researcher happens with as little interference from the researcher as possible. In other words, the goal of bracketing is to keep description as pure as it can be from the understanding of the participant.

A major assumption of Husserlian phenomenology, that will be elaborated on later in connection with my study, is his idea “that there are features to any lived experience that are common to all persons who have the experience” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 728). This means that obtaining an understanding of the essence of an experience might not arrive through observation. Rather, we may come to understand it universally, intuitively, as a universal essence, or as an *eidetic* structure (Natanson, 1973). This supposition of phenomenology is valuable in that it offers “commonalities in the experience of participants” or a “generalized description” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 728)—thus providing a sense of generalizability to my study.

Although it is currently not a general purpose of qualitative research to seek generalizability to the extent it is done with quantitative methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), it was the intention of Husserl (1970) to maintain scientific rigor within the study of human consciousness. Husserl (1970) accomplished this by positioning reality as something objective and independent from social or historical contexts. While I planned on understanding my participants' lived experience as it is influenced by their environment, also of interest was how teachers use their autonomy to shape those same environments. Husserl (1970) viewed this independence as

radical autonomy, in which he saw individuals as free agents who are responsible for manipulating their own settings.

Heidegger: The Interpretive Method

Heidegger (1962) built upon and modified the work of Husserl by providing a more dynamic understanding of phenomenology and the way meaning is elicited from lived experience through the method of *hermeneutics*. Hermeneutics is an approach to infer hidden meanings in human experience and relations. This philosophical assumption recognizes that humans do not necessarily think critically about their day-to-day actions and may be completely oblivious to embedded meanings. In other words, individuals may not be consciously aware of how they became influenced to act in ways they do. However, a researcher, using hermeneutic inquiry, might be able to suggest how an individual's reality may have been shaped through their *lifeworld*, or *being-in-the-world*—an aspect Heidegger argues is unavoidable. According to Lopez & Willis (2004), viewing a person as inevitably being shaped by their environment changes the approach to interview questions. Rather than to gain “common concepts integral to the experience” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 729), as would happen with descriptive phenomenology, the interpretive approach would focus on what the narratives of participants imply. Therefore, the questions would encourage participants to describe a particular process involved in relation to the phenomenon. For example, “What is the process involved in planning for art activities to facilitate aesthetic experience?” Then, particular attention would be paid as to the nuances within interactions between self and others.

A major component that separates the interpretive from the descriptive approach is the concept of *situated freedom* (Heidegger, 1962). While the descriptive school of thought

emphasizes *radical autonomy* (Husserl, 1970) in which individuals have the freedom to make choices, the interpretive philosophy believes that those choices are bounded by specific circumstances. Therefore, this line of thought makes a considerable difference in how researchers look for meaning. While the descriptive tradition is focused on finding uncontaminated, descriptive categories of experience, interpretive inquiry analyzes the historical, social, and political forces within participants' narratives to understand how their described meanings influence their decisions (Smith, 1987).

It is significant to note that the *bracketing* method, emphasized in the descriptive approach, is somewhat unsuitable for interpretive inquiry and hermeneutic scholars (Geanellos, 2000; Lopez & Willis, 2004). This is because, according to Heidegger (1962), a researcher's area of expertise and presuppositions are considered extremely valuable to the proposed study. Going even further, Lopez & Willis (2004) explain that theoretical and conceptual frameworks of a study should not be intended as a "component of inquiry" as with the traditional hypothesis-to-be-tested approach (p. 730). Rather, theory is to be utilized in a more informal way to make sound decisions on directions to take within the research—in particular, making sure the theory itself is not biased. These scholars go on to elaborate that while researchers do need to utilize frameworks to "interpret findings" and as a "frame of reference" for their study, they can be used to inform decisions about "sample, subjects, and research questions" (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 730). It is within this interpretive understanding that I employed my prior teaching knowledge within this context, as well as emerging understandings of the research process to gauge the direction of the study toward findings that were most beneficial for practicing visual arts teachers.

One last component of interpretive phenomenology that I integrated within my study was Heidegger's (1962) concept of co-constitutionality in which there is an intentional blending of

meanings elicited by both participant and researcher. Gadamer (1976) described this intersubjectivity as *fusions of horizons*. This concept is especially significant for me because I am open to new interpretations of aesthetic experience elicited by my participants. The idea of a fusion between my personal background and my participants' horizon of experiences and meanings as they remain within the field in question is truly refreshing. As Lopez & Willis (2004) highlight, I do acknowledge that another individual engaged in this study could interpret my participants' narratives in a completely different light. Yet, I did aim to remain reasonable and credible toward my framework and accurately represent my participants' realities. Now that I have elaborated on both the descriptive and interpretive schools of thought, I will briefly share how I connected both descriptive and interpretive approaches to my research questions. Afterward, I will go into detail as to how Alhazmi & Kauffmann (2022) describe their hybrid method of integrating both approaches.

Connecting Both Approaches to My Research Questions

Some of my research questions, according to Lopez & Willis (2004), might necessitate a descriptive inquiry. In other words, when I asked participants, "How do you define aesthetic experience, and how do you recognize the experience within your classroom, as well as beyond it?" I am posing this question through a philosophical assumption that there are certain features of lived experience that pertain to this phenomenon that might be like everyone's experience with it (Husserl, 1970). To put this into the perspective from a researcher's *objective* point of view, the commonalities of the experience with the phenomenon are identified by way of a generalized description of the essence that may be void of history and context (Allen, 1995; Lopez & Willis, 2004). This is an attribute of a descriptive tradition in which explanation of lived experience must

remain *objective* and researcher's opinions *bracketed* to maintain scientific rigor (Husserl, 1970; LeVasseur, 2003).

On the other hand, I also asked questions that warranted a more interpretive approach. In other words, not only did I consider a generalized description of participants' experience with aesthetic experience, but I also took the *context* into consideration. This means that I explored how participants might unconsciously influence the learning environment and how it might also influence them. For example, one of my research questions was "What goals do teachers place on aesthetic experiences that happen in the classroom?" To get at the essence of this, I asked teachers in the interviews to describe what planning for a lesson might look like, or to describe what a conversation with students about their creative process might sound like. In this way, I was looking for meanings embedded in their everyday practice (Lopez & Willis, 2004) that relate to their interpretations of aesthetic experience.

According to Lopez & Willis (2004), the interpretive aspect of phenomenology necessitates a *hermeneutic* approach to bring out what may be hidden in everyday human experience that might not even be apparent to participants (Solomon, 1987; Spiegelberg, 1976; Thompson, 1990). I did use a hermeneutic approach. Again, since many of my questions attempted to elicit a description of the ways in which participants plan lessons, communicate with their students, or describe their teacher education experience, my aim was on how possible historical, social, and political forces might shape experiences (Smith, 1987). This is where I implemented a philosophical assumption by Heidegger (1962) in which my background and knowledge as a visual arts teacher in a high school context are seen as valuable guides to inquiry. Interestingly, according to Heidegger (1962), it is likely that my previous teaching experiences in high school have led me to consider this topic and explore related literature to find this void in research. This was, in fact, the case.

Hybrid Phenomenological Methodology

As mentioned previously, it is because of this motivation to fuse together both the commonalities of aesthetic experience (descriptive), as well as the embedded meanings that shape individuals' actions within the classroom (interpretive) that the construct of this research study is that of a *hybrid* phenomenological qualitative approach. The philosophical underpinnings that drive both schools of thought have already been discussed. Now, I build on that foundation by elaborating on each phenomenology through the lens of Alhazmi & Kaufmann's (2022) hybrid theory. Descriptive phenomenology, according to Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022), involves relating participants' experience with the phenomenon in question. In addition, this process involves trying to grasp the essence of the experience as described by participants rather than based on researcher's opinions about participants or the phenomenon (Lopez and Willis; 2004 Moustakas, 1994). On the other hand, Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022) also elaborate that the aim of the researcher is to describe the experience "phenomenologically." In other words, the research design should allow for a subjective approach, one in which the researcher can approach their description in an exploratory way and their subjective nature in understanding can be acknowledged with value. Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022) assert that interpretation is "inevitable" in description and understanding (p. 5), especially when viewing this process through sociocultural theoretical lens (Giorgi, 2010; Mead, 1967; Vygotsky, 1978). And, yet, researchers should also engage a mode of bracketing, as well as a reduction process so that descriptions of lived experience is textured (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Hence, this process lends a researcher license, sort of speak, to describe lived experience with interpretation—but still with a keen awareness to a suspension of prejudgment to describe phenomenon with fresh eyes. This process could be interpreted as equivalent to the open and even selective coding during data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interpretive Phenomenology, on the other hand, has to do with the process of extracting meanings and themes from lived experience with a more *hermeneutical* approach. This means that interpretation could be made through both verbal and non-verbal means, such as with the use of semiotics. Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022) prefer to call this interpretive approach, “imaginative variation mode” (p. 7). For these scholars, this means that thematic and structural description of experience can be achieved through a reduction process called, “phenomenological reduction” (p. 7). During this reduction method the researcher re-describes the described experience to uncover the texture and structure of experience. In a sense, this process has two dimensions. On the one hand, the researcher is describing texture of the description from the perspective of the participant—in other words, what the experience is like for them. On the other hand, the researcher is also describing the perspective from his/her vantage point. The structure of experience is achieved when emergent themes are recognized. This might be interpreted as part of the data analysis process when codes emerge into patterns and are then categorized into themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022) go on to explain that the shift from descriptive to interpretive mode marks the transition when the researcher begins taking into consideration how the experience with the phenomenon affects the cultural identity of participants (Gadamer, 2000; Gadamer and Linge, 2008; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022) suggest that within this process is the need to engage with the “texture” of each participant’s experience and reflect on how those meanings relate to the context as a whole.

Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022) outline this hybrid approach to assist researchers in navigating through complex experiences encountered by individuals in novel social educational contexts—in this case, recognizing aesthetic experiences in the context of high school visual arts programs. In addition, this method promotes a responsive engagement in research, one which may

result in improvising activities. This is a step away from Positivist and Postpositivist procedures, such as the traditional scientific method, experimentation, or beginning research with a theory (Phillips & Burbules, 2000). With a hybrid phenomenological approach, the research process is more along the lines of “a journey to take,” which allows the flexibility and openness necessary “to track empathy and recognition of both the researcher’s and participant’s subjectivity in relation to the phenomenon being explored” (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022, p. 3).

Taking into consideration the context of this study as it explored teachers’ interpretations of the phenomenon of aesthetic experience, it is significant to note that a second phenomenon also came into question—which was the *individual’s experience*. According to Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022), an individual’s experience is a phenomenon on its own, which is fused with multidimensional aspects shaped by the psychological, cultural, and social. Given that this study was an exploration of multiple phenomena, the use of a hybrid approach, as Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022) go on to elaborate, supported the researcher to get at the essence of the participant’s experience with a phenomenon, rather than to provide a personal superficial description. These scholars go on to describe the potential of this process, highlighting that the focus is on the “what” and “how” individuals encounter the phenomenon (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022, p. 3). They even go as far as to say that this hybrid, exploratory approach “allows the researchers to *taste* and experience social phenomena and provides a journey of discovery that consists of adventure and surprise” (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022, p. 3; Blumer, 1986; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Stebbins, 2001; Willig, 2008). Going back to the context of this study, the complexity in attempting to grasp the essence of multiple phenomena warranted the utilization of this hybrid approach, especially because the aim was to remain open to realizing unexpected phenomenon or extensions of it.

The utilization of the hybrid approach in this study served two purposes: (1) it created the openness to discover something new about aesthetic experience—which has already been described, and (2) it promoted researcher reflexivity. Figure 7. highlights the process of the hybrid phenomenological qualitative method utilized in this study, as adapted from Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022). This methodological model (see Figure 7.) illustrates the complexity involved in bracketing bias through a *descriptive* lens and then incorporating an *imaginative variation* through the process of a structured reduction. It was used to aid in bracketing, or temporarily suspending, any prejudgments or assumptions about aesthetic experience in order to recognize potential new aspects (Drew, 1999; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Following the model in a top-down progression, the researcher: (1) formed descriptive research questions while bracketing; (2) engaged previous works about aesthetic experience; (3) conducted descriptive interviews in which participants shared and described their lived experiences; (4) re-described and got to the essence of the experience through interpretive and textural phenomenological reduction (yet, avoided selective or discriminating choices); (5) engaged an imaginative variation while extracting themes and essential meanings in relation to the whole context; and (6) presented findings while honoring the participant-researcher relationship in the mediational process involved in reflecting on past experience.

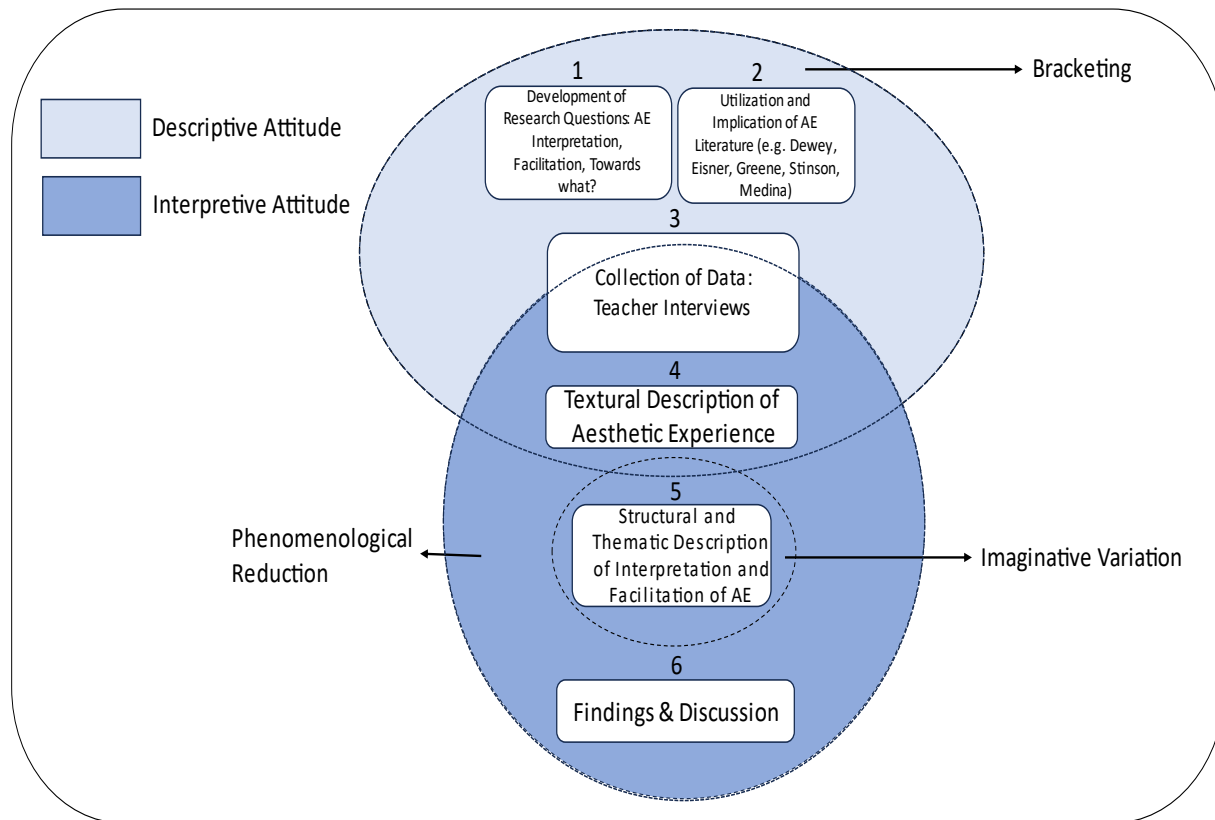


Figure 7: Alhazmi & Kaufmann's (2022) Hybrid Phenomenological Model Adapted to this Study

Bracketing

As seen in the provided methodological model, there was a concerted effort to address researcher reflexivity by balancing both *descriptive* and *interpretive* phenomenology in this study. Since research was conducted within the same community in which the researcher previously taught as an art teacher, it became vital that past lived experience about aesthetic experience was bracketed to engage a set of fresh eyes (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; LeVasseur, 2003; Moustakas, 1994; Salsberry, 1989). This process encouraged the researcher to be open to other aspects of the phenomenon that have yet to be recognized. Temporarily suspending assumptions aided the researcher to refrain from limiting the perceptions of the phenomenon from the point of view of participants. However, Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022) also maintain that it is impossible to be

completely free of presuppositions about the phenomenon. For this reason, several strategies were used to bracket research activities as recommended by Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022). These include creating descriptive research questions that are absent of presuppositions; engaging previous works about the phenomenon of aesthetic experience; conducting descriptive interviews about participants' lived experience with the phenomenon; and redescribing the phenomenon in such a way as to reframe it based on the data rather than being discriminatory to maintain previous notions.

Participants

Participant Recruitment

Participants were high school visual arts teachers who have taught advanced-level visual arts class(s) for at least three years within this context. A total of five participants were carefully chosen for this study. These participants were selected through *purposeful* sampling methods, such as snowball, or referral sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process consisted of consultation via email in which basic information about the project was shared. Participants who were interested and met the criteria were sent another e-mail with a recruitment letter (See Appendix A). Those interested in participating in the project that met the inclusion criteria were given more detailed information about the project via Zoom conferencing and an informed consent form (See Appendix B) before proceeding with the interviews.

Participant Context

This study involved interviewing high school visual arts teachers, who teach advanced-level visual arts content within Art II, Art III, as well as Advanced Placement (AP), International

Baccalaureate (IB), and/or Dual Credit classes. Educators that teach these classes were chosen because they are more likely to incorporate critiques and portfolio reviews in their classes. These are spaces that are of particular interest in understanding high school teachers' interpretations of aesthetic experiences and how they are facilitated. The participants are all employed at a large, public school district on the US-Mexico border in the Western region of Texas. The visual arts program within this district is known locally as a large, robust, and diverse program consisting of 90 visual arts teachers that span all grade levels. Participants that teach at this district serve 84.5% bilingual, Hispanic/Latinx students. In addition, 48.3% of students from this district come from low-income households (Texas Tribune, 2023; U.S. News Education, 2023).

Data Collection Method

I conducted a pilot study in the fall of 2022. Like this study, it explored how teachers define aesthetic experience, how they approach the aesthetic personally, and how they facilitate students' aesthetic experiences in the classroom. However, the overarching theme of my pilot study was to explore whether (or not) teachers facilitated aesthetic experiences toward social justice initiatives and why. Initial findings from the pilot study revealed that teachers' art training is a major factor that influences their perspectives on what constitutes aesthetic experiences and how they can be fostered in the classroom. Since the pilot study took place, the interview protocol was refined to open the exploration of aesthetic experience, not necessarily as a facilitator of social justice, but more so as to how the relationship between teacher and student, in connection to teachers' interpretation of aesthetic experience, shapes its utilization in the classroom. Part of this current research was still intended to consider the facilitation of aesthetic experience *toward what?* However, the interview protocol was further developed to put greater emphasis on how teachers recognize an aesthetic experience, how they plan for it, how they talk about it with students, and

how they might consider it an embodied experience. Hence, these new considerations assisted, not only in understanding the “toward what,” but also the relationships and learning processes involved.

Interview Instrument

A phenomenological research design provides an understanding of the themes and patterns described by the study’s participants (Moustakas, 1994). As such, the focus of this phenomenological research study was to understand the lived experiences of teachers as it pertains to their encounters with aesthetic experience. This investigation focused not only on teachers’ personal encounters with aesthetic experience, but also how those experiences inform their approach in the classroom and relationship with their students toward facilitating similar experiences. The essence of these experiences might not be the sort that can be observed. However, a respectful dialogue seemed more appropriate to understand and appreciate the mediational process involved in reflecting upon past experiences (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, the participants in the study were asked open-ended interview questions, such that their specific experiences could be identified. Moustakas (1994) stated, “The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience” (p. 13).

Data Collection Protocol

This study utilized phenomenological, semi-structured individual interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) through online, Zoom conferencing video. A total of three, one-on-one, 60 to 90-minute interviews were conducted with each art teacher focusing on their life history and lived

experience as it pertained to their aesthetic experiences (Seidman, 2019). These interviews sought to elicit participants' perspectives on aesthetic experience in the context of their advanced level, high school visual arts classes. Emphasis was placed on how teachers viewed their relationships with their students and how that relationship influenced interpretation, recognition, and facilitation of aesthetic experience.

The data collection included the first interview, which concentrated on teachers' interpretations of aesthetic experience, as well as art training and influences; the second interview incorporated Stinson's (1985) three levels of aesthetic experience (without making the levels known to the teachers). [Again, the three levels are: (1) An experience limited to an appreciation of a particular beauty of the artwork; (2) A transcendental moment in which one discovers connectivity between themselves, their world, and their role in it; and (3) The work of art becomes a vehicle for appreciating other's suffering, connecting it with one's own, and motivates one with the compassion to enact change.] In addition, I integrated questions related to Medina's (2012) concept of aesthetic experience as embodied and as a facilitator toward empathy. Finally, the third interview consisted of a preliminary member check in the form of an agree or disagree conversation (See Appendix C for the full interview protocol).

Two additional member checks were conducted with participants (individually) at later dates—one for the *descriptive* approach in data analysis, and another for the *interpretive* approach. During the interviews, participants began to break down their interpretation of aesthetic experience in stages. Realizing that I could later compare their levels with those of Stinson (1985), I encouraged participants to develop and finalize them. I would later type these levels and share them with each participant as the first “descriptive” member check. Then, once I completed the first draft of my “interpretive” findings, I shared an excerpt with each highlighting their specific

contribution. This would serve as a second member check. For both member checks, I considered participants' feedback, made edits, and reinstated the passages within my findings and discussion sections.

These interviews took place according to participant's availability and preferred setting as specified in the informed consent form. Participants were encouraged to take part in all three, one-to-one interviews, as well as both member checks—and they did. None of the participants were vulnerable to coercion or undue influence (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In total, each of the five participants invested between 240-360 minutes or 4-6 hours of their time in this study.

Data Management, Privacy, and Confidentiality

Pseudonyms were utilized for all contexts within the study except for the informed consent forms which were stored separately and securely. Participants' privacy was maintained by negotiating the appropriate time and place of interviews with each participant. This process ensured that the interviews were conducted in a way the participants felt that their privacy was being preserved and they were comfortable during the interview. Participants were informed that they did not have to answer a particular question(s). At any time, they could have chosen not to be audio recorded. Participants were informed that they could discontinue participation in the study at any time by contacting the researcher via phone, e-mail, or in person. As recommended by Merriam & Tisdell (2016), participants were asked not to share any information outside our interviews. This approach assisted in making participants feel comfortable within the Zoom conference setting and that their confidentiality was sustained even after the interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Siedman 2019).

The data includes both audio and video recordings acquired from Zoom conferencing. To maintain confidentiality of participants' information, all data collected, including informed consent forms, audio from transcriptions of interviews, as well as video recordings (via Zoom) were only accessible to the researcher. The researcher transcribed the interviews and only the researcher had access to these transcriptions. No actual names were used on any data collected. Pseudonyms for participants, as well as related institution(s) were used on all data. In addition, any data stored on the researcher's computer was password protected and any data or files that were printed were protected in a locked cabinet.

Data Analysis Method

Interviews were transcribed and then analyzed through a process of open and focused coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A preliminary analysis was conducted by employing an open coding system in which the interview was scanned to highlight repeating themes (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). These themes were then grouped into *descriptive* categories (which ultimately resembled descriptive levels) to showcase teacher facilitation of aesthetic experience in their classrooms *in their own voice* (See Chapter 5). Data analysis was then approached by employing phenomenological analysis which is "seeing the phenomenon from several different angles or perspectives," as well as a "heuristic inquiry" in which "the researcher includes an analysis of his or her own experience as part of the data" (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 227). To capture the essence of meaning in the data (Saldana, 2013) provided by teachers, the interviews were re-coded by way of open-coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). As a result of this secondary *interpretive* analysis, five major interpretive themes emerged. They include: (1) Aesthetic Experience is a Skill Development Toward Individual Pursuits; (2) Aesthetic Experience Facilitated with Minimal Consideration for

Postmodern/Contextualism Views; (3) A Disconnect of Self from Classroom Experience; (4) Challenges Facilitating Aesthetic Experience; and (5) Novel Views of Aesthetic Experience (See Chapter 6).

Bracketing as a Validity Check

Bracketing was utilized throughout this study to suspend potential bias about aesthetic experience and interpretations of participant data. It was intentional that data collection and analysis of this study were situated within the framework of the hybrid phenomenological method in which both *descriptive* and *interpretive* approaches were balanced. Subsequently, the primary goal was to keep researcher's bias in check. In addition to bracketing within the methodological approach, four other strategies were employed including member checks, researchers' position reflexivity, an audit trail, and thick descriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checks require sharing tentative interpretations with participants to see if they are plausible. Reflexivity encourages researchers to be critical in self-reflection as to how potential bias, theoretical frameworks, and relationship to the study might affect it. Providing an audit trail means providing readers with a detailed account of the researchers' process and decisions. Finally, providing thick descriptions means that the researcher contextualizes participants' experiences so that the essence is more relatable to readers. All these bracketing strategies were employed within the research study to maintain openness about interpretations of aesthetic experience.

One major bracketing strategy utilized in this study that needs to be elaborated in greater detail is the phenomenological reduction process that is described by Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022). This is a process of redescribing and illuminating meaning from the described experience of participants. This is done by the way researchers describe and interpret the essence of

experience. It is greatly encouraged by Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022) that the representation of the texture or “thickness” is done with a mutual respect between researcher and participant so that the process is authentic. This emphasis on the depth and genuineness of description is a key feature that Merriam and Tisdell (2016) similarly highlight as “thick description” (Geertz 1973; Maxwell, 2013, p. 138), “as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participants interviews, field notes, and documents” (p. 257). Thus, in the results, significant effort was taken to share participants’ lived experiences utilizing *their voice* through direct quotes from interviews.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis Part I: Descriptive Findings

The data analysis method utilized in this study is a *Hybrid Phenomenological method* which integrates both a *descriptive*, as well as an *interpretive* approach (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Since there were two distinct objectives to be achieved, analysis was intentionally conducted in two stages. Subsequently, these approaches are split into separate chapters: The descriptive findings are presented within this chapter and the interpretive findings are offered in chapter six.

To maintain scientific rigor and a degree of generalizability within this study, the approach to this chapter is to present the purest *descriptive* findings of aesthetic experience from the perspective of participants (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Husserl, 1970; Lopez & Willis, 2004). In other words, by employing a Husserlian line of thought, generalized commonalities of the aesthetic experience phenomenon are highlighted as it is understood by participants. These descriptions will remain objective and void of history and context (Husserl, 1970; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Identifying essential and universal commonalities of lived experience (Lopez & Willis, 2004) is significant to understand why specific groups of individuals—in this case, visual arts high school teachers—define and respond to aesthetic experience the way they do. Gaining an understanding of how these teachers come to perceive aesthetic experience serves to support the comprehension of their actions (Husserl, 1970) within the classroom to facilitate it. At the same time, utilizing a descriptive phenomenological approach supports the suspension or *bracketing* of preconceptions and bias (Drew, 1999; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Natanson, 1973) of aesthetic experience that have accrued through my personal teaching experiences (See Figure 8.).

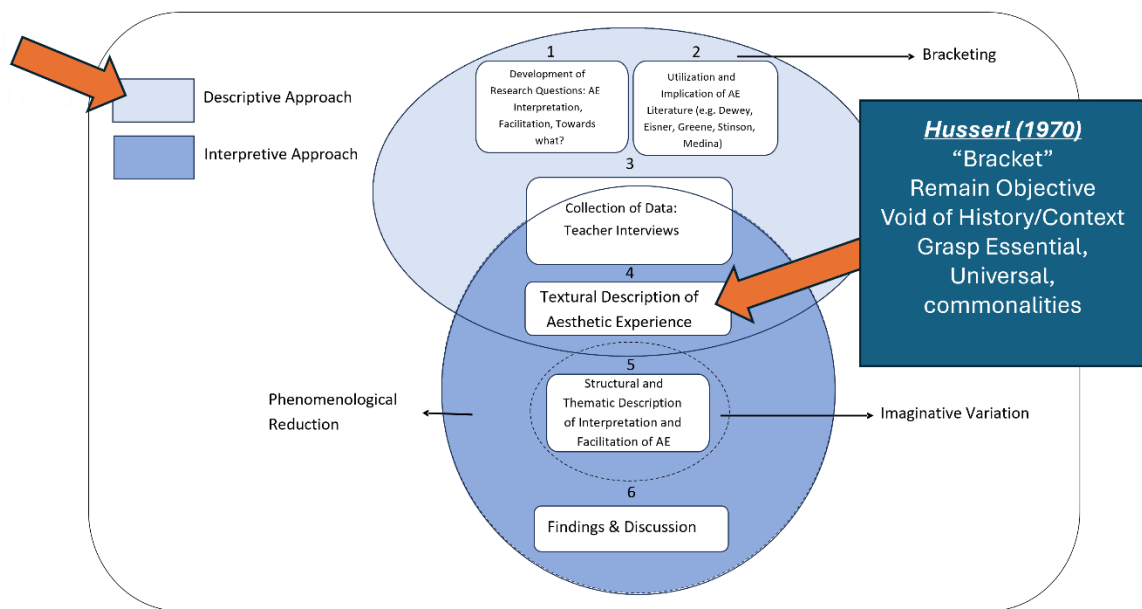


Figure 8: Descriptive Approach: Textural Description of Aesthetic Experience

To facilitate the descriptive approach and stay consistent with Alhazmi & Kaufmann’s (2022) hybrid phenomenology, my composite model of theoretical framework lenses were not utilized to analyze the data descriptively. As teachers began to explain how they interpreted aesthetic experiences within the classroom, it was noticeable that they were categorizing the experience as a hierarchy. For instance, first “this” needs to take place before “that” can be achieved. As this was organically emerging during data collection, I encouraged my participants to proceed in creating and finalizing a list through our interviews—this information was included as part of my side notes. Subsequently, the organization of their self-identified levels of aesthetic experience facilitation became the first part of my *member checks* (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After I categorized their levels separately as part of the analysis, participants were emailed it, asked to review it, and let me know if revisions were needed. The

graphics provided subsequently were approved by each participant and in line with their intent and reasoning.

This phase within the hybrid data analysis process examined and presents key features of aesthetic experience, rather than interpreting, inferring, and drawing conclusions about what the descriptions mean. The participants are introduced one-at-a-time, including demographic information, backgrounds, as well as their current standing within their respective art programs. Each participant's aesthetic experience hierarchies are provided as part of their introduction as this delineates their goals, role, and teaching approach toward aesthetic experience. Next, a descriptive summary of their interpretations of aesthetic experience are provided to address my initial research questions (What is aesthetic experience and how is it recognized; and what are teachers' goals and role in facilitating aesthetic experience?)

Participants

My study consists of five high school visual arts teachers from the same large school district within a border city in West Texas. They are *Iris*, *Alejandro*, *Ray*, *Carlos*, and *Sean* (all pseudonyms)—one female and four males. Considerable effort was made to find additional females to be represented in this study, however, additional female participants were not able to be obtained. [This aspect will be later addressed in the limitations of the study (Chapter 7).] Iris identifies as Latina. Ray identifies as Latino. Alejandro and Carlos, both identify themselves as Hispanic. Sean identifies himself as White.

Alejandro

Alejandro identifies as a Hispanic male. He has been teaching art for eight years. He teaches Art I, II, III, AP (Advanced Placement), and IB (International Baccalaureate) courses to all grade levels of high school students. Art was his major and in addition to taking drawing, design, and art history classes, Alejandro had specialized training in a particular “studio art”—Graphic Design. In addition to an art teacher, Alejandro can be described as a fairly known local artist; he has been quite successful at creating art prints that have been sold and distributed throughout the city and elsewhere in the U.S. Alejandro is known by teachers across the school district as highly competitive and his students as “regulars” when it comes to placing in art awards and portfolio competitions. When asked to provide a hierarchy of how he interprets aesthetic experience as it relates to his classroom, he proposed the following levels.

Alejandro’s Levels of Aesthetic Experience

- **Level One:** This level encompasses the *entire* process of creating artwork. This entails both the planning and the execution of the artist making an idea become a reality and making the process their own through originality and accomplishment of a particular art technique. Alejandro claimed that somewhere around 50% of his students reach this level of aesthetic experience.
- **Level Two:** This level is attained when the artwork is completed. One has made a successful production. This is a moment of reflection when one realizes that they have achieved all they set out to accomplish in their artmaking journey. This is a moment of self-gratification and celebration that one was successful at both technique and representation

of their intended idea. This is also a moment to take notice of others who admire and react to their art when on display. The artist appreciates the impact their art may have on others.

- **Level Three:** The goal in this level is “moving the artwork.” This entails making application of the artwork—be it through entering a competition or selling it. Achieving this level means attaining the highest degree of self-confidence, as well as a self-awareness in that one knows how to wield their talents to produce artwork that wins at competitions and might potentially be a means of making a living or explore entrepreneurship (Alejandro provided an example: “If a student were to open an Etsy account”). Alejandro claimed that “moving art” is also stipulated in the AP curriculum and is developmentally appropriate for his students.
- **Level Four:** As the artist continues to create and sell their artwork, this process could lead to even greater recognition of their work, and they could potentially become famous. Alejandro exclaimed that reaching this status might exceed the third level of AE.

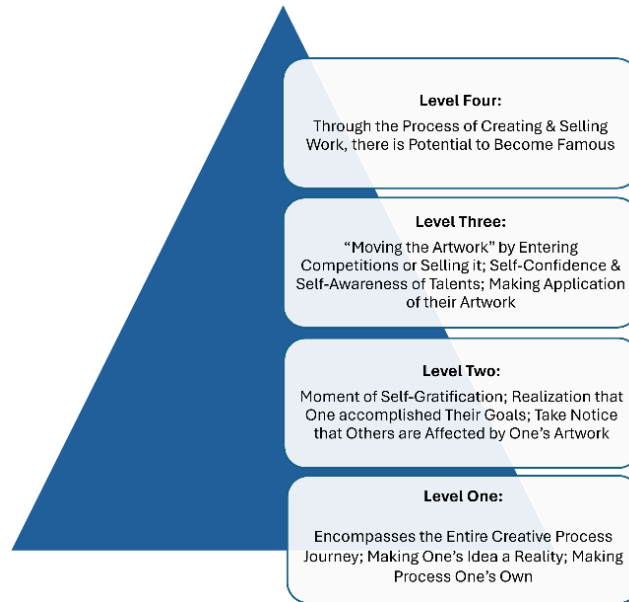


Figure 9: Alejandro's Levels of Aesthetic Experience

What is Aesthetic Experience to Alejandro and How is it Recognized?

For Alejandro, aesthetic experience is about achieving a well-balanced composition in which elements and principles of art are executed with precision. These would include items, such as line, color, harmony, rhythm, texture, etc. He suggested that artwork must be clean and well organized. Alejandro's focus on this meticulousness within an artwork is so noted that he deems it mandatory, otherwise an aesthetic experience may not be possible. Alejandro's view of how aesthetic experience is recognized is very much in alignment with Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's (2020) explanation of Representationalism and Formalism approaches in which emphasis is placed on the appearance of the artwork.

Alejandro's interpretation of aesthetic experience is two-fold. On the one hand, Alejandro indicated that aesthetic experiences tend to happen when an artwork is of high quality. Alejandro's narrative emphasized that an artwork must be neat, have a well-balanced integration of elements

and principles of art, and it must convey meaning. Alejandro suggested that only when these considerations are achieved, can there be potential for an aesthetic experience. Moreover, Alejandro's recognition of aesthetic experience suggests an emphasis on the physical appearance of an artwork more so than a person's aesthetic development. Hence, Alejandro plans his lessons so that successful integration of art elements and principles can be achieved. Alejandro explained: "Besides something looking nice... I mean...it's something organized...it has to be clean...it has to express something...how the artist uses elements and principles."

On the other hand, Alejandro also indicated that aesthetic experiences may happen when students are intrinsically inspired to engage in art projects. He elaborated that when students realize they can accomplish something they did not anticipate they could do in a work of art—such as, realistic shading—they have a moment, which Alejandro described as a "revelation." Alejandro capitalizes on these moments by facilitating a conversation with his students encouraging them to realize that a certain level of mastery was achieved in the process of technical development. He provided an example of a student who had one of these instances in which she became gratified in realizing her potential to create a two-dimensional drawing of a realistic, pencil-shaded sphere. He expanded:

And this is when I noticed, when I walk around, and I see this beautiful sphere...and I'm like...wow man...and I see this girl...then I asked her, have you ever done this before? And I noticed that smirk...you know...smile...and then like...no...I've never done it. I feel like that is a moment of like...revelation. But that little smirk...or that little moment, literally realizing that they've done something by themselves...I think that is like the most beautiful thing.

For Alejandro, when students are drawn to a certain art piece, it is because the artwork is a result of well-executed decisions that are to be admired. Emphasis is on the artwork, as well as the ability of the artist to attract others to it. He explained:

And a lot of kids were just looking at her artwork. But they were all like on top of it...you know...all these art pieces right next to it...and hers was like a big piece...and everyone was like looking at it. And I'm just thinking...like...something made them stop...you know...that made them have that conversation...that made them have that...you know...that moment there...analyzing the work...they're seeing what works...what doesn't work...what they like...what they don't like... everything...and I think that's the important part.

Goals & Role in Facilitating Aesthetic Experience?

Alejandro expressed that his goal is to help his students create beautiful, or aesthetically pleasing products that win at competitions, as well as facilitate their development as an entrepreneur to “move their artwork.” He conveyed that his role is to establish a healthy relationship with his students—one in which there is a mutual level of respect. One of Alejandro’s top priorities is to create a classroom environment where students take notice of the sights and sounds of the room. He went on to explain how he plays music and even has LED lights set up in his room to try to create a relaxed and productive space where students feel inspired to create. Even more than that, Alejandro expressed that he wants his students to be so impacted by the ambiance of the classroom space, that it becomes memorable. [Note: This is something that will be later considered as a novel view of aesthetic experience—*A Sense of Nostalgia.*]

Iris

Iris identifies as a Latina female. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in Studio Art and a concentration in animation and visual effects. Iris shared that when she was going to college, she had no intention of teaching art, so her art training did not include teacher education. She later went through an online alternative certification program to earn her teaching credentials. She has been teaching art for three years. Prior to teaching art at her current campus, she substituted for a couple of years, taught art in an after school elementary program, as well as an alternative school for students who get expelled from their home schools. Presently, she teaches Art I, II, and III to students in all high school grade levels. Iris described herself as relatively new to the teaching profession and feels that her priority is to be observant of more experienced teachers and try to grasp as much information as possible toward developing her own teaching approach. Despite her few years in teaching art, Iris was very articulate in explaining her pedagogy and she was acute about her teaching approach, as well as reflecting on it for the benefit of her students' achievement.

Iris was comprehensive in conveying what she believes to be an art teachers' responsibility in facilitating aesthetic experience, as well as the significance of students having conversations about them with their teachers and peers. She does not believe aesthetic experience happens by accident nor that her students would appreciate the involvement if she did not provide them with a foundation of understanding. Iris' outlook of aesthetic experience is very much connected to literature that argues it should be an *intentional* feature in the classroom (Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2017; Greene, 1980; 1986; 2001; Gulla, 2018; Sunday, 2015; 2018). Iris believes that learning to acknowledge and appreciate our experiences "aesthetically," is a vital part of understanding our own capacity, not only to create, but also to communicate our intentions to others. She explained:

We have to talk to the students about all of this stuff...especially how it relates to a real person...to like...us...to other art teachers...to the other art students...because I think part of the aesthetic experience is seeing it happen in other people in front of you. I feel like sometimes you might experience something like an aesthetic experience...and you don't know what's happening. You'd never be able to articulate it. You wouldn't know what it is...you'd just be like...oh...that makes sense...like how that came out...and it wouldn't go beyond that...like a little light flick...and that feels also kind of lonely. Like the student having this experience...this not knowing what it is...not really knowing that they can talk about it with somebody or that they should share it with somebody. So...I think it's important that teachers are articulating all this and really giving examples of how other people have achieved their experiences...and how they feel about their artwork so that students know how to articulate and express themselves through their artwork.

Iris' Levels of Aesthetic Experience

- **Level Zero³⁴:** This level indicates students who meet the bare minimum requirements of an assignment and are not really putting forth much effort into their artmaking.
- **Level One:** This lowest level of aesthetic experience is achieved when *one*, purposeful art element or principle is integrated within an artwork (i.e., line, color, shape, balance, pattern, etc.). Or the student incorporates *one* personal element (i.e., an original idea, interpretation, personal experience, informal knowledge, cultural aspect, etc.). At this level, the student is

³⁴ Iris explicitly identified her first level as “zero.” Therefore, the numbering for her levels reflects her actual voice. The other participants identified their levels starting at one. Additionally, the number of levels reflects how many each participant explicitly identified; this varied by participant and is detailed to identically match each teacher’s voice.

developing the ability to articulate reasons for their artistic choices. Despite this demonstration of autonomy, the display is miniscule because the teacher is still very much involved in the creative process. In Iris' words, the teacher might still have to "spoon-feed" the student with many details in how to go about approaching their artwork regarding ideas, technique, creative choices, and incentive to complete the assignment. Art is described as "basic", and students are likely to be lacking in motivation. The teacher must nudge students along in their artmaking process.

- **Level Two:** The student now integrates *several* art elements and principles, as well as *several* personal elements into their work. Perhaps not all the integration of these is purposeful, but the student demonstrates more understanding of each element. There is more complexity to both their knowledge and utilization of line, shape, form, texture, repetition, movement, etc. If the student is asked, they can adequately articulate reasons for their choices. There is more sophistication in their responses regarding their problem-solving and creative liberty. Although there is a step above the first level regarding control in articulation and technique, the student is still early in developing the ability to make the creative process completely their own by engaging themselves emotionally.
- **Level Three:** At this highest stage of aesthetic experience, the student utilizes *all* the art elements and principles in their artwork—or tries their best to incorporate most of them. According to Iris, one of the most significant aspects of this level is that students make this process *their own*. This means that the teacher did not have to motivate the student at all. The student is intuitively inspired to engage on their own and maintain incentive

throughout the entire creative process. They are thorough in articulating to teachers and peers the reasons for directions in their artwork. Their choices are made deliberately and are in direct connection to addressing the elements and principles of art they chose. They demonstrate the ability to wield their “creative liberty” with a sense of confidence and ownership.

Another significant aspect of this level is that students are open to engaging their emotions while creating art. Moreover, they welcome the prospect of being affected by the experience. According to Iris, this means that the assignment becomes much more than a course requirement or even a grade—it becomes an opportunity to immerse oneself through the engagement of their body and feel the experience through their senses. They allow their senses to be vulnerable in the artmaking process—or how Medina (2012) articulates, to permit one’s senses to “run at their peak,” and be conscious of how their body is being activated, (“body awareness”) through the process in creating their artwork.

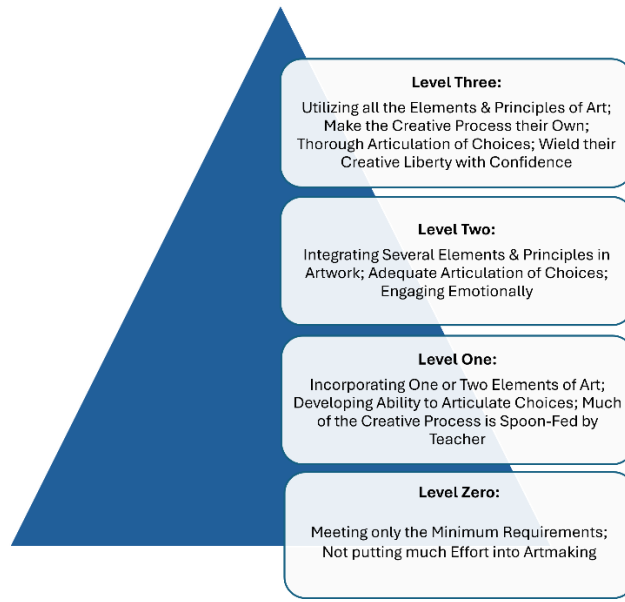


Figure 10: Iris' Levels of Aesthetic Experience

What is Aesthetic Experience to Iris and How is it Recognized?

Iris' interpretation of aesthetic experience, as it pertains to her students, is threefold. She first interprets it as developing the ability to make the artmaking process a *personal* journey for oneself. This skill is characterized by the level at which students can incorporate art elements and principles within their artwork and on their own. Individuality is a key component that affects the degree of an aesthetic experience, according to Iris. She even has a term to identify students' artistic autonomy—"Creative Liberty." She explained that this independence is demonstrated by students putting their own characteristics in their work that deviates from the minimal requirements of the assignment. Her students not only meet teacher expectations but bring something original to the assignment by approaching it in their own way. These considerations correspond to Heid's (2008) work in which aesthetic experiences involve a relationship with senses housed within one's body. It takes a sophisticated level of cognitive effort, or engagement in aesthetic experience, to connect one's emotions, lived experience, as well as course concepts to make choices in how to go about

their visual representations (Acer & Ömeroğlu, 2008; Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2002; Güvenç & Toprak, 2022; Heid, 2008; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Sessions, 2008). Iris explained that when students engage in this process, their artwork looks different than others. She expanded:

The ones that have more creative ability...they tend to subconsciously...or purposefully apply their own twist to assignments. So...when I think of aesthetic...I'm thinking about those students that are adding their personality to every assignment...and...it looks obviously different than everybody else who's doing it exactly how it's supposed to be done...or how I instruct them to do it.

Second, Iris recognizes an aesthetic experience by her students' ability to articulate their use of these elements, principles, and artistic choices. The more students are aware of their use of art elements and the more confidently they can defend their choices—the greater their level of aesthetic experience. She continued:

They are incorporating multiple art elements...and maybe not all of them are purposeful... like they didn't really consider why they used a specific color...but it works with everything...so it's just kind of like...subconsciously...they're doing this...and if I asked them...they wouldn't understand it...but I could see it in their artwork. They're putting their knowledge of the elements of art together...bringing in previous knowledge to what they're doing.

Finally, Iris suggested that the highest level of aesthetic experience is a combination of proficiency of art element integration, articulation of choices, as well as a new component—an *emotional engagement*. To Iris, this emotional engagement is what constitutes a student “making their artwork their own” in that they have integrated parts of themselves—be it ideas, feelings,

experiences, and interests—within their art. Iris realizes that her students may have trouble talking about their emotions or even conveying them in their artwork. For this reason, she chooses certain art elements that she feels are relatively simple in communicating their emotions and encourages their use. This is how Iris connects emotional engagement, as well as integration of art elements. Since she finds them equally valuable for an aesthetic experience—she ties them together. She expanded:

Even at this stage...when they're students...they don't really know how to express their emotions through their artwork. I can tell the student that really tried and was really putting their feelings into what I'm asking them for...especially through the most basic one that I tried to incorporate...I encourage students to use color to demonstrate their emotions. I think that's probably one of the most obvious ways that a student can do it. And I think...as they're learning it's good for them to have the basic tools [like] color to demonstrate their emotions. And I can tell when a student is using specific colors to try to get a point across. And then [you have] the one who has great skills...but is just kind of doing the assignment...because that's the grade. The highest level would be the ones that are obviously choosing every element in their drawing...and they can explain it to me...and I can ask them questions...and they can tell me...like...Oh yeah...I used blue because of this...and I decided to do this composition to show so and so.

Goals and Role in Facilitating Aesthetic Experience?

One of Iris' primary goals is that her students have fun in her class. Yet, it is also very evident in her responses that above all, she wants her students to develop autonomy in their creative process. She facilitates aesthetic experience in such a way as to eventually become less

involved in her students' creative processes. The quality of an aesthetic experience—according to Iris—depends greatly on how much of it is recognized by the student without the guidance of the teacher. It is significant to note that aesthetic experience, indicated by Iris, has not necessarily occurred until “it clicks” for students. In other words, there is a realization of their ability to attain an aesthetic experience through their artmaking process on their own. This is the moment in which Iris hopes to direct her students toward. In a sense, it is a moment in which students realize they can break away from the teacher, the teacher's examples, and specific directions for the assignment. They can veer off course with confidence. Iris suggested that aesthetic experience tends to happen early in the creative process when students are planning what to draw or deciding what direction(s) to take to convey their story. Students are described as having an “Aha moment” when they grasp a connection between themselves and their artwork. This is the role in which Iris sees herself, as inspiring a pathway toward this realization. Iris went on to describe:

I think it is similar with the students that are having those experiences. It's clicking for them without me having to kind of like spoon-feed it to them. They'll kind of just see something I give them...you know...the information they need to have to learn this one thing...and then they're able to just kind of run with it. When a student has an assignment that they have to do...and they're trying to incorporate their own style to it. So...maybe their aesthetic experience is when it finally clicks...like...Oh...this is exactly how I want to do my assignment...and they kind of have like that...Aha! Moment...and then they get into their drawing. And they're adding their own personal elements to it...and it's meeting all the criteria of the assignment....but they finally figured out...what the little thing...or the big thing that they wanted to include in their piece.

It is significant to note that Iris' approach to aesthetic experience is analogous with the topic on aesthetic autonomy found in current literature (Apple, 2004; Drinkwater, 2014; Ingram & Drinkwater, n.d.; Ingram, 2013; Morley, 2014; Van Lente & Peters, 2022). These scholars argue that sensible properties in artmaking, such as the somatic, affective, and emotional should be regarded and encouraged in artmaking and students should have the freedom of choice in wielding them. What tends to happen—something Iris is trying to nudge her students away from—is focusing attention on material outcomes. Iris is hopeful that students will purposefully deviate from the expectations of an assignment if it means they will employ their creativity and aesthetic autonomy.

Ray

Ray identifies as a Latino male. He has been teaching for three years. He teaches Art I, II, and III to all grade levels of high school students. Since Ray holds a master's degree, he also teaches Dual Credit courses. Ray went through an alternative certification program. Although he is relatively new to teaching, he has 20 plus years of professional experience as a Stylist and has worked extensively with well-known celebrities in Hollywood and New York. He expanded: "I've gotten to this point in my life where I wanted to...the idea of taking what I have learned in my life and sharing it with others." Ray was clear to express that his experiences prior to teaching—which have consisted of several changes, not only in tasks, but also development in his identity—have certainly influenced his approach to teaching.

Ray encourages his students to embrace change and embrace vulnerability within his classroom. He explained that students sometimes enter his class feeling very intimidated by their peers and fear that if they try to draw or create—they will likely fail. To confront this tendency,

Ray strives to create a classroom environment that feels safe so that students gradually become comfortable with showing their vulnerability, have fun, and trust that creating something pleasing to the eye takes time and patience. This is why Ray purposely builds a sense of trust with students. He went on to explain that having this confidence helps students to feel supported throughout the semester. Ray hopes his students give in to the process involved in artmaking—although it can sometimes be very daunting—and be willing to take chances toward discovering new things about themselves.

Ray's Levels of Aesthetic Experience

- **Level One:** At the bottom of this level represents an “F-student.” At the higher end of this level would be the student who might put forth very minimal effort into their assignments and creative process. In Ray’s terms, a student at this level would complete the necessary requirements just to pass the class—but not toward any goals beyond that. The student has no interest in evolving as a person toward new opportunities and experiences. They may even be adamant about not engaging fully in the class to avoid change. Ray explains that they may express fear and intimidation about creating works of art and have trouble concentrating on their work.
- **Level Two:** According to Ray, this level represents the “B-student.” Level two has to do with nurturing the connectivity between teacher and student. Through the course of the semester and engaging in artmaking, the student begins to develop a sense of trust in which they come to depend on the teacher for guidance. Through this nurturing environment, the student becomes more accepting to change their perception about the art class, their

approaches to their work, and what this journey might mean for them beyond the walls of the classroom. Any barriers that stand in the way of creativity, for example, fear of failure, fear of peer critiques, or even fear of self-judgment begin to fade. Hence, the student begins to feel safe to take a chance.

- **Level Three:** This level indicates that trust has been established between teacher and student. According to Ray, this type of relationship is critical for students to have fun and not hyperfocus on being embarrassed by an attempt to try something new. Within this level is also being vulnerable to make artwork personal by integrating themselves within their artwork. This would be done by making personal choices in their artwork and incorporating their interests and culture. Ray made mention that while it is significant for students to trust their teacher and goals of the art class through the journey of artmaking, they also must trust their own creative processes.

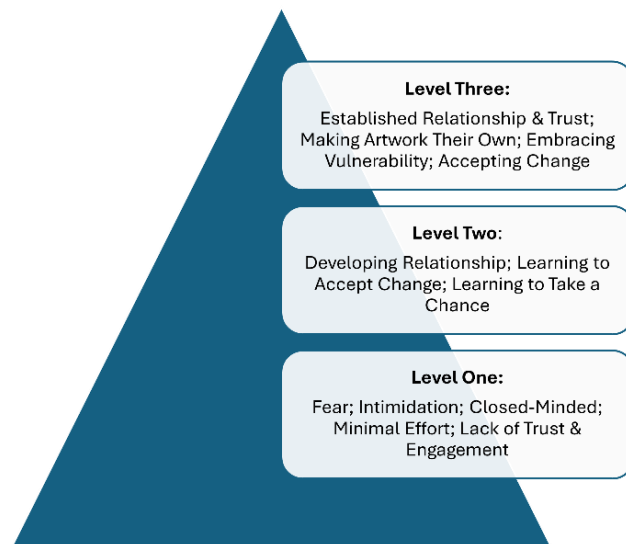


Figure 11: Ray's Levels of Aesthetic Experience

What is Aesthetic Experience to Ray and How is it Recognized?

For Ray, aesthetic experience has to do with being attentive to the arrangement of artistic elements which would be most pleasing to the eye. He elaborated: “So...I think for me...it’s a visual...a pleasing visual look...to make personal choices on creating something that is visually appealing.” Ray mentioned that using elements and principles of art, for example, use of line, shape, color, and using well-known artists and their styles as references, can aid students toward creating aesthetically pleasing works. Ray recognizes the importance of students developing the skills necessary to arrange certain aspects in a work of art so that it becomes a pleasing product. Ray places his emphasis more on students’ willingness to simply try artmaking, not necessarily create something that could potentially win at an art competition. He sees his students at this age as being very judgmental about how they draw. This reaction is comparable with the work of Lowenfeld & Brittain (1970; 1987) in which it is usually around the ages of 13-16 that children begin to allow the harsh criticism of others to influence their exit from the art world. So, Ray strives to pave the way for students by making his class fun and minimize potential obstacles that would hinder one’s attempts to “take a chance.” Ray went on to elaborate:

Just so they learn that they can actually do something...like...you can still do it. You don't realize...you can make something nice...cause they just give up if they don't think they can do anything nice. They could do it...you know...but they get to where they're subconscious at this age...and they don't think they can make something nice or pretty.

Ray also finds it valuable for students to incorporate their interests and culture in their artmaking. Doing so means that they are allowing others to see who they are through using their artistic voice—to share their vulnerability utilizing this specific form of communication.

Ray perceives aesthetic experiences as a gauge to assess his students' outlook about the art class, as well as their development toward vulnerability and transformation. Lower levels of aesthetic experience indicate that students are less engaged, less confident in themselves, and less trusting of their teacher. The higher one advances on Ray's levels; the more students develop a sense of openness and vulnerability. Ray interprets aesthetic experience, not only as a skill that one develops to create something visually appealing, but it also has to do with developing the relationship between himself and his students. For Ray, developing a relationship with his students is the most significant part of his teaching approach and his students' experience in his class.

Ray doesn't necessarily view aesthetic experience as a moment in time, or a heightened sense of awareness. Rather, it is more of stages within one's development toward being open to new experiences and accepting change. Ray explained that he would know if his students were having an aesthetic experience if they were deeply concentrating on their work. It is significant to note that Ray's perception of aesthetic experience also acts as a means of assessment that influences the outlook toward his students. In other words, these levels are utilized to help distinguish an "A" student from a "B," or an "F" student.

Goals & Role in Facilitating Aesthetic Experience?

Ray's top priority is to encourage students not to overthink the technical aspects of creating art, but instead to have fun. He sees his role as the person responsible for making the classroom

environment one in which all his students, including himself, are enthusiastic about sharing in the fun of artmaking. Ray feels that modeling vulnerability is crucial if he wants his students to reciprocate it. So, he has no problem with sharing experiences about personal struggles with the creative process or even everyday life experiences that are relevant to the art lesson. Ray's attitude on modeling aesthetic experience, vulnerability, and everyday life experiences is parallel to the work of several aesthetic experience pedagogues (Acer & Ömeroğlu, 2008; Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016; Davis & Dunn, 2023; Greene, 1980; 1986; 2001; Güvenç & Toprak, 2022; Medina, 2012; Sessions, 2008; Tilley & Taylor, 2013). Ray will sometimes invite colleagues he has worked with in the past as guest speakers to talk to his students. He expressed that this opens opportunities for students to see the many options there are to utilize their artistic expression.

Carlos

Carlos identifies as a Hispanic male. He has been teaching art for fifteen years. He teaches Art I, II, III, AP, and IB courses to all grade levels of high school students. In addition to being an art teacher, Carlos is identified as a well-regarded artist who is active within the local art scene. He values creative thinking because he recognizes it as *abstract* thinking, as well as the highest form of intelligence. This line of thought is consistent with the work of both Dewey (1934) and Eisner (2002) as they also considered aesthetic experience as the highest form of cognition and needed to be integrated within the public-school curriculum. Carlos defines creativity as coming up with ideas that do not yet exist. He explained that one can build upon the ideas of another, but the final thought should be something completely new. He tells his students they are in his classroom not just to think about the present moment, but to also start thinking about the future, as Carlos also worked for many years as a professional artist in the film making industry prior to

teaching. Carlos encourages his students not just to think about their future career, but to initiate the process by physically immersing themselves within the environments they seek to enter professionally. Carlos wants them not just to think about what they want to do for their future career, but to start doing it now. He went on to elaborate:

So...my suggestion is...if you want it...whatever it is you want to get into...let's say...advertising...go volunteer...not get paid...go volunteer to be a guy doing anything a couple of hours a week...even at an ad agency. Just go there and say...Hi...I'm a student at [school name omitted] ...I'm in advertising...can I volunteer carrying...you know...organizing your mail...or anything...to get your foot in the door...because that's the hardest part in anything. Well...I kind of try to show them those things.

Carlos' Levels of Aesthetic Experience

- **Level One:** According to Carlos, this level is about reacting to mere technical ability. Although he feels technical ability is important in creating something aesthetically pleasing, it is not the only goal within artmaking or to achieve an aesthetic experience. To react only to an artwork's form or an artists' capacity to wield their technical skill is only touching the surface level of AE. It may be evident that the artist is able to manipulate tools and materials for aesthetically pleasing visuals, but there is little in the way of developing a concept, experimentation of media, or engaging viewers conceptually or critically. Carlos feels that much of the artwork that gets chosen for display in art competitions or wins awards remains at this level.

- **Level Two:** Carlos views this level as extending beyond the artwork itself. This is when the artist not only engages in visual appearance of art elements and principles, but also how those facilitate the concept or meaning behind the artwork. Going even beyond the artwork is focusing on the overall experience in artmaking. This is where an artist reflects on ways to be innovative with their creative process and how they go about manipulating their environment to convey their thoughts.
- **Level Three:** Like Stinson's (1985) third level, Carlos sees the artwork being transformed from product to the mechanism that provokes conversations and questions about our world and role within it. For Carlos, concentration is not on the artwork anymore. Rather, focus is on what the artwork can do toward provoking existential questions about why we are here and what our purpose is in society. Hence, the planning that goes into creating art is more conceptual rather than technical. At this level of aesthetic experience, an artist will utilize their developed skills to experiment, manipulate, and explore their tools and materials toward reflection of ourselves within the world.

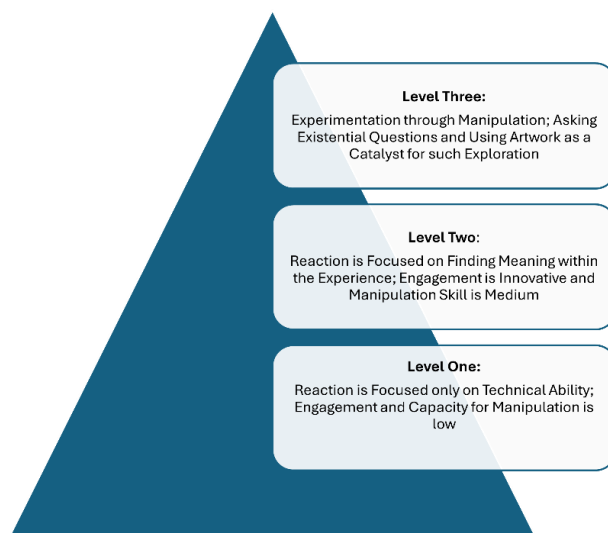


Figure 12: Carlos' Levels of Aesthetic Experience

What is Aesthetic Experience to Carlos and How is it Recognized?

Carlos defines aesthetic experience as being two-fold. On the one hand, it has to do with technique, yet it also deals with what he calls “artistic mystery.” He believes that the experience shouldn’t be termed so much an “aesthetic” experience, but more so an “artistic experience.” This is because he feels the term “aesthetic” has connotations with the beauty of an artwork and he, instead, interprets an experience with art as encompassing one’s emotions. He shared that he does not have emotional connections when viewing or creating visual art because it is “static” to him. Carlos shares that he has more of an “aesthetic experience,” or emotional connection with music or cinema. However, there is one exception. He shared that his encounter with Michelangelo’s Statue of David had a considerable and emotional impact on him. Carlos communicated that although his students may have aesthetic experiences with visual art, it would be rare and more prone to those in his more advanced classes (i.e. Art III, AP, and IB).

Carlos recognizes aesthetic experience when students are engaged in deeply seated concepts which he feels are tangible only when students' ideas are original. He described this process as "getting into it" or engaging one's mind and feelings within artmaking. Carlos explained that he knows when students are doing this because they appear "into" or "immersed" in their work. When students just go through the motions of an assignment and utilize well-known images for artworks, they are not engaging their potential for abstract thinking or even their personal views about their world to influence new ideas. Carlos compared this practice with craft art in which there is a proper procedure, or formula, in producing a product that will look identical to others following the same set of requirements. He expanded:

It's just that some kids don't want to...or maybe they are not capable of pursuing it to that level. They just want to do the craft stuff...you know...and some kids...they may really get into it. I have a kid...he's technically a good artist in my AP...and he cannot...he just doesn't have it in him...he cannot get into it...you know...in his mind...his feelings...to create something. He has to copy something every time...and half the time it's so obvious that he copied it. And immediately I saw it was from *Bladerunner*...you know...Okay...he just doesn't have that at this moment in his life...the capability of coming up with something original. But a lot of them are into their artwork. You just see...they're immersed into it.

Goals & Role in Facilitating Aesthetic Experience?

Carlos believes that everything students learn in school is a formula that must be followed. However, regarding the visual arts, he feels there is no set formula. Rather, one must interpret matters on their own and come to their own conclusions. Therefore, Carlos indicated he is

responsible for creating space within his classroom for reflective thinking and aiding his students to develop potential perspectives in which to view life. Within this space, Carlos aims to establish a sense of seriousness about what goes on within it and a level of respect for the potential art has in affecting our perspective in the way we choose to interact with the world. Therefore, he feels his role is to model this seriousness and respect to his students. He shared how his students likely feel about him:

Yeah...He's easygoing...he's got...you know...his nice personality...and he's kind. But...you know what...like...he's serious about this stuff and...yeah...they see that seriousness...and then they're like...wow...like...I can't just mess around...he's really looking at what I'm doing...and that I can articulate my thoughts about it and explain myself. So yeah...it's like they see that expectation from me.

Sean

Sean identified as a White male. Sean has been teaching visual arts for 21 years. He recently earned his MA in Studio Art. Since Sean now has his master's degree, he is teaching a dual credit art course. He teaches all grade levels of high school students in the areas of Art I, II, III, AP, and Dual Credit. Sean is known for his thought-provoking art shows in both local and out-of-state galleries. Sean's approach in facilitating aesthetic experience might be similar in how it would be organized at the college level. This is because Sean's methods encourage students to think for themselves, to come to their own understandings of what art means to them, and how they personally go about making it. Sean does it in such a way that seems to engage less in the way of modeling. Sean prefers voids, gaps, uncertainty, and frustration to provoke critical thinking versus showing students how to make these processes easier to deal with. He wants his students to

struggle, confront, and learn how to navigate these undertakings on their own and to find their own answers. He went on to elaborate:

If I can get them to suspend that dissatisfaction...then I can usually get them to see that they can produce something that even when they're making it...it's difficult...it's frustrating...they don't like how it looks...but if they finish...if they push it to the end...they get something they didn't know they could make. There you go...Yeah...I will repeatedly say...I'm just here to confuse you...just here...to get you to think more... and to find new answers.

Sean's Levels of Aesthetic Experience

- **Level One:** This level is considered an *external* experience. Like Stinson's (1985) first level of AE, Sean views this level as an appreciation for beauty within the world. There is no personal connection to the artwork. Appreciation is focused on the artwork as a product. There is no transcendence.
- **Level Two:** This level switches to an *internal* engagement. One now looks within and appreciates what they can accomplish when it comes to creating artwork. Emphasis might be on technical ability or valuing one's accomplishments throughout their creative process. Transcendence might be within oneself—a personal reflection toward transformation.
- **Level Three:** This level has to do with making a personal commitment toward a life-long aesthetic appreciation. For those that see themselves as having the capability to create works of art, they embark on a journey to progress in their skills and create even better

artwork. The higher end of this level transitions from looking within to looking beyond the self. This is also an opportunity to recognize and value the artwork of others. This awareness supports personal development in creating better works of art. The transcendence here is between self and others.

- **Level Four:** The final stage of AE is a transcendence beyond oneself. In other words, the experience with art motivates one to appreciate nature or something divine—possibly a higher being.

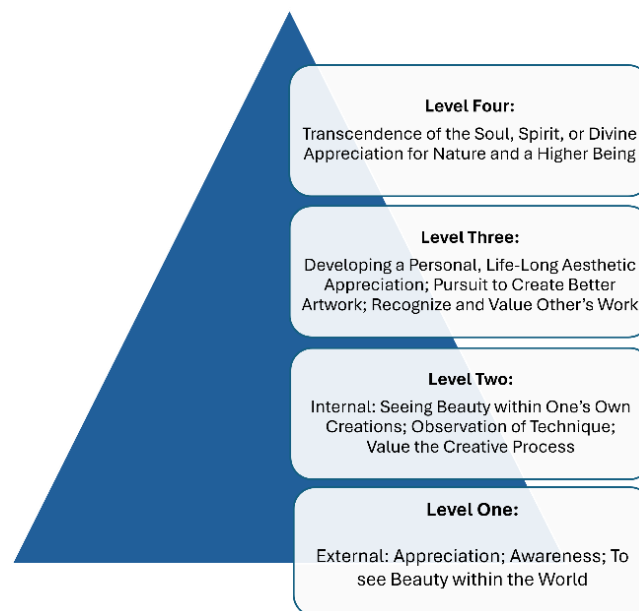


Figure 13: Sean's Levels of Aesthetic Experience

What is Aesthetic Experience to Sean and How is it Recognized?

Sean defines aesthetic experience as the consideration of beauty and truth. He stated the belief that the development of one's aesthetic is best accomplished through the study of art history in which one will explore the world of classical beauty, architectural beauty, and natural beauty. He shared that art created prior to the 1900's was more about celebrating, honoring, and reflecting

on the beauty of God's creations. However, after 1900, art became conceptual and was more about questioning the definition of art and pushing those definitions past their boundaries. Sean explained that he is particularly interested in how his students experience the presence, power, or fear of God. He mentioned that truth may come in the form of ugliness but is a necessary part of aesthetic experience. Although Sean agrees that transcendence can be between two or more individuals during an aesthetic experience, he believes that the highest level of "transcendence is a vertical experience." From his perspective, the principal goal of the aesthetic is to experience a connectivity with God—not necessarily with other individuals as a mutual engagement.

For Sean, an aesthetic experience is to be found within a person. It is what individuals bring to the encounter that will impact the experience the most—it is not primarily the artwork that holds the aesthetic to be appreciated; the less one brings to the encounter with a work of art, the less there is to take away from the experience. This sentiment is analogous with Greene (1980) and Gulla's (2018) scholarship in which an individual must be vulnerable in the face of an artwork—lending themselves, along with their responsive energies to it. This belief of aesthetic experience greatly influences how Sean facilitates it in his classroom. Sean views his class as a training program to prepare students for future encounters with art in which they will have better understandings of their own aesthetic experiences. [Note: This significantly contrasts with Alejandro's approach in which there is intense training with art tools, materials, and design principles, with the goal to prepare students to make clean and organized works of art that are more likely to elicit aesthetic encounters.]

Goals & Role in Facilitating Aesthetic Experience?

Sean contended that one of his major roles as an art educator is to be in support of students' development of their personal taste, or "personal aesthetic," which Sean feels comes from an intensive study of art history. In line with this, Sean indicated that he spends a great deal of time engaging students in artwork completed prior to the 1900's. Sean also shared that focus on work ethic and nurturing talent is essential to students' aesthetic growth. He elaborated:

I want them to grow as much as they care. And that's different for different kids and different for different levels. So that's the first thing...and I always tell them...look... I'm not grading you against Michelangelo...I'm grading you against *you*. I'm not grading you against your neighbor. Well, you know how it is...I'll take hard work over talent any day of the week. So, I want to get them to work. I want them to develop a work ethic. I want them to refine their abilities and appreciate craftsmanship...to develop their work ethic and develop their own style...and just think for themselves. The training...that's what I tell my students...it is the training. If you just bust your ass all day long and you study...definitely study art history...then you're going to be world class.

Sean sustained that his approach to teaching art and emphasis on developing a students' personal aesthetic is intended to equip them for future encounters with art. In the data, Sean's narrative contends that the quality of aesthetic experience is dependent on the prior knowledge that a person brings to an art encounter. The aesthetic, as well as the potential of the experience, is to be found within the person more than it is to be found within the artwork, or the quality of the artwork. Sean indicated that because he interprets aesthetic experience in these ways, he chooses to concentrate less on preparing students for art shows and competitions. Instead, he stated he felt

it is more meaningful to prepare his students for a life-long engagement of appreciating and reflecting on the beauty and truth in their world. He explained:

The true definition of aesthetics is the study of beauty. But generally, these kids have not had a sublime aesthetic experience...that you are overwhelmed with beauty and terror at the power of God's creation. I like them to be able to think for themselves and I really like them to be able to problem-solve. I like them to be able to recognize beauty. So, I teach them that, and I do teach them through art history. I also want them to develop a personal aesthetic. I think it is absolutely individual and bound up in personal tastes.

Sean shared that even though he wants his students and their work to be visible in art galleries, he does not emphasize preparing his students to win competitions. Rather, he said he is more interested in getting his students to think critically about their world and develop the value to self-educate. Hence, his class critiques highlight themes in art history, as well as gaps and voids in materials and subject matter. He continued:

I do want them to see their work compared against other students... [to get] work in a gallery-setting, off campus. That's incredibly important. It's not like a competition in the classroom because they're going to develop their own aesthetic and I want them to develop their own style, their own thoughts.

Closing Comments on these Descriptive Findings

Before transitioning to an interpretive approach in the next chapter, it is significant to highlight the universal commonalities of aesthetic experience that were communicated here which will inform further analysis. To do this, it is important to visualize the aesthetic experience levels that were described by my five participants (See Figure 14.). Collectively, to the high school art

teachers interviewed, aesthetic experience is a form of *transcendence* in one way or another. Transcendence can be defined as climbing or going beyond; as an existence or experience beyond the normal or physical level; an experience that goes past normal limits (Cambridge University, n.d.). This makes sense as an aesthetic experience is a phenomenon which continues to be regarded as an extraordinary effort requiring special planning and facilitation to engage with artworks and letting oneself be affected by them (Greene, 1980; 1986; 2001; Gulla, 2018).

	Alejandro	Iris	Ray	Carlos	Sean
Level Four	<u>Level Four:</u> Transcendence Through Process in Creating & Selling Work; Potential to Become Well-Known and Famous				<u>Level Four:</u> Transcendence of the Soul, Spirit, or Divine Appreciation for Nature and a Higher Being
Level Three	<u>Level Three:</u> "Moving the Artwork" by Entering Competitions or Selling it; Self-Confidence & Self-Awareness of Talents; Making Application of their Artwork	<u>Level Three:</u> Transcendence Through Use of all Elements & Principles of Art; Make the Creative Process their Own; Thorough Articulation of Choices; Wield their Creative Liberty with Confidence	<u>Level Three:</u> Transcendence Through Established Relationship & Trust; Making Artwork Their Own; Embracing Vulnerability; Accepting Change	<u>Level Three:</u> Transcendence Through Experimentation & Manipulation; Asking Existential Questions and Using Artwork as a Catalyst for Such Exploration	<u>Level Three:</u> Developing a Personal, Life-Long Aesthetic Appreciation; Pursuit to Create Better Artwork; Recognize and Value Other's Work
Level Two	<u>Level Two:</u> Moment of Self-Gratification; Realization that One Accomplished Their Goals; Take Notice that Others are Affected by One's Artwork	<u>Level Two:</u> Integrating Several Elements & Principles in Artwork; Adequate Articulation of Choices; Engaging Emotionally	<u>Level Two:</u> Developing Relationship; Learning to Accept Change; Learning to Take a Chance	<u>Level Two:</u> Reaction is Focused on Finding Meaning within the Experience; Engagement is Innovative and Manipulation Skill is Medium	<u>Level Two:</u> Internal: Seeing Beauty Within One's Own Creations; Observation of Technique; Value the Creative Process
Level One	<u>Level One:</u> Encompasses the Entire Creative Process Journey; Making One's Idea a Reality; Making Process One's Own	<u>Level One:</u> Incorporating One or Two Elements of Art; Developing Ability to Articulate Choices; Much of the Creative Process is Spoon-Fed by Teacher	<u>Level One:</u> Fear; Intimidation; Closed-Minded; Minimal Effort; Lack of Trust & Engagement	<u>Level One:</u> Reaction is Focused only on Technical Ability; Engagement and Capacity for Manipulation is Low	<u>Level One:</u> External: Appreciation; Awareness; To See Beauty Within the World
Level Zero		<u>Level Zero:</u> Meeting only the Minimum Requirements; Not putting much Effort into Artmaking			

Figure 14: Collective Depiction of Teachers' Voiced Aesthetic Experience Levels

As depicted in the underlined text boxes in Figure 14., for some teachers (such as with Alejandro and Iris) transcendence was stated as a personal achievement indicated by the quality of student artwork, the level at which students can articulate their choices, or the extent to which a student can make a name for themselves selling their work. For Carlos, transcendence is also personal, but he stated the primary goal is how students can use their artwork to continue asking

big questions about life and the world. For Ray, transcendence is, again, indicated as a personal feat, but it also has to do with the connectivity between himself and his students. The ultimate transcendence for Ray is embracing vulnerability and change. Finally, for Sean, transcendence is voiced as a means to get closer to nature or a supreme being.

Among the differences between participants' views of transcendence, one component becomes quite clear—Transcendence is mostly a *personal* success. This is contrary to the work of Stinson (1985), Greene (2001), and Medina (2012) in which aesthetic experience is a transcendental involvement toward others. Certainly, aesthetic experience could be said to always begin personally, but as can be seen in Stinson's (1985) hierarchy of levels, the higher goals to aim for are to develop empathy for one another, to connect with one another, and to act for the benefit of others. The data provided in this chapter suggests that aesthetic experience within the high school context of this specific West Texas region is facilitated toward individualistic goals.

Another consistency within teachers' views of aesthetic experience is a tendency to focus mostly on technical skill and representational capabilities of students. Since most teachers emphasize that students create art products that contain aesthetically pleasing elements to be admired, the aesthetic approaches utilized are mostly Representational and Formalism (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). Some teachers, such as Iris and Carlos, *do* touch upon an emotional engagement within artmaking and, therefore, to some extent employ an Expressionism/Cognitivism method (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). However, there was no indication that teachers utilize the lived experience or social contexts of students as a foundation to inform future activities and lessons toward creating a better society. This data suggests that within this specific sample of high school visual arts teachers, a Postmodern/Contextualism approach is fundamentally nonexistent.

All these considerations inspire the following themes: Aesthetic Experience as a Skill Development Toward Individual Pursuits and Aesthetic Experience Facilitated with Minimal Consideration for Postmodern/Contextualism Views—these themes will be explored further in the next chapter. Additional data will be presented to confirm these findings and implications will be offered. Three other themes that were imbedded much deeper within the data will also be revealed. They are: A Disconnect of Self from Classroom Experience; Challenges Facilitating Aesthetic Experience; and Novel Views of Aesthetic Experience.

Chapter 6

Data Analysis Part II: Interpretive Findings

Transitioning to An Interpretive Approach

The previous chapter examined participants' interpretations and highlighted objective, essential, and universal characteristics of aesthetic experience according to them. This approach employed a *descriptive* approach in efforts to maintain scientific rigor, generalizability, and to get to the essence of aesthetic experience as understood by the participants (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Husserl, 1970). Through this process, I addressed the first part of my research questions which were: What is aesthetic experience and how is it recognized? And what are teachers' goals and role in facilitating these experiences? This chapter addresses the second part of my research questions which are: How is aesthetic experience planned for and facilitated? How are the meanings of aesthetic experience co-constructed between teachers and students. And finally, are their novel views of aesthetic experience that differ from the literature? This chapter looks even deeper at teachers' facilitation of aesthetic experience, planning, and their development of relationships with their students. This part of data analysis was done by way of an *interpretive* approach (See Figure 15. below), or analyzing data by interpreting how individuals' perceptions of a phenomenon (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Hiedegger, 1962)—in this case, aesthetic experience—influences their facilitation of it in the classroom.

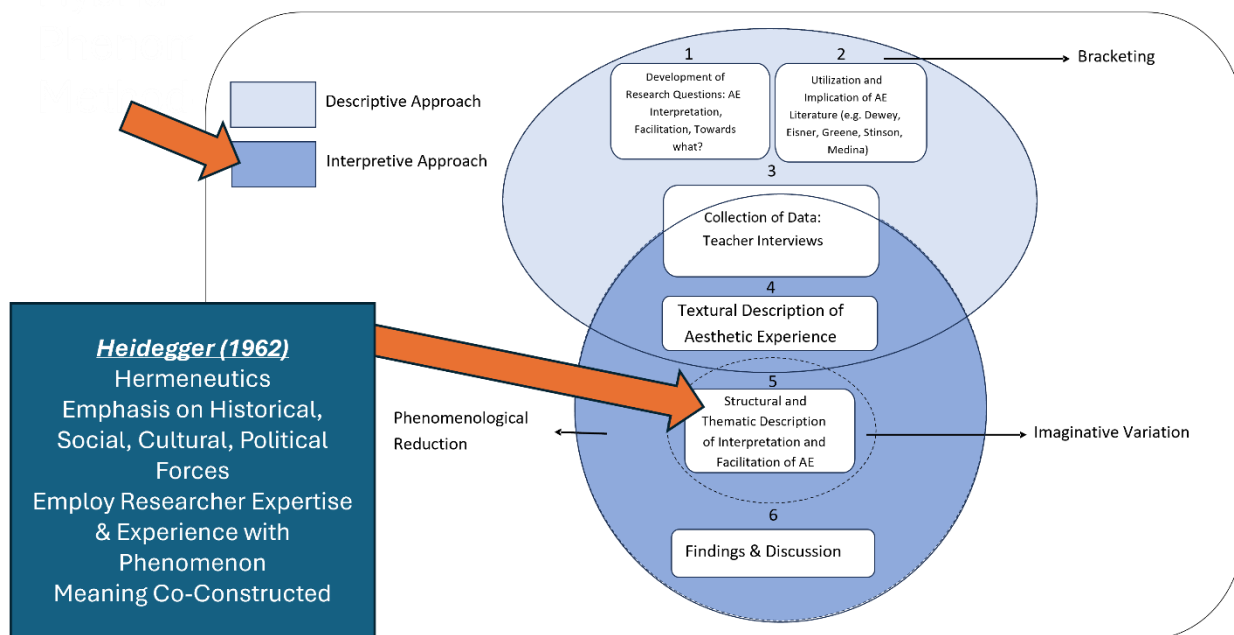


Figure 15: Interpretive Approach: Theme Development & Imaginative Variation

My Process in Coding and Developing Themes

Interpretive Phenomenology employs a *hermeneutical* approach which is extracting meanings and themes from lived experience through both verbal and non-verbal means of communication. Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) refer to this as an “imaginative variation mode” or a “phenomenological reduction” (p. 7). During this reduction method, I re-describe the described experience of participants to uncover the texture and structure of experience. This process is two-fold. On the one hand, aesthetic experience is outlined from the perspective of the participant. On the other hand, I also draw interpretive conclusions about their perspectives from my vantage point through additional coding. In seeking to gain structure of participants’ experience with aesthetic experience, codes emerged into patterns and then these were categorized into themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process was initiated by broad, open codes. For example, self-

confidence, elements and principles of art, originality, articulation, relationships, self-confidence, and work ethic were some of the early codes found within the interviews. A second round of more focused coding—which also began to take on the form of *axial coding*—illuminated more complex themes. For example, participants began to use phrases, such as a sense of nostalgia, creative liberty, vulnerability, manipulation of tools and materials, and transcendence.

As Alhazmi & Kaufmann (2022) describe in their work, the shift from a *descriptive* to an *interpretive* mode begins when the researcher takes into consideration how the experience with the phenomenon affects the cultural identity of participants (Gadamer, 2000; Gadamer and Linge, 2008; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). During this portion of analysis, an effort was made to engage with the “texture” of each participants’ experience and reflect on how those meanings relate to the “context as a whole” (Alhazmi & Kauffmann, 2022). While primarily examining the context of the high school visual art classroom, I was also considering how teachers’ interpretations of aesthetic experience influenced their identity, as well as the identity of their students’ both inside and outside of the classroom. Moreover, a third round of exhaustive, selective coding helped to fine-tune themes which would also act as subheadings for this chapter. Some of these include the significance of leaving students alone in their creative process, the challenges in facilitating aesthetic experience, and novel views of aesthetic experience that differ from the literature.

In chapter five (the descriptive approach), I discussed how I integrated a member check of participants’ levels of aesthetic experience to make sure those outcomes were in alignment with what they had shared in the interviews. Again here, with the interpretive section, a separate member check was conducted to maintain accuracy and resonance throughout the engagement of both the “imaginative variation mode” and texture of participants’ experience. Evaluating the credibility of my results, I returned an already analyzed sample of each of their interpretations of

aesthetic experience, its influence on their cultural identity, and approaches within the classroom. For example, I gave Alejandro an excerpt of his contribution of a sense of nostalgia and Iris a passage on the significance of integrating and articulating choices for art elements as a pathway toward aesthetic experience. These selections were returned to me, some with edits, which were then integrated within this chapter, as well as the discussion.

Scholarly Lens Utilized for Interpretive Data Analysis

The lenses used to interpretively analyze the data included the conceptualizations offered by the following scholars: Greene, (2001); Medina, (2012); Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, (2020); and Stinson, (1985) (See Figure 16.). Furthermore, as advocated in Alhazmi & Kaufmann, (2022), my 20 years of experience as a visual arts teacher served as an additional lens for viewing the raw data. The scholarship that grounds this portion of the analyses is detailed below.

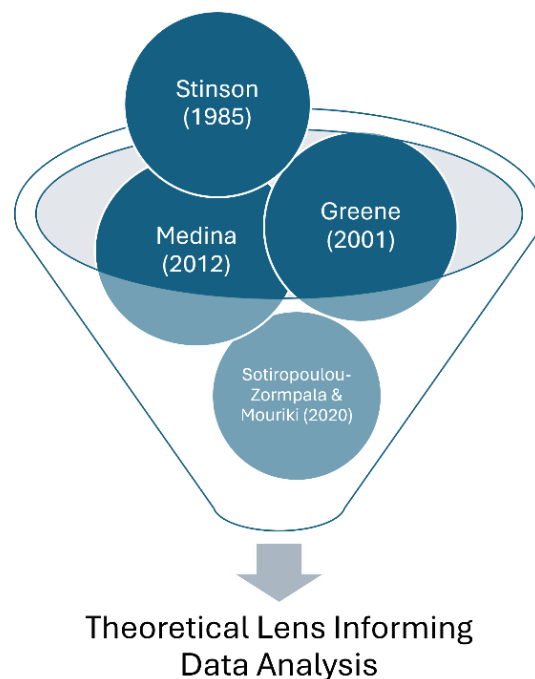


Figure 16: Scholarly Lenses Utilized for Interpretive Data Analysis

Stinson's (1985) Framework

Particularly when engaging the interpretive mode of the phenomenological process, Stinson's (1985) perspective on aesthetic experience is utilized as a lens to look well beyond students' artwork, and to some degree, *even* beyond their aesthetic development. Moreover, it looks "beyond the work of art to establish connections with [their] own life experiences" (Güvenç & Toprak, 2022, p. 22). This engagement is introspective and, at times, even spiritual in that the experience transcends from an external encounter to an internal one. This experience is not routine—it is a heightened sense of awareness about transcendence and transformation (Kaelin, 1989; Lim, 2004). Stinson's (1985) theory maintains that viewing or creating artwork is not a means-to-an-end. Rather, experiences with artwork should be reflective of one's relationship between self, community, and one's role within it. Stinson (1985) explains that the encounter with artworks acts as a means for "appreciating, connecting, [and] self-reflecting in critical awareness and moral agency" (p. 5). It is evident that Stinson's (1985) three levels of aesthetic experience are very explicit as to how each type of encounter influences one's reflection, perception of self, and role within society. Therefore, as I employ Stinson's (1985) lens when understanding why teachers facilitate aesthetic experience the way they do, my perspective is inclined by reflexivity on how art experiences might be aimed toward developing a commitment to others. Stinson's (1985) theory on aesthetic experience coincides with both Greene's (2001) and Medina's (2012) work in that they all view imagination and creativity as a means of empowerment toward visualizing one's potential to help others and change society.

Greene's (2001) Framework

Greene's (2001) concepts are utilized as a lens to see aesthetic experiences—within the context of educational spaces—as an *intentional* endeavor facilitated by teachers—*not* a passive coincidence. As Greene (1980) puts it, aesthetic experience is “achieved” (p. 316). Therefore, an individual needs to *make* the effort; to *take* the initiative to absorb themselves in the aesthetic object (Chang 2017; Greene, 1980). Secondly, the significance Greene (2001) places on the vulnerability necessary when engaging with an artwork is considered. One must be vulnerable to expose their life to the artwork or one must be willing to “lend a work of art your life” (Gulla, 2018, p. 108). Finally, (Greene's (2001) idea of developing agency within a space in-between is applied. In other words, there is consideration of the *encounter* one has with an artwork or the *space in-between* the viewer and the artwork, and the lived experience that is brought to it. As Greene (2001) elaborates, this sort of experience happens “in a space between oneself and the stage or the wall or the text” (p. 128). During this portion of the analysis of teachers' definitions and approach to facilitating aesthetic experience, I take into consideration what this “space” might be used for.

Medina's (2012) Framework

Medina's (2012) definition of aesthetic experience: “a moment of perception when our senses are functioning at their peak, because we are fully aware and fully awakened by the artwork in front of us” (p. 44) is also addressed in this portion of the analysis. I apply this definition as a lens throughout to assess the definitions of my participants. Medina's (2012) definition speaks to the significance of empowering the *body* as a means for attaining, retaining, and retrieving knowledge—or in other words—taking into consideration the capacity of one's body awareness

or body authority when viewing or making art (Robinson, 1982; 2001, Stinson, 1985). The issue of interest is the pedagogical efforts teachers might use to engage students' bodies in experiences with art. Thus, teachers' approaches in how they might encourage students to step inside the shoes of others, reflecting on how their actions affect others, and navigating their next course of action through compassion is examined. Also explored is the co-construction in understandings of aesthetic experience and the relationships between teacher and student.

In addition—much like Greene's (2001) awareness of the *space in-between*—Medina's (2012) *Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy* framework also supports investigation of the space in-between the body and an artwork. Through a critical lens, consideration is given to what meaning or experiences might transcend both the artist and their artwork toward the benefit of others. How might teachers' personal values and educational experiences influence whether this determination takes place? What values do teachers nurture? Is it to create beautiful works of art and win at competitions? To gain confidence in wielding art elements and articulating their use? To develop an awareness of one's existence? To nurture a life-long appreciation for aesthetic experience? To apply aesthetic experience toward social change? Which of these goals do teachers value most and why? What might get in the way of being successful in pursuing any of these goals? Medina's (2012) critical outlook of aesthetic experience is employed to aid in addressing these questions.

Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's (2020) Framework

Aware that my principal theoretical lenses were grounded upon a *Feminist, Critical Theory, and Postmodern* outlook of society, I did not want to neglect my participants' contributions if they did not necessarily fit well within these lines of thought. Therefore, I employed Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's (2020) four *Aesthetic Theory* approaches as part of my theoretical

framework (Representationalism; Expressionism/Cognitivism; Formalism; and Postmodernism/Contextualism). Analyzing teachers' approaches through these categories provided room to appreciate why teachers might facilitate aesthetic experience in other ways besides a Postmodern approach. As a former art teacher within the same school district as my participants for 20 years, my intention is that this research extends beyond theoretical reading. Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's (2020) integration within this study allowed for a more *practical* perspective of aesthetic experience engagement at the high school level while still encouraging a theme of societal transformation.

Introduction of Themes

Through my interpretive data analysis, a total of five major themes emerged. They include: (1) Aesthetic Experience is a Skill Development Toward Individual Pursuits; (2) Aesthetic Experience Facilitated with Minimal Consideration for Postmodern/Contextualism Views; (3) A Disconnect of Self from Classroom Experience; (4) Challenges Facilitating Aesthetic Experience; and (5) Novel Views of Aesthetic Experience. These themes were explored through subheadings inspired by *Axial Codes*—or exact wording that participants used to describe their facilitation of aesthetic experience—which emerged throughout the re-coding procedure. Through the process of *phenomenological reduction*, I interwove the various lenses of my theoretical framework (discussed above), my experience in teaching visual arts, my evolving knowledge of aesthetic experience, as well as participants' expertise to draw conclusions about the phenomenon within the high school context (See Figure 17.). As part of Alhazmi & Kauffman's (2022) hybrid methodology, I also integrated an *imaginative variation* (interpreted here as an *artistic researcher license*) to draw understanding from my participants facilitation of aesthetic experience, yet I also continue to “bracket” bias by including direct quotes from them.

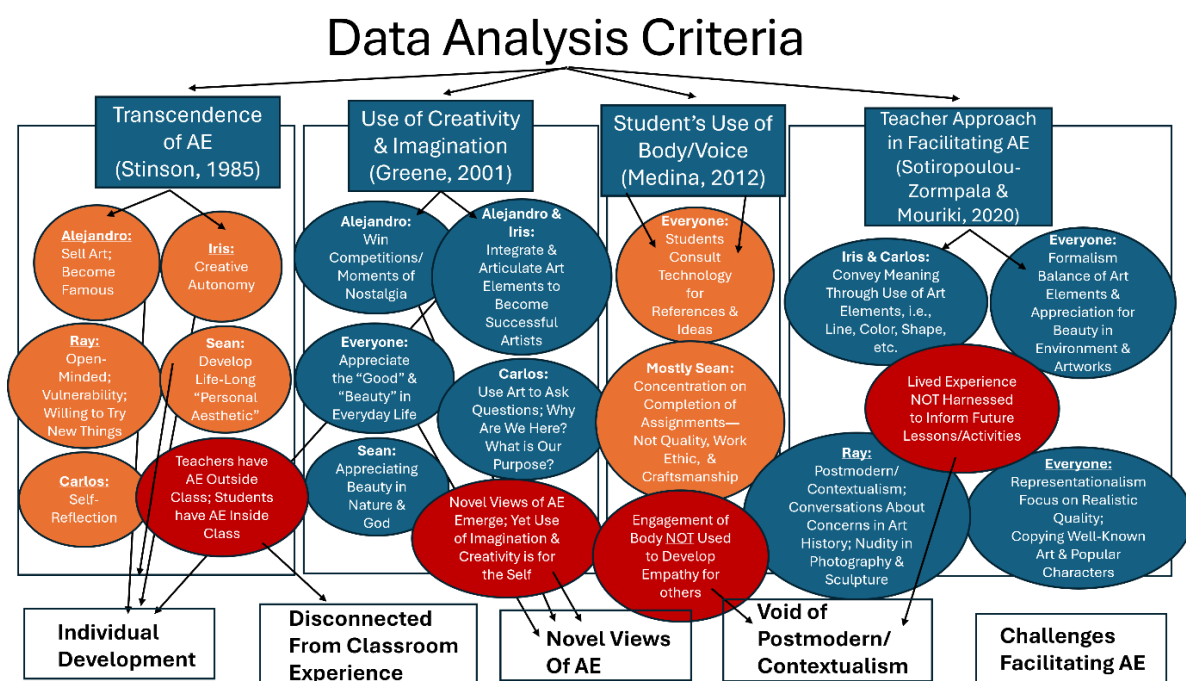


Figure 17: Data Analysis Criteria Informing Themes

Aesthetic Experience is a Skill Development Toward Individual Pursuits

Although my participants each had varying definitions of aesthetic experiences and ways to identify and facilitate them in their classrooms, there were several common themes that tied them together. Comparing my findings in relationship to my theoretical framework—specifically the concepts of aesthetic experience being a *collective* pursuit—one theme stood out immediately. Overwhelmingly, the teachers perceive aesthetic experience as a means toward *individual* growth—not necessarily as a cooperative pursuit or to create artwork that influences change in society. I state, “not necessarily” because participants may very well aim to develop their students individually in preparation to better collaborate artistically with others toward an ideal society. Yet, this would be a supposition that was not expressed in the data. The implication that can be drawn from their responses is that priority is placed on aesthetic development for personal fulfilment and

success—almost as a self-actualization progression (Maslow, 1968; 1970). This may be grasped in the way that teachers tailor their activities and lessons to engage students’ use and understanding of art elements, techniques, and creativity to gain confidence in themselves as a developing artist. This theme is elaborated on through subthemes inspired from the actual terms denoted by the participants. They include: (1) Selling Artwork; (2) Integration and Articulation of Art Elements; (3) Being Open-Minded and Vulnerable; (4) Questioning our Purpose in the World; and (5) Long-Term Appreciation for Beauty and Transcendence.

Selling artwork

Alejandro believes that the highest form of aesthetic experience his students can achieve is when they sell their artwork and become known for their talents. He encourages his students to create quality pieces that are likely to attract interest and sell. He elaborated: “Recently, I’ve been pushing a lot of...you know...do your art and sell it...I’ve been pushing a lot of that.” Since he feels so adamant about supporting his students in this effort, he goes even further by making it a point to buy his students’ artwork if it appeals to him. The following is an example of how Alejandro considers purchasing one of his student’s artworks and their interaction:

One of my students...a little ink drawing...I asked her...how much do you want for it, she was like...oh I want \$50. It looked beautiful...and I was like...this is really cool...this is sick. I need this...and I was like...yeah sure. I don’t make a lot of money, but you know...I’ll pay her...so she knows that artwork is valuable. I think that was the first time she sold something. Then I bought another one...a bigger piece...from that same student and she said \$150...she was really happy again.

Through this example, the data suggests that Alejandro buys his students' artwork because he wants them to recognize that their work has value. Another inference is that when one sells their artwork at a price which they feel validates the investment, it brings them satisfaction. On the one hand, to value one's creativity and imagination and see how it impacts society is certainly a significant step in the right direction (Greene, 2001). On the other hand, will this satisfaction eventually move beyond a personal *pursuit of happiness* (Freire, 2017; Rossatto et al., 2020)? There is a backside to this consideration that will appear later within the novel views of aesthetic experience in which a positive insight into selling artwork will be highlighted. For now, the hypothesis could be that the encouragement to invest oneself toward making monetary profits might solidify a market-based, meritocratic type of outlook about the purposes of artmaking (Apple, 2004; Aronowitz, 2004; Drinkwater & Ingram, n.d.; Ingram, 2013; Markovits, 2020). Consider the following encouragement about entrepreneurship from Alejandro. He elaborated: "I've sold some to like other places...and it feels good. And I think the third stage...you know you're like...I can actually sell this...I don't know...open an Etsy store...or whatever."

Taking all this into consideration, is it Alejandro's intention to encourage students to make artwork for the main purpose of selling it? The data reveals that Alejandro ranks selling artwork and possibly becoming famous as the top aesthetic goal to aim for. In addition, Alejandro indicated that when his students can sell their artwork, it acts as a means of validation that they are competent artists. And in Alejandro's eyes, a competent artist is one who produces and moves their artwork. Notice how in the following excerpt, the goal is not to use artwork to connect with others to challenge our perception of society and roles within it. To some extent, an appreciation for artwork itself or even the creative process involved becomes irrelevant. Instead, it seems that

emphasis is placed on the individuals' capacity to make their artwork suitable to sell and get recognized for it. Alejandro expanded:

They can see that people are actually looking at their work...that enter competitions. And when it's those things...they're like I can actually do this...you know...I'm not just doing it because I'm good at it...like I can actually produce this and sell it.

As all teachers mentioned developing self-confidence in their students, take notice toward what ends Alejandro might be developing that self-confidence. The implication is that students are not developing confidence in appreciating their capacity to positively influence others to work in partnership through their artwork. Rather, the goal appears to be toward building confidence in oneself, *for oneself*. To put it another way, students are being assisted to be egocentric with their creativity and imagination—it isn't intended for anyone else's gain but the artist. It is significant to note that within this phrase, "I can actually produce this and sell it," the confidence realized here seems to convey an *individual* success. This accomplishment is arguably a worthy endeavor toward student achievement in the Arts—but, then what? How does that individual accomplishment benefit anyone else? Or is it meant to?

Integration and Articulation of Art Elements

While Alejandro paves the way for students' individual success by encouraging them to sell their artwork, Iris similarly assists students in developing their skillset using art elements. Iris demonstrates a passion to prepare her students with a robust grasp of art elements and principles so that they not only integrate these in their artwork, but so they can also articulate reasons for doing so. This consideration is significant because she doesn't just want competency in technique, she also wants students to develop the autonomy to use their imagination and voice. For Iris, it

appears that the capacity to communicate artistic choices to peers and teachers is perhaps even more valuable than creating beautiful artworks. This impression was confirmed within her hierarchy of aesthetic experience levels. Iris categorizes aesthetic experience depending on the number of art elements that her students can use, as well as how competent they are at articulating reasons for their choices. Ultimately, Iris wants her students to connect to their artwork personally and emotionally. She explained that although there would be visual indications of aesthetic experience regarding art elements, there would need to be verbal communication to recognize indicators of an emotional connection. Ultimately, students would need to be able to articulate these developments to her. She elaborated:

This is what an aesthetic experience is. It's about this emotional creative connection where students are trying to make the artwork their own. Well...I don't know if I'd look. I think I'd ask them what their intention was in their work. What they were trying to achieve...and if they achieved it. Cause I mean...just looking at their work...I wouldn't be able to see that they had their experience. I think I'd talk with the students and ask them what was the point? What were you trying? What was the meaning behind any of this...and if they were able to say it back to me and repeat whatever they thought or imagined in their head...I think that I'd confirm with them like...okay...yeah...you had your aesthetic experience...I can see. I can see that whatever you were thinking...whatever you're feeling...it's coming across in your drawing.

Through this excerpt, it seems that Iris seeks to push students beyond merely utilizing an aesthetic skillset—she also wants them to be articulate in how they utilize it. As seen in the literature, this consideration is extremely valuable toward students' aesthetic literacy development

(Greene, 1980; 1986; 2001; Gulla, 2018; Sessions, 2008). Iris' stance on articulation of elements, technique, and choices is not only beneficial to students presently—it is a skillset that can be used long-term. The concept of *temporality* (Dewey, 1934; Ortiz, 2022) comes to mind as students strengthen their capacity to reflect on where they have been, where they are, and where they are going in terms of their aesthetic development. Yet, toward what objective is this initiative being facilitated? Is this capacity only an encouragement for the student or is it intended also to strengthen the communicative skills of the class? Are students encouraged to utilize their acquired, aesthetic voice to converse with their classmates about how choices in their artmaking can inform the way they see themselves and society?

The data indicates that the ambition to develop a repertoire of art elements, as well as the competence to articulate them, is meant for the *individual*. Iris states: “I think I focus a little bit more on giving them the tools to create their aesthetic.” She also adds: “I was going through all of the elements of art and how they can be applied in their artwork to represent whatever they're trying to do.” Therefore, the objective of these skills appears to provide the tools necessary to create artworks and convey ideas to accommodate students' *personal* objectives—not necessarily to increase dialogue between students to reinterpret themselves and society. Yet, Iris' method can be seen as a move toward a more dynamic aesthetic experience (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020) as she is combining both a *Representational* and an *Expressive/Cognitive* approach. To contrast teachers' approaches, while Alejandro's teaching approach centers around what an artwork looks like (Representational), Iris' approach focuses both on what an artwork looks like, as well as the meaning it conveys (Expressive/Cognitive).

Despite these efforts to move beyond the artwork itself toward conversations about it—this still does not parallel to conversations about what artwork might motivate us to do (Greene,

2001; Medina, 2012; Stinson, 1985; Sunday, 2015; 2018). Considerations about how artmaking can inspire us to collaborate toward reimagining society are still relatively absent. Although Iris' goals toward aesthetic experience are considered, it is significant to consider some other primary goals for her class—She wants her students to achieve a sense of accomplishment and have fun. Again, this success could be seen as mostly an individual pursuit, or one that might not reach beyond individual fulfillment. She went on to elaborate:

Bringing students back to when they enjoyed drawing and coloring. I'm just trying to spark a little bit of that excitement that they would have when they were kids. When a kid gets excited and they do something well...even if it's really simple...and I give them the praise that I think that they deserve...for the effort they put in. I think that's what I'm trying to achieve is them feeling proud of accomplishing something...even if it's not something that they're gonna pursue or go beyond Art I class for the mandatory credit. I just want them to enjoy it like how they enjoyed it when they were little.

When considering Alejandro's approach, Iris is helping her students develop a sense of confidence. While Alejandro does this through mastering technique and organized artworks, Iris helps students develop confidence by reminding them that art is fun, and creativity can be accomplished as when they were younger. This most likely adds a holistic teaching approach toward aesthetic experience. Afterall, aesthetic experience tends to be regarded as an experiential and satisfying endeavor (Edwards, 2010). Yet even these aims do not necessarily elicit collaborative initiatives. In fact, discussed more later, all the teachers purposely remove themselves from dialogue just as the creative process begins for students. Iris explained:

I kind of just leave them alone for the drawing part. If they ask for some feedback on...or if I'm walking around...and I see that they can use a little bit of guidance...I will...but if they're doing well on their own...then I just kind of leave them.

It is important to note all the teachers interviewed do this to some degree. However, based on the above excerpt, how can there be an effective reinforcement toward collective activities if teachers remove themselves from interactions? Once more, the data suggests that aims to integrate art elements and strengthen students' articulation of their choices doesn't necessarily facilitate the engagement of shared struggles, shared aspirations, nor shared voice. Moreover, the integration and articulation of art elements seem to be intended for students' *personal* advantage.

Open-Minded and Vulnerable

Another feature in the findings that suggested facilitation of aesthetic experience toward individual benefit has to do with encouraging students to be open-minded and vulnerable. These concepts are seemingly valuable traits for an individual to develop regardless of subject or grade level. However, concentration is placed on these characteristics because of the way they are framed within this specific context to facilitate aesthetic experience. Because of Ray's experience with change before his teaching career, he was inspired to offer his students the advice to accept change both with their artmaking process, and in their everyday lives. This was particularly significant to him because he felt it helped to alleviate the fear of artmaking. He explained:

When I came to teaching...the other thing that I brought to this job...I tell my students that nothing's ever gonna be forever...you're gonna probably want to switch jobs in 20 years...you know...there's always gonna be a change...and for my job in entertainment...it was always changing. That's the great thing...like...it's always change.

You don't know what's gonna happen. So that's always how I lived my life. So...the only way that they can be successful at all and learn is to be vulnerable because they have to try. You have to be able to trust others around you...like...okay...I'm going to be vulnerable...and I trust you...I'm gonna open up to something that I'm...you know...scared about or unfamiliar...and I'm not gonna be embarrassed. So...I think trust in a relationship has to do something with it. And then...I also think it has to do with transformation...change...that like...you're willing to confront something...try something new...and if you like it...or you connect with it...be willing to change who you are...or change your perception on things.

Being open-minded and vulnerable are not negative features in and of themselves. In fact, these characteristics could be said to be the foundation of both Stinson (1985) and Medina's (2012) arguments. Thus, vulnerability is a significant component of the framework in which this study is established on. However, highlighting these attributes in the context of participant narratives bring attention to the indication that their use is aimed toward the benefit of the *individual* student—not necessarily a triumph for the group. Being open-minded and vulnerable throughout the creative process will likely aid students in building their confidence—but toward what purpose? Are students encouraged to use their openness and vulnerability to create artworks for a sense of personal accomplishment? If so, this success could be harnessed toward developing empathy for others and using an aesthetic experience as a space to reinterpret how we interrelate and affect others through activities—even through artmaking (Medina, 2012; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020; Stinson, 1985).

Questioning Our Purpose in the World

Another variation of individual pursuits within the facilitation of aesthetic experience presents itself within Carlos' description about purposes for artmaking. He focuses efforts in getting students to think about what we have achieved as a society and how their artwork can intellectually stimulate our curiosity as to where we currently stand. Yet, emphasis does not move far from the self. There are a couple of activities that capture the essence of Carlos' facilitation of aesthetic experience. He elaborated on the first one:

I tell them that a self-portrait can be...like I told you...Van Gogh painted a chair...a long chair with a pipe on it. It talks about his loneliness and his solitude. So...they come up with some really surprising things with their self-portraits. They'll put symbols...my relationship with my mom...and a lot of things come out from those. I explained to them that a self-portrait does not have to be straight on your face.

This activity may advance students to reflect on their identity and develop the capacity to articulate it through an artistic voice. Both this activity and the one that follows parallel some of the classroom workshops that Medina (2012) conducted with her college students. For example, (1) Who Am I? (2) Why Am I Who I Am? And (3) Building Silhouettes. Activities such as these, like Carlos' techniques, are excellent ways to invite oneself and their values within the process of artmaking. Carlos welcomes students' interests and lived experience with the next activity He understands aesthetic experience, not just as an event to appreciate beauty, but also as a space to question ourselves. He explained:

It does have to do about beauty...but not necessarily...aesthetic experience also has to do with questioning our existence. One of the assignments I have is like...“Paint a Day in

Your Life”...and they have to go take a picture of a day in their life. Okay...then with Art I...just an introduction to creativity...So...that's the first hurdle they write 10 things that they like...and then I tell them...okay...from those 10 things choose like 5 things that you really think represents who you are or that you really like...and then I want you to draw like a graphic of each of those things...you know...a football...they draw a phone...and every time they do artwork, they have to explain the concept.

These initiatives may provide a starting point on which to build toward even more considerations about what the next step in reflectiveness might entail. So, what *is* the next step? According to Stinson (1985), Greene (2001), and Medina (2012), the next step would be to utilize our imagination to aim our purpose in life toward bettering society through our artwork. Is this a potential goal for Carlos and the other teachers? It might be, but this destination was not communicated within the data. Rather, it is within Carlos’ initiative that the potential to positively change society might lose momentum as the contemplation of existence seems to remain a personal undertaking.

Long-Term Appreciation for Beauty and Transcendence

Sean indicated that his positive experiences with art developed through his college training. He acknowledged one college art professor that encouraged him to reflect on classical artworks so that he could develop a “personal aesthetic.” Sean shared: “He took an interest in me, and he really got me interested in art history.” Sean added that in his college years he would be presented with only the subject matter and would have to come up with the tools and materials to create artworks. And, at other times, he would be presented only with the tools and materials and would have to devise the subject matter. Sean stated that he now presents his students with similar “gaps and

voids” rather than supplying them with all the information. Moreover, in his approach to instruction, Sean indicated he encourages students to interpret artworks in preparation for future encounters through critical thinking and problem-solving. Sean elaborated:

I think it's better to confuse them and ask questions. I really try not to give them both [medium and subject matter]...so that they have to think about it. Alright, if I'm giving them the subject then they have to pick the medium, or if I'm giving them the medium, they have to pick the subject. So, it's kind of those voids...those blanks that force them to think. They don't understand that being bored and frustrated are absolutely essential to art. I do tell them that what I'm trying to give you is a lifelong gift. If we do formal analysis you will talk about elements. Talk about principles then we'll talk about what's going on in the painting. Maybe we'll talk about the history...and you know the artist and that kind of stuff. Then, you should be able to do this with any work of art anywhere in the world. So, I'm trying to give you this experience...and again, you can apply this to nature...you can apply it to photo...whatever...individual experience. But...I also want them to have a life-long ability to recognize beauty.

Sean views aesthetic experience as a catalyst to connect lived experience with art and nature which may have been influenced by his art training to think critically about the world around him and seek his own answers. For Sean, these approaches to art nurture the value of study, work ethic, and a life-long ability to interpret the aesthetic. Sean's narrative indicates a teacher who consciously presents information in a way to encourage students to think critically in drawing their own conclusions to aesthetic matters and transcendence toward the appreciation of nature. Yet, once more, the emphasis here seems to be on *individual* development and not necessarily a progression to lead one another toward shared pursuits about recognizing beauty within our

society. This indication is quite clear in Sean's wording. What he proposes is an "individual experience," a "personal aesthetic"—not a shared experience or a collective aesthetic. Sean rationalized: "In art, you should be able to walk in all worlds and be a part of none. I'm looking for them to develop their own style...their own voice."

Considering this specific angle of Sean's perspective of aesthetic experience and artmaking provides a clearer understanding of just how personal he feels these experiences should be. The implication here is that artmaking is essentially a lone activity to explore many different realms but eventually arrive at one specific approach—*one's own*. I purposely concluded this subheading with Sean's contributions to underscore the challenge to understand aesthetic experience as anything beyond an individual pursuit or personal acquisition. Not to say that aesthetic pursuits cannot, or do not begin at the individual level, but what is to become of personal fulfillment, appreciation, acquired skills, questioning, and reflection? At what point can artmaking involve using one's imagination toward reinterpreting oneself and society in ways that do not already exist (Greene, 2001)?

Aesthetic Experience Facilitated with Minimal Consideration for Postmodern/Contextualism Views

As teachers created their hierarchy of aesthetic experience levels and described their process in planning their lessons and activities, it became apparent that their approaches gravitated toward a comparable style. Although slight variations emerged between participants teachers facilitate aesthetic experience primarily through *Representationalism* (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). This aesthetic approach is about sharing well-known artworks with students and having them either copy the art to some extent, or at least utilize the work as a reference to guide students to create realistic qualities in their art. This motive was seen recurrently with Alejandro

as he is possibly the most engaged—of all the teachers—to see his students succeed at art competitions and shows. For him, if a certain level of realism is lacking in an artwork, not only is it hindering an aesthetic experience, but perhaps more importantly, is that it won't win art awards or portfolio review competitions.

The *Formalism* approach is also noticeable with Alejandro, Iris, and Sean's facilitation of art education. This is because students' artwork is assessed with less regard for context—or the personal, moral, cognitive, and practical reflection of an art object (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). Instead, aesthetics is assessed based on the form of the artwork utilizing the elements and principles of art (Bell, 1913; 1958). Although the teachers shared incentive to engage students expressively in their artwork, Iris and Carlos are identified as the two leading teachers who emphasized the significance of helping their students develop both an emotional and cognitive connection to artwork; they were mostly aligned with an *Expressionism/Cognitivism* aesthetic approach (Barrett, 2017; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020).

Although some teachers suggest their attention is toward integrating students' prior knowledge, interests, and culture within the lessons and activities, their primary focus is not on using these considerations to shape the foundation for the next lesson or project. In other words, engaging students' identities, social awareness, lived experiences, and political views (Duncum, 2000; Freedman, 2000) *may* have been encouraged throughout the creative process. However, these contextual factors were not necessarily the focal point of lessons, nor were they deliberately geared toward self-understanding, a reinterpretation of art, or a transformative approach to enhancing the quality of life (Anderson, 2003; Sandell, 2009).

The data indicates that teachers may well touch on these aspects; some teachers gear their facilitation of aesthetic experience in ways that will guide students on a pathway to consider these goals. For example, Carlos encourages his students to ask existential-type questions about why we are in the world and what role we play in it. Sean is hopeful that his students develop a life-long, personal aesthetic in which they can appreciate their world aesthetically. Ray helps his students to see that change in life is inevitable so being vulnerable and open to it can make one's life experiences more positive. Yet, the data does not suggest that their aesthetic approach is built upon students' reinterpretation of their world, nor is it based on *students' goals* for artmaking. On the other hand, the data *does* show that their approach is founded primarily on goals that have become *commonsensical* (Apple, 1990) within the visual arts curriculum—which is demonstrating use of art elements and principles, showing mastery of technique, being expressive and creative, and making realistic-looking artwork. Although these goals are significant, none of them have much to do with using student aesthetic voice, identity, or body authority (Medina, 2012) to question, reinterpret, or disrupt the status quo—these are intentions of a *Postmodern/Contextualism* approach (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020).

According to Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020), social, historical, and political influences are considered when viewing and creating artworks through a *Postmodern/Contextualism* approach. By encouraging students to be creative and open-minded, the teachers might have stimulated students to consider certain social, historical, political influences on some level, yet it might not have been *purposefully* facilitated by teachers. In general, Alejandro, Iris, and Carlos steer clear of political, religious, or personal conversations that they believe might cross lines of appropriate conversations for school. The following is an excerpt from

Iris' interview as she describes how she is reluctant to engage with her students about certain topics.

I don't want to encourage religious discussion because I don't feel like I'm well equipped with the knowledge to provide good feedback for that. So...I kind of just avoid that as well as politics. I try to avoid those discussions because I don't want to misinform them...especially because we live in an area that's very Catholic...very religious. I don't discourage students from expressing their religion in their artwork...I just don't discuss it with them. I just tell them like...hey...if this is something you're interested in... you can include it. And then I mean, as far as morality...I always just try to remind them that although it is art...this is still school...and their work needs to be appropriate to the setting that they're in.

As Iris suggests, religion, politics, and ethics tend to be perceived as complicated topics—and especially within public school settings—these tend to borderline what are considered appropriate subjects. Still, these areas are prone to be applicable to one's identity, social awareness, and lived experience. Therefore, to deliberately avoid them—even if they are considered risky discussions—means to also avoid one's tools or pathways toward empowerment and transformation of self and society (Pinar, 2012). Alejandro will likewise cautiously intervene or even stop class conversations if he feels it is headed in the wrong direction or inappropriate for school. He is especially careful when students put him on the spot asking questions about *his* political views. He mentions that he is concerned about being briefly recorded by one of his students and his words taken completely out of context. So, he feels it is necessary to censor portfolio reviews and class critiques so that they don't encourage political and religious reactions. He explained:

If the student wants to talk about it...I am not opposed to it...if a student wants to do something...I am no one to tell them no...but if it starts getting like...if I know it's something that's going to cause like a big thing...then I'll stop it. Students are not ready to have those conversations...okay...I'm not saying all of them. That student that did the art piece...maybe they are...but not everybody else. I made it clear with my students...I don't want to talk about politics or religion. I don't want to get recorded saying something that can be taken out of context... because you know people get fired.

Carlos shared an experience about one student who wished to connect her journey as a transgender person in her artwork and art critiques. With the approval of the student's mother, Carlos hesitantly permitted the artwork and dialogue in his classroom hoping that it would be a fruitful experience not only for this student, but for his entire class. He expressed reluctance in this undertaking. Like Alejandro, Carlos expressed hesitation with these kinds of conversations that he feels are non-traditional. To navigate these occurrences, he strictly maintains an "I'm the teacher, you're the student" type of relationship and employs his authority to censor.

I want to highlight a discussion that Ray had with his students that suggests he may lean somewhat toward Postmodernism/Contextualism (although, discussed in the next chapter, this may not be in the fullest sense). The following excerpt consists of complicated conversations that the other teachers explicitly stated they might either be very hesitant to engage in or avoid altogether. Ray explained.

Like the other day, we had a really great discussion...there were chapters on photography... and we just got a new book. And I showed them the video on...do you

know the Napalm Girl from Vietnam...the young girl who's running down the street naked like this? So...I was bringing in photojournalism...and how photography...what you can do...different elements you can do with it...how it could be manipulative...how it can help...how it could be political...I showed them the picture. It was a big deal when it was published in the early seventies. First of all...we discussed why...how that changed the Americans' point of view on the war...because there's a burned...naked girl running down the street...America printed a naked girl...and then one guy was like...it was sexual...but it's a naked girl. I was like...yeah...but it's not...is it a sexual naked girl? Cause just the last class we were doing sculpture...and I showed them a video on Michelangelo's David...and we're discussing that as a nude...you know...We discussed David...how it's like...perfection...we discuss how at the end of the Renaissance they brought back nudes into the art world because it was gone for all the medieval times...and also we discussed like...David's hands are really big...his head is really big...and so I also brought up the size of his penis. And I said, and it's obviously very...I said...disproportionate to the body. And...of course...they're all embarrassed...and I said...well...in the Renaissance they use very small...If you look at the Renaissance artwork...small penises...and then they laugh a little. It's because it's assigned...but also small penises meant...it was a sign of humility and self-control. In today's world it would be completely the opposite...you know...but this was an intentional decision that Michelangelo made...So we're discussing that. And today...with the Napalm Girl we discussed...Can that photograph be published today? We have wars going on...We see dead bodies every day now from Palestine...from the Ukraine...you know...But if we

saw this...and they said today...they didn't think it could be published...and I said...I agree with them.

The conversations about nudity, which also include themes of art history, war, death, the male anatomy, and current political events, are exactly the dialogue that Alejandro and Carlos deliberately expressed they refrain from engaging in with their students. Both Alejandro and Carlos's narratives clearly indicated that there is to be no nudity in student work. Although Ray never made his position known whether he allows students to include nudity in their work, his narrative does indicate that he is okay talking about it with his students in relation to artistic choices in history. This significant contrast stands out in the data, given the very clear indication of the other teachers in deliberate effort against addressing such a topic.

It is significant to note that although Ray *does* make it a point to engage in complicated conversations with his students, his approach does not really meet the intent of Postmodernism/Contextualism as described by Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020). The data suggests that Ray involves students by noting the status quo for art history's sake, but these conversations do not seem to be intended to inform forthcoming lessons and activities engaging students' daily experiences and future lives, *disrupting* the status quo, and/or enabling cultural transformation.

Based on these examples, the data reveals that the motivation to shape one's curriculum based on the context of students' lived experience and politics is predominately nonexistent. Therefore, Postmodern/Contextualism is not illuminated along with the other three aesthetic approaches in the data. What follows is a brief explanation of how each teacher utilizes three of the four aesthetic approaches from Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020). This occurs by

analyzing teachers' aesthetic levels from chapter five, as well as comparing their facilitation of aesthetic experience through the approaches of Representationalism, Formalism, or Expressionism/Cognitivism. Ultimately, only one aesthetic approach is used to identify each of their facilitation styles.

Aesthetic Experience through Representationalism

This approach is apparent with Alejandro's facilitation of aesthetic experience, as he particularly focuses on students' ability to develop quality artwork more than expressive, contextual, or even integration of art elements and principles. This was reflected in his discussed concentration on art composition. For example, Alejandro talked about breaking down drawing methods into smaller training exercises that specifically isolate parts of the procedure. He shared about having his students practice shading a sphere with the five-elements of shading and utilizing a value scale. The sphere must have a wide range of values that are distinct. Alejandro stated he encourages his students to create the "perfect" sphere, and he will highlight a student's sphere to the rest of the class that meets his expectations so that they can copy the successful technique. For Alejandro, his narrative on art training was about developing his students so that they can make beautiful works of art. The aesthetic experience comes from being inspired to create beautiful works of art and from appreciating those artworks once they are completed. Alejandro illuminated:

When it comes to something like the sphere...and I show them specifically how to do this. And I told them...I want a perfect sphere...I go...and I see who has the best one and I show it to the rest of the class. Hey...guys...this is exactly what I want to see. Yours has to look exactly like this. So...it's those things...like...it has to be perfect. So...I have this level or standard. I guess it's a high standard that I asked of them.

Craftsmanship is also a significant component in portfolio development and aesthetic literacy for Alejandro. Thus, he views an aesthetic experience in the classroom as being dependent on the quality of an artwork. He elaborated:

I started looking more into craftsmanship. You know...your lines...really clean...your color...layers...whether they look good. For example...I had this student...and I saw it in front of me...it was very...not sloppy...but it wasn't clean. It just seemed like an underlay of pencil and one coat of acrylic...she just made one pass at it...and didn't go back over it. So...it looked good far away...but not up close.

Aesthetic Experience through Formalism

Among those interviewed, it was Iris and Sean who placed emphasis on facilitating aesthetic experience through Formalism (although Iris will also be highlighted for her expressive/cognitive approach below). This means that their approach in creating and viewing artwork is void of context—be it the meaning behind the artwork or artist's intentions. Instead, students are encouraged to reflect on the form, shape, line, or color that were utilized and appreciate the beauty that was elicited from those art elements. While both Iris and Sean demonstrate Formalism approaches, there are subtle differences. For instance, Iris focused more on fostering the skills necessary to achieve beauty and Sean placed emphasis on appreciating the skills of self and others to create beauty in artwork—this includes the beauty found in nature.

To Iris, her role is not so much about teaching students what aesthetic experience or aesthetics is as she feels this awareness is personal and will come with time. Rather, she feels her responsibility is to focus on fostering the skills to create visually aesthetic products. Again, through

her aesthetic levels she provided in chapter five, the indication is that Iris sees the way toward her goal through the development of art elements and principles. She explained:

I think I focus a little more on giving them the tools to create their aesthetic...to achieve their visual aesthetic...like this is how you know...what kind of lines are you using? Does this straight line...is it angry? Or is it calm? And that's kind of how I approached when I was going through all the elements of art...and how they can be applied and used in their artwork to represent whatever they're trying to do. I definitely try to give them a little bit of the examples in like talking about other people's artwork...but I think I'm a little bit better at explaining it in such a way...here are the tools that you can use...and here's how you can use them.

The suggestion here is that rather than putting emphasis on considering other people's artwork, Iris concentrates on sharing the tools her students can use to create and appreciate form with their own. She explains to her students how a variety of lines can convey different representations in their artwork depending on which direction they want to take. True, within these efforts, students may very well consider how their feelings, emotions, or experiences might influence choices in their artwork. However, contextualizing their art experiences is not the point within this part of her approach. Again, the point is on utilizing the learned skills to create art that is aesthetically pleasing to view—not necessarily to interpret meaning as would be the case with the Expressionism/Cognitivism approach.

Sean utilizes a Formalism approach by nurturing his students to appreciate the beauty in their artwork, the artwork of others, and within their environment. He *does* teach his students elements of art and technique. Yet, Sean does not concentrate on proficiency of these skills—the

focus is more on the potential students possess to create and appreciate beauty regardless of their skill level. Sean defines aesthetic experience as the consideration of beauty and truth. He states the belief that the development of one's aesthetic is best accomplished through the study of art history in which one will explore the world of classical beauty, architectural beauty, and natural beauty. He mentions that truth may also reveal itself in the form of ugliness but is a necessary part of aesthetic experience. He states that "transcendence is a vertical experience." From his perspective, the fundamental goal of aesthetic experience is personal, a matter of individual perception, and a connectivity with God or nature—not necessarily with other individuals as a collective engagement. He explained:

The true definition of aesthetics is the study of beauty. But generally...these kids have not had a sublime aesthetic experience...that you are overwhelmed with beauty and terror at the power of God's creation. I like them to be able to think for themselves and I really like them to be able to problem-solve. I like them to be able to recognize beauty. So...I teach them that...and I do teach them through art history. I also want them to develop a personal aesthetic. I think it is absolutely individual and bound up in personal tastes.

From this excerpt, Sean indicates a context to aim toward—a connectivity with God and/or nature. However, the focus is on personal tastes of art's beauty and form. Sean will emphasize beauty and form by making connections to students' environment. For example, he will ask them to reflect on the way their neighborhood looks like, to notice the mountains or sunsets within our region, or to take the time to notice the reflection that can be found in bubbles. He went on to explain:

But...really...I'm just trying to get them to appreciate beauty and craftsmanship...and to the extent that it's possible...take their time making something...and even notice simple

stuff like...hey...are you the house on the block that has the weeds and the broken-down car? Like...maybe fix that. I mean...hell...if I can get them to pay attention to...the rainbow reflection on the bubbles while they're doing dishes.

Sean moves his attention away from technique and representationalism and more toward an appreciation of an artwork's form. This can be seen, not only in how he motivates students to reflect on beauty in their world, but also in the way Sean encourages them to proceed in their artmaking. In the following excerpt, Sean recognizes a developmental shift in his students as they tend to hyperfocus on their ability to draw realistically (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970; 1987). Sean navigates this by redirecting their focus on technical skills and toward an appreciation for beauty in what they *can* accomplish, as well as seeing beauty in daily routines that are not usually considered art. He elaborated:

Most of the kids at this age...like psychologically...about the age of 13...they start becoming dissatisfied with their ability to draw realistically...and most of them quit...and a very small percentage of them persist...and they push through it. So...what I'm trying to do is take the focus off whatever idea of perfection it is that they have that's stopping them from making things and getting them to see the beauty in something that they can create...that maybe isn't something they would have before considered beautiful. For example...say the way someone signs their name.

Aesthetic Experience through Expressionism/Cognitivism

Iris and Carlos seem to be the ones most concerned with their students expressing themselves, having an emotional attachment to their work, as well as being aware of the cognitive value of these experiences. While Iris emphasizes that aesthetic experience comes in the way of creativity and use of critical thinking skills, Carlos believes it derives from contemplating big questions and letting those motivate directions within artwork. He described:

All arts...religions...and sciences are branches of the same tree...they're all trying to answer the same questions...What are we? What is this crazy body we're in? What are we? Where do we come from? Do we come from just evolution and an uncaring universe? Or is there a God? And where are we going?

Iris' approach in observing, reflecting, and implementing different teaching styles is comparable to what she encourages her students to do. For example, she aims to absorb a variety of approaches from other teachers but ultimately *makes them her own*. She likewise encourages her students to do the same in their artmaking. That is, to learn as much as they can from others about technique and art elements but then personalize their art through use of their creativity—or as she termed it: “Creative liberty.” She explained that this creative pursuit also encompasses utilization of critical thinking skills that she feels is valuable in making connections to class concepts and evolving beyond the rudimentary expectations for the activity. Iris expanded:

And then it kind of ties into that creative liberty where students are using their critical thinking skills...their creative thinking skills...And it is all just kind of coming together

beyond the basic requirements of the assignment...which I think it doesn't happen very often.

Carlos is a firm believer that creativity is the highest form of cognitive ability. This is a sentiment that is very much in alignment with concepts from scholars such as Dewey (1934) and Eisner (2002). Carlos went on to elaborate that to be creative requires abstract thinking to come up with something original and manipulate tools and materials in new ways. He indicated that creativity is both a body and mind experience because creativity requires engaging one's emotions to inspire conceptual thinking for novel ideas. In fact, he considers students who "get into their artwork" or have an aesthetic experience, are involved in a "meditative" endeavor. He explained:

So that's why we're in art class. So that you guys start using your creative brain to come up with stuff. And I tell them that creative thought comes under the umbrella of abstract thinking. And abstract thinking is the highest form of thought there is...that gives you an emotional visceral experience. Doing artwork is a meditative thing when you get into it...really into it...it's a meditative thing...going into another world...living in the art...living in the art world.

For Carlos, creating art is more than just copying how others interpret the world. Rather, he wants his students to really observe and reflect on why aspects of our world are perceived the way they are, as well as why others choose to represent it in such ways. Carlos encourages his students to push themselves beyond traditional representations of the world and express themselves based on a rational and informed perception through self-study. He elaborated that society has been trained to accept a one-dimensional view of ourselves through straightforward symbols that do not capture the complexity of the world. He expounded:

I tell them they need to observe reality. You are stuck in a mind warp that society...the media...and everything...has proposed this reality. Hence...when you draw a heart... you draw a valentine...but you don't think about drawing a heart the way it looks like. Have you ever looked at a heart?...the way it looks like? I tell them you need to start rendering from what you are actually seeing...I tell them you have to see color. I tell them like when you draw skin when we get into skin and painting...most people paint base skin. But...if you paint base skin with values...your paintings are gonna look like that movie toy story. When you look at toy story there's solid colors with values in them...and it looks like a plastic world. It doesn't look like reality. But when you look at your hand...I tell them... look at your hand. Look at all those red splotches all over the palm of your hand...that's blood. Your skin is translucent. Believe it or not, it's got a thickness to it...but it's translucent. There's different layers to your skin, and parts of it will come through...same with shadows. I go...whenever you're looking at anything...light is bouncing all over the place. It's light that is creating the visual and light is a spectrum of a whole bunch of colors.

Carlos puts a great deal of effort into making the connection between mind and body tangible for his students. On the one hand, Carlos nurtures them to utilize their cognitive abilities in understanding the world and how to represent it through art. On the other hand, he also motivates them to engage their emotions while artmaking. The idea is to use both mind and body to develop a conceptual idea for artwork, use it to inform directions through one's creative process, and then articulate those choices through manipulation of tools and materials. He continued that the result is utilizing memory and experience to influence one's environment in some way. He illustrated this conceptual development by interpreting a self-portrait as a cognitive endeavor that also conveys emotional values. He elaborated:

Everything is sort of like a self-portrait. And every time they do artwork...they have to explain the concept. But even when we do the self-portrait...I tell them...look at this painting by Van Gogh. It's just a chair. Okay...it's just a chair? That chair is a self-portrait. Why is it a self-portrait? Because that chair symbolizes his loneliness. So...you literally do not have to have a person's face to be a self-portrait. Almost all artwork is a self-portrait anyway. Creativity involves memory. It involves experience. It involves learned experience from yourself and other people. And you are manipulating an environment. That's what creativity is. You're manipulating an environment. And this environment is what is going through your brain and coming out in some way.

A Disconnect of Self from Classroom Experience

The third major theme is there seems to be a disconnect, not only between the aesthetic experience of teachers and students, but also from the creative process/experience within the classroom. Moreover, the data suggests this disengagement seems to be more intentional than a coincidence. This is because the teachers indicated that they deliberately distance themselves from both students' creative process, as well as their aesthetic experiences. It needs to be noted that the teachers *do* facilitate the tools, materials, and environment for these experiences to take place—but then remove themselves so students may complete the journey on their own. This is identified as the first sub-theme that will be addressed below. A second sub-theme that is likely less of an intention from teachers, is there also seems to be a way of perceiving their own growth in aesthetic experience that influences their outlook on student experiences—this has to do with *what kinds* of artworks are viewed and *where* they are viewed at.

A third sub-theme has to do with teachers' perception of aesthetic experience as it pertains to their own artmaking and viewing outside of school. Although some teachers shared an experience about how they were affected by the artwork of others—usually masterpieces to be found in famous museums—most do not recognize aesthetic experience as something they achieve when creating their own art. These factors might play a significant role in the detachment between teachers' and students' aesthetic experiences, as well as impact the way students view their engagement with art. Furthermore, the teacher narratives did not indicate much effort was put forth to harness a connection. These identified sub-themes: (1) Intentional Disengagement; (2) Aesthetic Experience Achieved Mostly in Art Museums; and (3) Aesthetic Experience Seems Absent in Teachers' Artmaking are further examined below.

Intentional Disengagement

This consideration of withdrawing from students' creative processes is discussed further later as a novel view of aesthetic experience. Currently addressed are the types of disconnection that emerged from the data. In addition, questions are raised as to how facilitation of students' aesthetic experiences might be affected. It is important to note that although “intentional disengagement” might stir negative connotations about participants' approach, the data indicates that their doing so is done as a constructive effort to develop and nurture students' self-confidence, autonomy, critical thinking, and problem solving. Therefore, it needs to be noted that teachers are *not* “disengaging” from supporting their students. Rather, the narratives denote that they are disengaging from certain aspects of their artmaking process.

According to Iris, a primary goal for her students is that they develop creative independence. She wants to pull further and further away from their creative process so that they

can make decisions on their own and potentially struggle with choices that they have made. She feels the only way that they are ever going to become comfortable with taking risks and developing their creativity is if they learn how to be on their own. She elaborated:

I want them to have some creative independence. I want them to be able to think for themselves when they are creating their artwork...because I feel like...I found out that a lot of times...If I don't tell a student almost exactly what to do...they are lost...and they can't think creatively by themselves...independently. So...I'm hoping to kind of get to that point where I can just tell them...you know...this is what you're doing...run with it...without having to give step by step for everything.

Similarly, Alejandro shares that he used to have checkpoints throughout the creative process in which he would assess students' progress in their artmaking. In other words, he would check in on their progress with finding their idea, drawing preliminary sketches, their technique development, researching the representation of their idea, or manipulation of media. However, Alejandro discovered that these checkpoints seemed to be ineffective because students rarely committed to what they said they were originally going to do. He indicated that students, to his approval, were thinking like artists, in which it is the norm to completely abandon a preliminary idea or a sketch to go in an entirely different direction. Alejandro also found it counterproductive to be involved in every aspect of students' process—and at times, in *any* aspect of it—especially for those students who are self-motivated and have their own aesthetic agenda set. He feels that even if students are taking an excessively long time to complete an assignment for his liking—as long as they are engaged in it, he questions the need to “hover” over them and rush their process. He went on to elaborate:

Do another sketch...do this...I used to tell them...do three sketches...show me your three sketches...like little checkpoints. I used to do that...but then I realized that a lot of those checkpoints...the kids were not even really doing it. It started being a waste of time. You realize that the kids don't even pay attention to their sketch. I'm like...why are they doing the sketch in the first place...where they did something completely different. And then they started telling me like...it's because I already know what to do...I hear that a lot. And...I had a student. She was doing a painting...and it took her like a whole August...September...like half of October...and I never told her anything because every time she went into my class...she was painting and she was really into it. What is the point of me rushing her?

Carlos also makes every effort to stay out of the students' process and, in a sense, disconnect once the instructions have been given and objectives of the assignment are made clear. Carlos bases his approach on how he used to feel as an art student. He preferred it when teachers would leave him alone and allow him the opportunity to immerse himself in his drawings to the point that he would escape from the regular world and be in, what he terms, "the art world." He explained:

I try to let them be. You know...when I was in any art school...I never liked when the teacher was just on my ass. Hello...looking...and you know. So...we talked about the process of getting it done...and then I walk around and make sure they're working right. But that's my main thing. Are you working? I'm not like going around and policing if they're watching YouTube videos. I'm more concerned that they're working on something...and then so I kind of let them be.

Aesthetic Experience Achieved Mostly in Art Museums

Both Dewey (1934) and Eisner's (2002) efforts to advance visual arts and aesthetic experience into public schools some years ago are now met with a measure of resistance. Dewey (1934) argued that art was to be viewed and appreciated beyond the confines of an art museum—as an experience for everyone, not just the elite. Similarly, Eisner (2002) paved the way for public schools to consider the visual arts as a worthy discipline that could be integrated into the general curriculum—while at the same time enhancing it through interdisciplinary connections. Yet, these efforts seem to be challenged by some of my participants as they indicate that aesthetic experience is more likely to be had at a museum than in the art classroom. And not just any museum, but well-known museums or spaces that reside mostly beyond the West Texas region, and in some cases, even beyond the United States. Many teachers mention The Guggenheim, The Metropolitan Museum in New York City, The Seattle Art Museum, The Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, The Louvre, and The Vatican. The implication here is that an aesthetic experience necessitates an encounter with art beyond our everyday experiences.

Yet, many individuals have never been to such places. What of those individuals who cannot afford to visit such places? Does this mean that they may never achieve the *ultimate* aesthetic experience? This seems an apparent disconnect—based on teachers' levels of aesthetic experience attained within their classrooms (Chapter 5), their narratives provide evidence for the belief that the potential for aesthetic experience is something all their students possess, so long as they go through a process to reach it. Yet, it is also apparent that when they describe their own personal aesthetic experiences, there is a tendency to share *rare* occasions that happen in prestigious museums.

This distinction is beyond the scope of this research, yet it raises questions for future consideration. Why can teachers perceive their students capable of aesthetic experience in the art classroom, but when it comes to themselves, neither the classroom nor everyday experiences outside of it seem to be the right space for it? Is the classroom space not adequate for their experiences? Are teachers on a different aesthetic level from students in which it takes more sophisticated encounters to achieve aesthetic experience, and what are the implications of this for their teaching practice? As intriguing as these questions are, they need to be addressed in future research because they extend beyond the scope of the data of this study. Yet, some available evidence may be reflected upon, as some of the participants highlighted personal aesthetic experiences beyond the school walls.

Both Alejandro and Ray mention that they become disappointed when they ask students during lecture if they have been to certain museums or have seen certain, well-known art pieces in-person. At the same time, they express that they become delighted when students exclaim: “Oh...yeah...I’ve been there,” or “Yes...I’ve seen that painting in real life.” Alejandro described that, for the most part, students lack experiences with well-known art museums: “I always ask them...okay...how many guys have been to New York? And then from like the forty something that I have...only two of them raise their hand.” For Alejandro, viewing a well-known artwork in-person is a totally different experience from seeing it in a book or even online. He went on to elaborate:

But I don't think you'll get the same reaction from a student seeing a picture of let's say...I'm like...Oh cool...I'm showing this and that...you know...and that picture that I'm sharing on the screen in front of you. It's not the same as actually walking into the real

thing and seeing it in front of you...seeing it with...20 other people standing in front of it...it's just not the same. You have that moment like...I'm here...the same space that Van Gogh once stood...from his canvas. He was right here at one point...moving the brush...whatever. Seeing the Mona Lisa, in a room full of like 300 people from all over the world...gathering in that one little space to see. Yeah...it's never gonna be the same as to actually seeing it. I don't think you'll share the same excitement as me that I was like standing there.

Although Alejandro makes efforts for his students to grasp what he finds to be an aesthetic experience, it may not be understood by some of his students who may not have visited such places or engaged in the experience in such a way as to perceive it as an aesthetic moment. Still, he finds it extremely valuable to share experiences with students in which he had aesthetic experiences. For example, he described a time he visited the Van Gogh Art Museum in Amsterdam, Holland, and became overwhelmed with one painting—"The Potato Eaters." He elaborated:

Last year when I went to Amsterdam...I think one of the most eye-opening art pieces that I have seen in my life...I think seeing The Potato Eaters from Van Gogh. It's gonna sound super silly because I would tell myself...I came back like a different man...you know...Yeah...those light and dark browns...yellows.

The data indicates that Alejandro shares stories like these to connect with others about experiencing art at a level that is both transcendental and relatable. He explained: "I try to show my students...sometimes show your excitement." Alejandro went on to share that even though he is aware many of his students have not been to the places he has been, he still attempts to spark an enthusiasm about visiting museums by engaging their senses as he relays his stories.

It is interesting to note that Alejandro also perceives visiting museums—especially ones that are overseas—as a validation of an esteemed teacher that has these types of experiences. In other words, Alejandro feels it is important that his students know he has traveled and seen these famous artworks in person. The implication here is that this knowledge about a teacher adds value to lessons because students might be more inclined to respect a teacher who has experienced renowned art firsthand. He also mentioned it is important that students see their art teachers doing their own art and are involved in art communities. He expanded:

When we went to Amsterdam to the Van Gogh Art Museum, I saw the Potato Eaters...And then I remember the first time I saw the Sunflowers when I went to London...and it was just like an ah ha moment...you know...like you're just there with your mouth open. But I honestly think it's important to mention to students...to actually show them that you also go to museums. You also experience art in your own way. You're not just the teacher...you're actually like an art teacher...you actually go...and do workshops...or you...you actually do art. So...they know...like...my teacher went over here and he saw this.

Both Ray and Sean recognize that because of socio-economic factors, many students are not able to appreciate exceptionally renowned pieces of artwork. Sean feels extremely adamant that although there are some natural, geological landscapes and calendar-quality sunsets, it is difficult to reference beauty in the region we live in. He said: “[omitted] is a fairly ugly city. It's really sad that these kids are so impoverished for their experiences in Aesthetics.” It is notable that within this sentiment, our region is being compared to places like New York City, France, Holland, Greece, or Italy.

Sean explains that because of the lack of scenic opportunities within our region and the lack of magnificent museums (as compared to larger cities) more efforts are made to get students to think of beauty in what they *do* get to experience in their culture and everyday life experiences. Something that will be brought up later in the novel views of aesthetic experience, Sean has students consider a signature. He explained that a signature is something most people don't give much attention to and, even nowadays, many high school students have not yet developed their own signature. Sean inspires them to see a signature as an extension of their identity and the unique choice of swoops and dashes of line as beautiful and something to be admired.

Aesthetic Experience Seems Absent in Teachers' Artmaking

Beyond an indication of teachers viewing aesthetic experience as happening mostly outside the classroom walls, are the teacher narratives that do not see aesthetic experience as something that happens when *they* create artworks. Again, it is important to note that I am not suggesting aesthetic experience is absent within teachers' lives. However, based on my data, there is an indication of aesthetic experience as absent from some of the teachers' artmaking processes. For example, Carlos shares that he doesn't have any aesthetic experiences when engaged in visual arts—be it artmaking or art viewing. On the other hand, he does feel he has such moments when he listens to music or watches cinema. He went on to elaborate:

You know...I love art...that's my thing. But it's hard for art to give you that experience...a visceral...emotional experience. So...like...a lot of famous art now is soulless...It's made for money...or for shock value or whatever...and a lot of it is just soulless because it doesn't move you at all.

It may be considered surprising to hear that an art teacher who encourages and facilitates aesthetic experience within his visual arts classroom does not find the visual arts to be as emotionally engaging as listening to Beethoven's ninth symphony or watching a classic film. From data previously shared (see Chapter 5), Carlos makes it a point to integrate music and cinema as part of his class, so that from *his* standpoint, aesthetic experience could be facilitated more naturally. Alejandro provides additional insight. He admits that although he may have had an aesthetic experience well after his art was created, reprinted, and sold, he feels he has never had an aesthetic experience in the moment of creating. He shared:

When I'm creating my own artwork...I'm gonna be completely honest with you. I don't think that's happened...like in the middle of the piece...you know...where you're like...Wow!...you know.

Further reflection of Alejandro's view of aesthetic experience happening long after an artwork is created, lend understanding to the levels he provided (See Chapter 5). This is because he recognizes his students' highest level of aesthetic experience when they "move their artwork," or sell it and make a name for themselves. The implication that Alejandro's example brings to light is that the way teachers come to view aesthetic experience for themselves is likely going to shape how they view them regarding their students. Moreover, if Alejandro doesn't have aesthetic moments while he creates, he might not be anticipating that his students do either.

Iris offers a different take of aesthetic experience as absent in teachers' artmaking. Her narrative suggests that rather than an "absence" of aesthetic experience, there may be more of an unfamiliarity with it. She shared how she has yet to have discussions with her students about

aesthetic experiences and she suggested that she is still developing with her understanding of them and how they relate to *her* creative process. Iris elaborated:

I can't say entirely cause...I don't know how. I haven't asked them about this...obviously...so I don't know how it's clicking in their mind...and if it would be similar...you know...to how it would click in my mind.

Iris' contribution may suggest an absence of aesthetic experience in teachers' creative process because it may have never been introduced in her art training as a pedagogical approach. In Medina's (2012) and Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's (2020) work, aesthetic experience is being explored as a practical teaching approach with specific guidelines and recommendations for either the elementary school or college level. However, the data from this study brings to light a questioning of the role of aesthetic experience in high school art teacher preparation.

Challenges in Facilitating Aesthetic Experience

As the teachers each explained how they went about facilitating aesthetic experience according to their own goals, they expressed a variety of challenges that hindered their ability to do so. Most of the challenges centered around a lack of motivation from students. The data suggests that the teachers ultimately depend greatly on their students' involvement. Moreover, the teachers shared additional factors that negatively influenced facilitation of aesthetic experience from beyond the classroom walls. These were challenges within the data that teachers felt they had less power to change. A total of five sub-themes were identified: (a.) Lack of Motivation and Critical Thinking Skills (b.) Lack of Originality, (c.) Views of Art Class, Size, and Placement, (d.) Detriment of Technology (e.) Difficulty Gauging Aesthetic Experience.

Lack of Motivation and Critical Thinking Skills

A reflection amongst all teachers is that most of their students are lazy (their wording). Alejandro refers to this issue as an epidemic in which he terms “Post-COVID Laziness.” He expresses that his students used to have a sense of urgency when it came to engaging and creating their art. He described his class as a lively, productive atmosphere where students would be carrying their canvases about the room, enthusiastically getting feedback from each other, and excited to get started on their work. Upon returning to in-person classes, Alejandro described an entirely different ambiance to his classroom. Post-COVID students are described as more withdrawn, less ambitious, and more prone to ask for assistance rather than attempt to tackle a problem on their own. Since Alejandro nurtures an environment where voids and gaps are embraced so that students can develop problem-solving skills, develop a personal aesthetic, and engage in dialogue about aesthetic concerns, this new disconnected setting presents a real challenge in supporting an aesthetic literacy. He shared:

I’m pretty sure there’s something out there...a study or something...but ever since COVID happened...when we came back to the classroom...I noticed a huge shift in the kids. They don’t want to...they’re not interested. I honestly feel it’s just laziness...it’s just laziness. It feels like ever since COVID happened...all the students are lazy. In my AP classes...everyone was walking around carrying their canvases...their paint...fast-paced...class was sitting down...kids listening to music. Now...I’m like...okay...let’s start...let’s keep going...and they’re just like on their phones and they start the last ten minutes of class...or they put their headphones...and they don’t talk. They don’t talk to anyone. They don’t even talk to me. You find that the class is quieter.

Likewise, Iris struggles so much with a lack of motivation from her students that she referred to helping students as “spoon feeding.” Going beyond navigating the instructions to an assignment, Iris explained that her students lack the capacity to think critically. She shared that she not only needs to break down simple instructions to assignments, but she also must play a major role in walking students through their thinking process in coming up with an idea, manipulating their tools and materials, and deciding on which elements of art to incorporate in their work. Iris expanded:

Their motivation is low...their effort...their product turnout is sometimes pretty low. So...I just need to really like drill them on the basics of what they need to know. I've realized that students lack some critical thinking skills for the majority. I kind of just want them to meet a bare minimum of the assignment requirements. And I think that's what limits me. Sometime their progress tends to be kind of slow. So...I try to just find the few students I see that are reaching their goals quicker. Now...how can I add more goals to them?

An implication here is that Iris recognizes to achieve an aesthetic experience requires critical thinking, goal setting, and meeting those goals. If Iris' assessment is correct in that students need these skills to have an aesthetic experience, then those students who require more development than Iris can offer them might be limited in aesthetic experience opportunities. This is also evident in the narrative of Ray. Ray clearly indicated who his “F-students” are—the students who do not try— and noted he diverts his focus more on students who are likely to be successful in developing aesthetically—or the “A-students.” Any attention that is given to his “F-

students” is to divert them so that they do not become a disturbance in facilitating aesthetic experience for others. He explained:

That's where I realized that I give most of my attention to the F-students. By keeping them occupied...if they're less of a distraction for the rest of the kids. Unfortunately...it's such a small group...but they affect the whole class...and I really neglect them.

Iris also shared that her students lack the motivation to self-assess, self-study, and research. Once instructions are provided and students set out to engage in creating their art, there seems to be this gigantic hurdle to independently gauge their next move in their creative process. Iris feels that she has prepped her students with a plethora of examples, ideas, and references to draw upon. Yet, this is where Iris feels she needs to “spoon feed” ideas to nauseum. She conveyed that they almost want the ideas and specific “walk-throughs” of approaches to be given to them. She went on to explain:

They'll show me their sketch...and I ask them...okay...what are you gonna do to make it surrealism? I gave you different links to different animals...flowers...like all this stuff that you can use for symbolism. So...what are you gonna add to it? And...that's when they look at me like confused like they don't want to research.

From my notes taken during data collection, I recorded an evident sense of frustration from teachers that is conveyed within their facial expressions, gestures, and voice. Alejandro and Carlos, both in noted words and gesture, showed frustration in their students’ lack of motivation. Alejandro is adamant that students in his AP course should be able to meet the level of expectation

as a college-level class. Yet, he shared that even they sometimes require step-by-step guidance. Like Iris, he acknowledged there is a limit to the “spoon-feeding.” He explained:

There’s a certain point where you’re like...you have to let the kid do the work. I always tell my AP students...you’re gonna be responsible. You’re in a college level class. I can’t grab your hand...move your wrist...you know...paint...you have to do it by yourself.

Carlos offered his reasoning why students have become so dependent on others for ideas. He explained that students have learned through core-content classes, such as math and or reading, that there is a specific formula for concepts. This formula needs to be learned, sometimes memorized, and then regurgitated. Carlos expressed that art is different because it requires one to come up with their own formulas to convey a personal concept that is likely to not derive from a particular mold, or formula. According to Carlos, students are, in a sense, coming up with their own formulas in how to perceive the world and respond to it—rather than following scripted formulas on how to do so. Carlos expanded:

You have to come up with shit on your own. Yeah...we guide you...but you still have to come up with this stuff on your own. And that is the hard part...because a lot of times when I start teaching the kids...they're like...Mister...I don't know what to do or because they've never...you know...everything's been given to them. Everything's been given to them in the sense of...this is the formula...now use the formula. So that's why we're in art class....so that you guys start using your creative brain to come up with stuff.

Ray described most of his students as having trouble getting started. He shared, “most of them are not self-starters.” So, to motivate them to action, he has developed tactics based on highlighting the presence of others in authority. He explained:

We just moved into this new building, and we're in the same wing as the principal. So...I'll say oh...you know the principal is right there...so...get a piece of paper...do something...that way they'll start. Or I'll say [the visual arts facilitator] is coming this week....so get drawing...get started—And they do.

Lack of Originality

According to the teachers, a key feature of aesthetic experience—especially for purposes in the more advanced art classes—is that artwork must be original. Alejandro makes it a priority to communicate this to his students early in the semester and it is a reoccurring theme throughout the school year. According to Alejandro, original artwork is also a requirement of the AP course. Students must even sign a form before taking the class in which they promise to create original pieces for their portfolio. If students include recognizable artworks from popular culture in their portfolio, it is negatively reflected in their grade for the course and may even result in a rejection of their entire portfolio. In the following excerpt, Alejandro shared the dialogue he had with one student who had trouble understanding what it meant to create “original” artworks for his portfolio:

Your work has to be original. Think of something that other people have not made. I don't want you guys to come in next year putting it on me because you decided to make a Blues Clues drawing...Dragon Ball...and I don't want you to put it on me because...you know...there's times when you can do that. You wanna make your characters...your

favorite cartoon. But it's not *this* class. That's fine if you want to do it on the side and bring it here...but *do not* turn it in for your portfolio.

Despite these efforts, teachers express that students' lack the ability to be original in their ideas for artworks. The data indicates it as a struggle such that some teachers stop putting so much attention on original ideas and will settle for copies of well-known artwork just so students can practice developing their technique in manipulating art elements, tools, and materials. Teachers expressed that this is a laborious process that needs to be initiated in the beginning of the semester, and even sometimes throughout the year—otherwise students will remain stagnant in their creativity. Carlos demonstrates this approach with his students:

Sometimes I'll say...draw your pen...draw your favorite shoe. And...then sometimes I even have them draw a famous painting like...draw the Mona Lisa, you know it's kind of amazing how at the beginning...everybody has such low self-confidence abilities...and then...when they start doing it...they improved their drawing skills by drawing something every day.

Some teachers feel that this lack of originality might not be so much an absence of creativity but more of a lack of enthusiasm for being in the art classroom, as many students are “placed” in the art classroom for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, art class is not a student choice, or it was the least threatening compared with the other arts, such as dance, music, or theatre that tend to be perceived as requiring more vulnerability and labor. Ray expresses that he deals with many students who don't want to be in his class and their goal is to merely endure it. The last goal in their minds, indicated by Ray, is wanting to develop their creativity and aesthetic skills. Therefore, Ray resorts in aiding these students to *endure* his class. He described:

And so...I said it has to be colored. And some kids do really terrible jobs. And that's when I'm like...just copy. I'll say...you can trace it...and then you fill everything else in yourself. Cause I think what I learned is that...especially after my first semester...we'd give them an assignment....and half of these kids don't even want to be here. They're thrown in here cause there's not another class for them to be in. And so...then they're like... I can't draw...and so they don't even want to try. So...I'll say you don't have to draw. You don't have to know how to draw. I just want you to try to do some stuff...you know. So that's why I say...trace it...or whatever. Either copy it directly or somehow do a version of it...but if I don't give them the option to copy directly...they really don't know what to do.

Views of Art Class, Size, and Placement

For Iris, the way school administration and parents view art class does not support her efforts to facilitate aesthetic experience. She feels that both view it as a “default setting” or a space where children have fun but isn’t taken seriously as a pathway toward a potential career, or even a practical endeavor on its own. She elaborated that unless a child is adamant that they want to pursue art as a career option—and parents also see the value in this choice—only then is art class viewed as a valuable opportunity. She explained:

I think unless a child makes it known to their parents that they are interested in art beyond high school...they're not even considering that their child is learning anything valuable. And...I think this is kind of like the default setting for a lot of people...or it is just something fun that their kids are doing in school. Unless they know that their child is interested...they're probably not viewing it as important knowledge gained.

Ray's narrative is analogous with Iris's thoughts. He went further to elaborate that "[visual] art is the bottom of the fine arts." He feels this way especially because of the budget that visual art classes receive for the entire school year—which usually adds up to around \$300 for anywhere between 150-200 students. He contrasts this amount to what established bands, orchestra, or theatre programs might receive which tends to be in the thousands. He shared how he had to self-source for money and supplies during his first year of teaching. He elaborated:

I would get \$300 a year for supplies...and I was like...shit...that's not a lot of money. And so...when I started...everybody just gave me stuff. That first month...I didn't have anything...So...I went to the dollar store...spent like a hundred and something dollars...just buying stuff...pencils and whatever...markers...and then at some point they gave me some money...like \$300 or something. And then so the fall of 22 comes and then they tell us that we didn't have a budget. We'd have to get money from fine arts or raise our own money. And I was like...Oh...fuck...this is not good!

Ray referred to art class as a “filler class” or a space in which “they just kind of throw kids in.” The data points to an outlook that is shared by all the teachers is that art class is usually seen by administrators, parents, and students that will require the least amount of effort, practice, time investment, money, and talent. The teachers contend that band, orchestra, choir, dance, and theatre either require a student to purchase and lug around an instrument, commit yourself to rehearsals and practice, or require you to be vulnerable in front of other people. However, when it comes to art class, the opinion is that students can just show up, somehow be creative and expressive with minimal direction, and hide behind an artwork as it supposedly articulates for itself. Carlos

addresses this in his narrative about student placement, student goals, and outlook of art class in comparison to other art subjects. He explained:

Most kids are just placed in there. So...most kids have no goal. I don't think they really have expectations. I think they had to take a Fine Art...but they don't want to take drama...they don't want to take choir...you know...most guys don't want to take dance, right? So...it's like...what can we take? Oh...let's take art...you know.

Still, another area of concern amongst teachers is class size. In Kohn's (2006) text, he explains that to build a sense of community within *any* classroom, one of the three requirements is that there must be a small student-to-teacher ratio (the other two are teacher-modeling and seeing students daily). In the data, the teachers collectively expressed that to create a classroom environment in which aesthetic experience can be facilitated with success requires a smaller class size. They elaborated that having less students per class presents more time and space for class critiques, gallery walks, experimentation with tools and materials, one-to-one exchanges, and deeper class discussions can take place. Ray went on to elaborate on how he started off with small classes, but as class size increased, the less he felt he could accomplish:

They gave me small classes. My classes are about 22-25 students. And I would really love to do...I would do critiques. So...we'd finish a project...and then I put them up on the board and then we would talk about it...I would make everybody say something...they'd have to say at least a word...you know. And...of course...in the beginning...nobody wanted to talk...nobody likes to talk. They're embarrassed and stuff. And by the end of the semester...they loved it...like we had a really good time...and people talked...and I had a couple of guys that...really got into it. And the next year...they're like...why don't

you do that anymore? And I said...you can't sit 39 students and talk. It's just too big. You can't do that.

Something to consider about the way art tends to be viewed, having a larger class size, and having students placed with little esteem is how these issues might influence a teacher to approach their class. From the data, both Alejandro and Ray have developed their own strategies to navigate these issues. For example, since Ray has such large classes and feels that most students do not want to be there, he indicates that he focuses less on technique and more on effort and art appreciation. The implication here is that the quality of students' aesthetic experience might be reduced. This is not to imply a lack in Ray's teaching, as he is doing his best to accommodate all the needs of his students—be it a need for art appreciation, making crafts, or “playing” with materials. However, as Ray indicates in his narrative, he is completely capable of having more meaningful and elaborate art experiences with a smaller class size. It is evident he is only resorting to surface experiences because there is no other option. He expounded:

I don't just spend a lot of time with technical stuff...because there's a very small handful of students that even want to know technique...and that are willing to learn. Because they're such big classes...and you're not gonna get people who actually want to be in art. There's always that kid that can't really draw or even trace correctly...you know... there's some that are like that. As long as they try...I mean...it might look like crap...but I'll still give them 100 as long as they put effort into it. When I give them leeway to come up with their ideas...they don't know what to do...90% don't know what to do. So...I'll have to say...do this.

Detriment of Technology

Two teachers, Iris and Sean, suggested that technology plays a major role in student's ability to self-motivate. Iris focuses more on a dependency of cellphones and Sean, although agreeing with Iris, critiques the trend of quick activities facilitated in core-content courses. Iris indicated that because students must persistently consult their phones for ideas and references, the need to apply *themselves* toward these reflections diminishes. In addition, Iris explained that even when students do not use their cellphones in art class, just their habitual use of technology at home or school creates a dependence to look beyond themselves for inspiration with their artwork. Iris elaborated that students will just sit in their seat, fall into a slump, and not move forward in their creative process. She must be the one to remind and sometimes threaten about possibly failing the course in hopes that students take the initiative. As many students pervasively watch videos—not necessarily for ideas, but simply to pass the time—Iris indicated a sensory overload that seems to make students languid. She expanded:

I think it's a lack of motivation to do anything. Sometimes it takes me reminding them like...hey...if you fail this class...it also affects your GPA. And...maybe overstimulation from social media...they're constantly on their phones. I'm not very strict about phone use in the class as long as they're working. But the kids that have finished their work...I see them...and they'll be on their phones. And they're just watching video...repeatedly...like continuously throughout the whole class. And I mean, I'm not a psychologist. I don't really know how that affects them. But I know sometimes when I feel overstimulated...I kind of just want to sit down and do nothing.

Sean is analogous with Iris' concerns about students' use of technology. Through his years of experience teaching art, he has noticed that the dependency to be informed by online resources seems to cause students to doubt their own creative abilities. According to Sean, this results in a lack of self-confidence. Therefore, not only does this become a matter of reliance on others for imagination and creativity, but this also results in self-inflicted, verbal abuse. Sean elaborated that instead of his students engaging in self-assessment that is constructive, they degrade their aesthetic capacity through what he calls "negative self-talk." He went on to explain:

They can't take more than two or three...or even one step at a time without running up and asking for help. I guess the negative self-talk and the lack of confidence...it is really weird. The thing that limits me is their cell phones and their very...very short attention spans.

Sean feels that technology really limits his ability to facilitate aesthetic experience because students have become familiar with completing very quick digital assignments in other classes, such as in the case of core-content classes. He explained that perhaps to preserve their attention spans, other teachers have shortened their activities and made them accessible through digital formats. This trend poses an issue for Sean's art class because instead of students putting emphasis on craftsmanship and quality of their artwork, they are viewed as merely rushing through assignments to get them completed. Moreover, Sean contends that students feel validated for simply completing work with absolutely no regard to its value, the understandings they contributed to it, or growth that may have been achieved. Sean expanded:

Social media and cell phones have so ameliorated their mental endurance and strength...that this is what has made people stupid and so many teachers have dumbed down what they're doing. That's why I mock the fifteen-minute digital assignment in class. Damn it! Look at all this talent you've got. You're so like annoyed that you have to do

something because you're so addicted to your phone...like you can see her going through phone withdrawals. Their attention spans are so short...unless we outlaw social media and phones like we did cigarettes. No...no...I'm totally serious about that. They're so damn stupid. They're like willfully, gleefully ignorant, you know. Not all of them.

Sean went on to explain that while some core-content teachers might rush through course concepts—be it 15-minutes or one class period—he might invest several weeks to cover material and allow time for the creative process. This is a major reason why Sean has made a conscious effort to get away from technology in his classroom. He believes that his students need time to think, get frustrated, plan, make mistakes, elaborate on their art, rework areas, and push themselves beyond what they think they are capable of. Above all else, he feels they need to do these processes “low tech” or go back to basics. In other words, Sean values traditional sketches through thumbnails, use of a sketchbook, repeated trial runs, and consulting one’s mental capacity for ideas and problem solving. For Sean, to rush or skip this process is to waste time and materials and produce ineffective work. He went on to explain:

So...look guys...I know you do fifteen-minute assignments on your computers in groups...in other classes...We're not doing that here. We're gonna take two...three...nine weeks. And it's gonna be super low tech. It's you and your brain and your hand. We just did print making and scratchboard. So...we gotta search photos and stuff but...you know....if you let them get on those phones...they'll take literally three weeks to find a picture...cause they just can't focus.

Sean provided an example of one student who rushed through her artwork and was confused about what she did wrong. She was anticipating that Sean was going to be pleased with

this accomplishment. As mentioned earlier, her emphasis was only on completion of the assignment, not on her creative process nor aesthetic experience. Sean explained:

It's like crap...but I did my work. And I was like...sweetheart...it's not about doing your work...it's about doing the best you can...and pushing it beyond what you think. And I hate this utilitarian idea. Talk about an anti-aesthetic idea...but just doing it...I just did my work...like...okay...but that sucks...and I could tell you just rushed it. You weren't thinking at all. There's no craftsmanship. It's basically...you're just wasting time and material. So...if they rush through their work...they think they've done it...but they can't. So...then they pull into this place of almost learned helplessness where they want to be spoon fed everything. And I want something more difficult. I want something more frustrating. I've got these kids that can't make more than one decision at a time. They're so conditioned to these short assignments and other classes that they just blow through it...and it's like...no man. No...you just ruined a piece of scratchboard.

Difficulty Gauging Aesthetic Experience

According to Iris, there is a challenge in knowing how to have conversations with students about their aesthetic experiences. She explained that there are three reasons for this. First, is that these experiences are very personal, and she doesn't feel comfortable prying into that realm. Secondly, she feels she is still developing an awareness of her capacity for aesthetic experiences, so she doesn't feel necessarily experienced to assist her students with their development.

Finally, she feels that at this stage in her students' development, they have a hard time talking about their feelings and emotions. She explained that they tend to get embarrassed easily or become awkward if conversations about their emotions get too deep. She went on to elaborate:

If I approach them...ask them a few questions...they're more likely to talk to me. But I don't know if it's maybe something about being teenagers and being kind of like awkward. They're not as likely to articulate how they're feeling about their artwork. So sometimes it's kind of hard to gauge how they're feeling...or maybe they feel kind of embarrassed to say that they're feeling connected to their artwork.

As Iris conveyed these reasons, a few implications began to surface. Students might feel peers would view them as overly enthusiastic if they demonstrated that they were developing an appreciation for their creative process in artmaking or nurturing a relationship with their artwork. Could this heightened sense of enthusiasm or passion be seen by peers as being too in touch with one's feelings, or perhaps being an overachiever and seeking the teacher's attention? Iris seems to indicate this in her interviews. Although she loves the enthusiasm that students bring to their creative process, she feels that an overzealous attitude goes against the norm and can be seen as weird by peers. This is because Iris feels that high school students intentionally tone down their excitement for art because it is socially acceptable to do so at their age. This purposeful withdrawal negatively affects her student's creativity. To explain this, she compared high school with elementary students: "Elementary school children are the most creative people because their minds aren't limited by social norms and the expectations and everything."

Another inference is that communication about aesthetic experience in Iris' class begins with her—she must initiate it, otherwise students might not open-up at all. Although Iris does take

the time, other teachers might not, especially if they become bogged down with other teacher responsibilities or if they tend to leave students alone in their artmaking once instructions are given. The last justification seems quite plausible considering data discussed earlier that teachers intentionally give students their space throughout the creative process.

Novel Views of Aesthetic Experience

Through the teacher interviews, several considerations emerged that were not apparent during my literature review of aesthetic experience. Before setting out to conduct this research, I was hopeful for insight as to something innovative that would contribute to this conversation. I was on the lookout for a very straightforward, focused, and deliberate facilitation of aesthetic experience. I was not anticipating subtle or indirect approaches. Even more profound is that I did not anticipate positive advantages of competition in connection to aesthetic experience. A total of five sub-themes were identified: (1) Aesthetic Experience through Selling Artwork; (2) A Sense of Nostalgia; (3) Connectivity with Others Through Competitions; (4) Aesthetic Experience through Sense of Community; (5) Appreciating Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life; and (6) Leaving Students Alone Throughout Their Creative Process.

Aesthetic Experience through Selling Artwork

To my knowledge, the selling of artwork is not connected to aesthetic experience in the literature. This is also a method that I would not have considered because of my hesitancy toward competition and, other scholars' criticism of a hyperfocus on final products as a means toward an aesthetic experience (Apple, 1990; 2014; Foley, 2014; Greene, 1980; 1986; 2001; Gulla, 2018). However, despite the emphasis on representationalism (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020), this strategy may prove to be beneficial to students' aesthetic development. Being able to use one's

voice and imagination to connect to others is valuable to one's identity (Anzaldúa, 1987; 2007, Greene, 1995; 2001; Medina, 2012). And, from Alejandro's standpoint, selling your artwork validates one's relevance to society. In other words, when a student sells their work to someone who values their interpretation of the world, is in essence, valuing *them*—both as an artist and a human being. He elaborated:

I think it just feels good...it's just like a unique feeling...like someone telling you like...Hey...I wanna buy your stuff because you did it. And she (the student) does commissions too. So...she's making money off her work. She's not just making art and putting it under the sofa...you know...like she's actually selling...it feels nice...you know...it feels good.

To see advantage, one must move beyond the monetary value in selling artwork and to recognize that one's ability to convey ideas through their artwork and someone else validating that capacity by purchasing it, might be a potential first step in connecting with others. Perhaps selling one's artwork is necessary for some youth to acknowledge their worth because they may have grown accustomed to consumerist ideals. To put it another way, there may be a tendency to find value in products that have become relevant through advertisements or get endorsed by popular personalities and media (Apple, 2006; 2013) For critical scholars (such as myself) who tend to resist Neoliberal agendas, this may be difficult. Yet, as Carnoy & Levin (1986) suggest, we may have to challenge Neoliberalism *with Neoliberalism*, or use schools which are targeted to reproduce Neoliberalism as battlegrounds to fight Neoliberal influence.

A Sense of Nostalgia

Alejandro mentioned that the terms aesthetic and aesthetic experience have connotations of nostalgia. According to Alejandro, nostalgia could be viewed in two different ways. First, it might involve appreciating certain genres of artforms or periods of time in which art was created. Going even further, he comments on how feelings of nostalgia might bring up consideration about what constitutes art in the first place or how teaching art can be approached and considered. For example, many individuals regard comic books, baseball cards, ComiCon, anime, Marvel/DC comics, Totoro, and related characters, films, and merchandise as artforms and could be said to provide a type of aesthetic experience. He asserted that these various genres should be considered as possible ways for students to relate to class concepts and come to a better understanding of aesthetic experience.

Further, and significantly, nostalgia involves a reminiscence of great memories that might trigger the senses. Although Alejandro did not provide examples of how his students felt a sense of nostalgia in the class, he did share how he does in his personal life. Alejandro spoke about how he feels a sense of nostalgia when he reminisces on previous “good times” of being a student in the art classroom, or remembering special moments with friends, teachers, and colleagues regarding creating art or even teaching it. He considers this feeling of nostalgia as a component of an aesthetic experience and sometimes even recognizes it as an aesthetic experience. He elaborated:

In the classroom...like...it makes the kids remember...like what is happening all year and all the things that have happened...You know...the things that go on in the classrooms...the artwork they turn in...the talks...the critiques...those things that make

you...that stick with you...or make the students remember. I feel that would be like...the aesthetic experience. Let's say...for example...giving you an example of me. I can count several things that I remember from [name of class omitted] class. I would consider that the aesthetic experience. I remember seeing those things...and I remember them vividly like they were yesterday...and I remember what we did...and they got stuck with me.

Alejandro's description of nostalgia as aesthetic experience is reminiscent of Greene's (2001) and Stinson's (1985) perspective—immersing oneself in aesthetic experience to feel a connection between ourselves and society. Alejandro's perspective of nostalgia is about a connection with one's world. And it also has to do with “coming full-circle”—or returning to our roots, our original intentions, or even achieving what we originally envisioned for ourselves. He expanded:

Like...it's what makes me enjoy my job...like remembering those things...you know...remembering the things that I did in my art classes. Remembering when I started...getting more exposure to art. So...that's very important to me. When I bumped into like former students...like...you know...they're managers...or like servers...or whatever...you know. And they tell other people...like my parents...if I'm with my parents or my friends...I really liked your class. When I was in high school and graduating in college and finding a job...and it's all those things like...it gives me that feeling man.

Out of all the novel views identified in the data, explicit identification of a sense of nostalgia as a component of aesthetic experience or to describe aesthetic experience itself might be the most intriguing, as it is largely absent as a critical component in the current literature. While there is no explicit focus on nostalgia in the literature, connections to it may be implicitly noted.

For example, in Heid (2008) and Kübra Ozalp's (2018) work, aesthetic experience is highlighted as a form of cognitive function that can be facilitated through embedded language and use of metaphor. Or how Medina (2012) references the body as having the capacity to retain a feeling or a memory as a sight, sound, or smell. But, to regard aesthetic experience as nostalgia as defined—"a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations" (Cambridge University, n.d.)—is not found explicitly in the current literature. However, results of this study suggest that a sense of nostalgia should be given deeper consideration as a component of aesthetic experience, or at least a fundamental feature toward facilitating aesthetic experience within high school visual art classrooms.

Through Alejandro's examples of nostalgia, its value in facilitating aesthetic experience may be seen. To recall experiences of the past, be it a time in our lives we regard as cherished, a place we long to return to, or simply a memory we like to indulge ourselves in from time to time, seems to be a potential pathway to fully engage our senses and become more aware of our body's engagement (Medina, 2012). In addition, considering nostalgia as a component of aesthetic experience appears to support Dewey's (1934) concept of *temporality*, utilizing aesthetic experience to reflect and question one's past, present, as well as future endeavors toward a better society (Ortiz, 2022; Sessions, 2008). Perhaps encouraging students to reminisce on positive domains of their past may help engage their imagination and creativity outside of representationalism and formalism, and more toward expressionism and contextualism (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). However, just because one might have a moment of nostalgia doesn't necessarily inspire empathy for others, as noted as important by aesthetic experience pedagogues in the literature (Medina, 2012; Stinson, 1985). This suggests, for conceptualization of aesthetic experience that includes reflections of others, additional efforts may

need to be made to connect a personal sense of nostalgia and aesthetic experience with a motivation for positive societal change.

Connectivity with Others Through Competitions

Although Sean's narrative does not suggest that he values art shows and competitions like some of the other teachers (i.e., Alejandro), his responses do denote that he recognizes them as beneficial for his students. Sean explained that there is value in observing how others react to your artwork. He encourages his students to enter competitions so that they can attend and witness, firsthand, the responses and feedback when others view their work.

Centering the intent indicated in the teachers' narratives, competitions may be seen as more than just placing in 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or Honorable Mention—several participants point to the value to be had beyond the awards and even beyond being proud of oneself for trying. Entering art shows and related competitions could be viewed as sharing your ideas and values with others. The act of participating in these activities supports a transition between the self toward connecting with other people if competitions are viewed this way. For Sean, that *is* his purpose. He went on to elaborate:

I want them to enter shows so that they can see that other people see value in their work and like it...because after a while they stop listening to me. Where I display artwork...I've got like a 12-foot display case. That means something to them. Or if you take a print or a drawing and hang it up on the board...That kid gets that kind of rush...And that's what we're doing in student art awards. We're trying to enter kids that are gonna stick with it. Or maybe not...maybe this is the height of their aesthetic...artistic achievement...but

still...like somebody recognizes it...it reframes it for them. I like it enough to put it in a show...and another person likes it enough to give it an award. If you stand back from your piece and watch how people interact with it...you're gonna get more information from that.

According to Sean, entering competitions provides students with valuable information that aids in their aesthetic development. First, the feedback students get reinforces what Sean has already told them about their work. Secondly, other peoples' responses to their art validate the reasons for creating artwork in the first place. Sean shared that after competitions, "students begin making work with a renewed vitality; the tedium that typified their artmaking previously is transformed by new confidence and a sense of purpose." It could be conceived that the triumph is that there was an interaction during competition. And if there is an exchange between artist and audience that might ignite a "new confidence and a sense of purpose," this may lead toward further connectivity and possibly societal change. The data suggests critical scholars may need to widen thinking and research to consider potential positive aspects of high school competitions regarding aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic Experience through Sense of Community

Alejandro claimed that another approach to support aesthetic experience is developing strong and healthy relationships with other art teachers at the school. It is important to Alejandro that his students see him, not only interacting, but bonding with his colleagues. He describes this bonding as talking about art, movies, or creative hobbies they enjoy outside of class. He feels that when students observe teachers interacting with such enjoyment and esteem for one another, it reinforces the understanding that all the art teachers function as a collective and the level of

seriousness about art, the constructive conversations, the connectedness, and student expectations transcends across the team and school community. He explained:

Now it's like the three of us have been bonding really good...you know...work wise...I mean...you know...we really don't talk outside of work...but we have a really good industry there that even the kids notice...and they notice it...they see us walking together...Hey...let's go to lunch together down the street. They see that we are having fun...that we are having a good relationship and they want to be a part of that...you know...they want to be around the same environment.

Alejandro went on to explain that students take notice of the measure of respect each teacher gives to one another for their specific area of expertise—be it in animation, graphic design, photography, costume design, digital art, etc. Alejandro said he and his colleagues purposefully create an environment, or sense of community, that students would want to be a part of. According to Alejandro, students become cognizant of this kinship between their teachers and begin to understand the value of networking. Alejandro has noticed that his students will ask to go speak with his colleagues so that they can utilize their specific area of expertise. Alejandro—with his focus on competition—will provoke what he feels is a healthy rivalry amongst colleagues and their students. He expanded:

We try to be like work-friends and the kids notice and they're like...oh...can I go ask this other teacher for his input or her input...and I think the three of us...we each bring a different perspective. This new teacher brings her background in animation...graphic design...digital art...and the [other teacher] brings knowledge from the industry...from like the movie scene or like acting and fashion...and I feel like I am the one who brings

more of the traditional art...like studio art. I'll tell the teacher next door...hey man...what if we tried this...let's make it a competition man...your kids against my kids. Let's see who makes better artwork.

Alejandro also feels it is important that students see him actively involved in going to museums, having experiences with artwork, and creating his own art. According to Alejandro, when students see their teacher involved like this, they respect them more because they see them beyond a “teacher” of art—they see them as a *working artist*. He continued:

It matters that students know you go to museums and you have seen famous paintings...that you also experience art in your own way...you carry a sketchbook, you know...things like that...that you're not just the teacher...you are actually an art teacher...you actually go to workshops...you actually do art...like you draw. I feel like it's important to mention that so they know...my teacher went over here and he saw this.

Likewise, Ray also contributed to this notion of aesthetic experience facilitated through a sense of community—although with a different way of going about it. Because Ray has a vast network of colleagues from his years within the entertainment industry, he sees the importance of inviting them to visit his school to talk and interact with his students. It is significant to note that Ray's friends are high-profile celebrities. He suggested that being able to interact with such individuals helps to build his students' confidence. This is because interacting with successful and prominent individuals on a one-to-one basis makes their aspirations not so farfetched. He elaborated:

And I started this...I've done it once...but I have a plan for next semester. I started like a visiting lecture class...I talk...it's almost kind of like an art history class. And so last

semester I had one of my best friends I used to work with. I was her assistant for years. She's a costume designer. And I said...hey...would you talk to my class? These are 15- and 16-year-olds...and you're talking to this person who...you know...hangs out with the super famous...is on the red carpets...and was a nominee for an Oscar. That's a way that I personalize...I guess...looking back...I never had confidence in anything. I want them to see that they can attain anything really...you just don't know what life brings you...where it's going to take you. And at the end of the month...I'm having a friend of mine who's an actress. She's gonna talk to my class.

According to my knowledge, this idea of aesthetic experience through a sense of community is a novel concept not found within the literature. For the exception of Sessions (2008) and Lee's (2022) work that specifically dealt with aesthetic literacy development and connecting informal and formal learning through community-based education, the notion that an aesthetic experience can be attained through the comradery of faculty, or knowledge of one's teacher beyond the classroom has not generally been considered. Yet, utilizing community connections may support the modeling that teachers must do in demonstrating how to present oneself in front of artwork and be open to its effect (Acer & Ömeroğlu, 2008; Davis & Dunn, 2023; Eckhoff, 2011; 2012; Greene, 1980; 1986; 2001; Gulla, 2018; Güvenç & Toprak, 2022; Medina, 2012; Sessions, 2008).

Appreciating Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life

I'm just trying to get them to appreciate beauty and craftsmanship. If I can get them to pay attention to...you know...the rainbow within the reflection on the bubbles while they're doing dishes...you know...and to the extent that it's possible...take their time making

something...and even notice simple stuff like...Hey...are you the house on the block that has the weeds and the broken down car?...maybe fix that.

The above excerpt is from an interview with Sean. Both Sean and Alejandro focused on the concept of facilitating aesthetic experience through examples in everyday life. As with the previous novel views, this notion is not something widely touched on within the literature, although there may have been subtle indications (e.g., the work of Ingram, 2013; Ingram & Drinkwater, n.d.; and Sosin et al., 2010). This scholarship most certainly values the everyday experiences of students' lives and encourages them to be interwoven within artworks. Yet, there is also a tendency in such scholarship to focus on the negative elements in students' lives to create artworks that expose these negatives to provide critical commentary about them. However, data from this study suggests teachers may facilitate aesthetic experience more broadly/positively by appreciating one's everyday life.

Both Sean and Alejandro offered examples to aid in the understanding that taking the time to ponder mostly positive, unconventional, and everyday occurrences can also lead to meaningful aesthetic experiences. This sentiment aligns with Greene (2001) in which she continuously advocates that we break down the habitual and conventional in the way art education is perceived. Sean provided a simple example of a signature (previously mentioned). This illustration is exactly the type of nontraditional activity that maintains so much significance in the way of identity, empowerment, and agency that because of its everyday nature, might be typically taken for granted. Sean recognized its magnitude though. He shared the following:

So...what I'm trying to do is take the focus off of whatever idea of perfection it is that they have that's stopping them from making things and getting them to see the beauty in something that they can create that maybe isn't something they would have considered beautiful before. So, just for an example...the way somebody signs their name. They don't sign papers anymore. So...if you can get even a small incursion into their idea of like...who they are. Cause it's this little aesthetic...almost like a drawing that they attach themselves to...and I guess I hadn't really thought about this until we did prints this year...and so many of them don't have a signature. I was like...you're a freaking rock star...Don't sign it like you're putting your name on a spelling test in second grade...like...put some verve in it!

Alejandro mentioned that it is significant to him that he shares his aesthetic experiences with his students that are part of his life. One experience that he elaborated on was a recent trip to Boston and a museum visit in the Harvard area. It is significant to note that his aesthetic experience is not necessarily about creating an artwork or viewing one. Rather, it is about evoking sensory experiences while engaging in a new venture. He explained to me that relaying the experience to his students was very nostalgic and an important part of his life. He also seemed very engaged in his emotions when he shared the story with me. He reminisced:

But yeah, it is important, to resonate that with my students. And it's gonna stay with the ones that you know really care, or really interested. Just like with anything in life...you have to enjoy it...to really...you know...take it all in. It was cold, we were walking like at ten in the morning with like a coffee, and then all these Harvard students just like walking around with their hoodies and everything. I'm like, man that's cool, and I remember walking into the museum and then it's like all these cool things, like Greek art, like giant

statues, and everything was worth it, just those little things. But every time we travel now, we try to go visit a new museum, at least for a few hours.

Leaving Students Alone Throughout Their Creative Process

The final theme of novel views which is not found within the current literature is taking students only part of the way through their creative process—mostly through the planning phase—and then purposely leaving them alone. In general, the literature collectively advocates that teachers engage students through modeling, scaffolding, and displaying vulnerability throughout the facilitation of aesthetic experience (e.g., Greene, 2001; Gulla, 2018; Güvenç & Toprak, 2022). However, the data suggests that the teachers in this study deviate from these practices as they explicitly conveyed that an aesthetic experience is less likely to happen if they are encroaching too much in their students' process.

The amount of engagement it takes to plan for, facilitate, and recognize that aesthetic experience is happening in the classroom; this might be why the teachers seemed to shift some of the responsibility to students. The data indicates that the teachers believe their students will have a more meaningful experience with their creative process if left to experience it on their own. In other words, to interject too much teacher feedback is, in turn, imposing the *teachers'* creative process into something that the students should take ownership of instead. This seems to be the case with both Alejandro and Iris. Alejandro explained:

I have students who are really...really good. And...yeah...I just go. I want them to experience it by themselves. I don't want them...you know...going...And oh...I like this...you have to do it like this...Oh...I don't like how this looks...you have to do it like this...you know...it might be counterproductive.

Iris also went on to elaborate:

I think when a student is working on an assignment...on a project...and they're at work. I let them work for a while by themselves. You kind of let them...you know...go through the process on their own. And if I go by and ask them about how their work is going...And they've...you know...completed this entire composition with almost very little input from me...I think it's more apparent that they've had an aesthetic experience. Cause...I think it's probably more likely to have an aesthetic experience when the teacher is not hovering and not giving them constant feedback.

Another factor influencing teachers to stay out of student's artmaking process might be because that is the way they were taught, and it seemed to work for them. According to Barnes and Smagorinsky (2016), teachers are heavily influenced by teaching approaches long before entering teacher preparation programs. This line of thought seems to be especially pertinent for Carlos and Sean as they preferred to be left alone as a student and now value that approach for their students. Carlos expanded:

I try to let them be...you know...when I was in art school...I never liked when the teacher was just on my ass...Hello?...looking...So...we talk about the process of getting it done...and then...you know...I walk around and make sure they're working. But that's my main thing. Are you working? I'm not like...you know...going around and policing them.

Sean also contributed:

Okay...So...I do a lot of withdrawing because the best teachers that I had left me the hell alone. But I understand...I'm not every student.

Although the statement, “leaving students alone,” doesn’t quite have a nurturing tone to it, this approach can be appreciated if one considers what teachers’ motives are behind it. Although it was not explicitly noted by teachers in this study, perhaps too much teacher involvement would not be considered *developmentally appropriate* (Edwards, 2010) for high school students. At the elementary grade levels, aesthetic experience seems to be facilitated by highlighting every aspect of the creative process along the way with very calculated dialogue (Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2017; Eckhoff, 2006; 2011; 2012; Sunday, 2015; 2018). Yet, if high school teachers did the same, they might inhibit their students’ incentive toward aesthetic experience; this sentiment is supported by the findings of this study.

Chapter 7

Discussion

Discussion Objectives

The aim is to further describe and analyze the themes obtained in the results of this study (1) Aesthetic Experience is a Skill Development Toward Individual Pursuits; (2) Aesthetic Experience Facilitated with Minimal Consideration for Postmodern/Contextualism Views; (3) A Disconnect of Self from Classroom Experience; (4) Challenges Facilitating Aesthetic Experience; and (5) Novel Views of Aesthetic Experience). To demonstrate how my findings answer my research questions, I go into greater depth with these themes while connecting to the literature base, my theoretical lenses, and my methodology to draw conclusions as to how art teachers, school administration, and school communities might benefit from a consideration of the findings. In addition, to highlight how certain characteristics of the methodology utilized may have influenced the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study will be presented.

Aesthetic Experience is a Skill Development Toward Individual Pursuits

Teacher beliefs in this study indicated there are positives to gain from developing independently in art class. These include technical skills in manipulating art tools and materials, articulating directions in artwork, developing a personal style and voice, being open to take chances, and nurturing the capacity to ask questions about our purpose in society. Yet, these achievements may not contribute toward developing empathy for others and creating societal change (Medina, 2012; Stinson, 1985) if the focus doesn't move beyond *individual* transformation.

Teachers might be hopeful that individual development would eventually yield positive change in society, yet the data does not support this assumption as a conscious consideration.

As previously outlined in chapter two, scholars in the area of aesthetic experience unanimously recommend that facilitation of aesthetic experience be *intentional*. In line with this, for the teachers in this study, facilitation *was* intentional. However, participants interpreted aesthetic experience differently, so *intentions* were different—teaching approaches targeted a variety of goals. Looking only at participant’s highest level of aesthetic experience (See Chapter 5), intentions were to encourage students to: become famous (Alejandro); develop creative liberty (Iris); (be vulnerable and accept change (Ray); ask big questions through manipulation of tools and materials (Carlos); and spiritual transcendence and appreciation for nature (Sean). Although there is inconsistency between these teachers’ intentions, one ideal is consistent—the teachers’ goals for their students don’t necessarily transcend beyond *individual* aesthetic growth. In other words, while it was explained how aesthetic experiences could support the development of students toward their respective trajectories, it was never mentioned how their aesthetic empowerment could benefit others in society or even in the classroom. This finding is not in alignment with literature in which aesthetic experience is a means toward developing compassion (Medina, 2012); where creating alternate realities of oneself inspires a revisioning of how society could be (Greene, 2001); where artwork becomes a catalyst for change in society (Stinson, 1985); or that conversations about art shift from admiring its beauty to what it might motivate us to do as a collective (Sunday, 2015).

According to Stinson (1985) and Greene (2001), a personal triumph or awareness of one’s capacity should also extend toward the benefit of others. And in the case of each participants’ depositions, the implication that can be concluded is that these pursuits might not extend much

further from the self. In case there are presently any doubts about this suggested individualistic nature of aesthetic experience facilitation in the findings, each participants' primary goals are reviewed. Starting first with Alejandro's top level of aesthetic experience—selling artwork and becoming famous—one may attempt to see this goal through the lens of collective endeavors and enacting positive change for society. An argument could be made that a particular artwork sold might move someone toward positive change in society, or that this intention might be what the artist was hopeful for when the art was conceived. One could also argue that selling artworks might build confidence in one's values and voice. Still, others might argue that becoming well-known, or famous—achieving the status of a celebrity—would enable a platform for the artist to voice their political views. Moreover, some might even argue that the artwork might speak for itself, and it will be up to viewers to interpret the artwork's meaning.

I *do* acknowledge that all these could very well be the case and have merit to some extent. However, all these proposed justifications also could be viewed as connected to tradition, the status quo, and *commonsensical* (Apple, 1990) thinking. These explanations also sound like *neutral commodity language* spoken by individuals who are presenting themselves as *institutional abstractions* (Apple, 1990). Perhaps the further we detach ourselves from the capacity that art and aesthetic experience has in changing society, the more we may be presenting ourselves and our actions as transparent and unaffected by the *social and economic reproduction* imposed by people in power. In other words, the more we hide behind our artwork to speak for us, the more we might be demonstrating our *indifference* or *insensitivity* for the world (Pinar, 2012). Aronowitz (2004) argues that humans are losing the connectivity for a “love of the world,” therefore, teachers and students might not be inspired to *reconstruct* experience, only *endure* it (p. 16). This stance might remind one of the saying: “throwing things at the wall and hoping they stick.” To elaborate, we

might be hoping students make the best of their art experiences, but to say we will deliberately aim for their artwork to positively change society—well, who knows if their artwork will, or it won't; but is that *our* responsibility as teachers? Critical scholars (such as myself) propose that a restoration or *textured reflection*—through the process of *currere*—(Freire, 1970; Kincheloe et al., 1999) of Arts Education is very much in order as the findings of this study indicate a supposed “neutral” trajectory for students’ aesthetic pathways even though all the indications seem to lead toward *individualistic* and *meritocratic* agendas (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Markovits, 2020). Findings from this study suggest that high school art teachers may contribute to the reproduction of societal norms, such as preparing students for art colleges and future collegiate competitions. Consequently, the current artmaking practice isn't aimed at breaking down the *habitual* and *conventional* (Greene, 2001), instead, it could be said to be *ideological hegemony* (McLaren, 2003); “assumptions that do not get articulated” (Apple, 1975 p. 99); or assimilating to the world as it is presented (Apple, 2014; Darder, 2021; Freire, 1993).

To diverge from competitions for a moment, consider the narratives of Carlos and Sean. They are less enthusiastic about participation in art shows toward the goal of winning awards. Sean values art shows only so that students can gain exposure and so they can witness others reacting to their artwork. Similarly, Carlos encourages his students to question the meaning of mankind's existence and use artwork to probe those questions. Yet, despite these pathways that go beyond success in art shows, both Carlos and Sean still place emphasis—as do the others—on development of an aesthetic literacy for personal progress. Another consideration is Ray's view that aesthetic experience is an opportunity to develop vulnerability and be open to change within oneself. Again, an assumption could be made that this teaching approach is intended for students to be reflective about how their approach to art might affect others, but this was not evident within the data as

expressed by Ray. Finally, Iris' goal for students to articulate their cognitive processes in creating artworks is a great encouragement to exchange ideas between peers about alternate realities, to share each other's aesthetic experiences and their influence in creating art, and to theorize their world to change it (Darder, 2021; Edwards, 2010; Freire, 1993; Greene, 2001; Medina, 2012). Yet, once again, there is no indication in any of the data that exposed intentions are to extend communication between peers to inspire societal change.

It is worth noting that none of the participants said anything to the effect of “art speaks for itself”—insinuating that they avoid the responsibility to develop competent and articulate students. Nor does the data support that these teachers aimlessly “throw” art concepts at students, hope they stick, and then take credit for accidental student success. It is explicitly evident from their narratives that these teachers put an exhaustive amount of effort into developing students' capacity as artists, as well as their agency to navigate future aesthetic endeavors. On the other hand, conspicuously absent (or noted as barriers) are those who are responsible for supporting these teachers in their work. This included responses that comprise assignments of 40-plus students in a classroom; students who have had no art training are placed in advanced level art classes; students who do not want visual arts are assigned to the class; and school cultures where art competitions are considered as the sole means for recognizing student achievement in art. Supported by the results of this study, as well as my experience as a public-school art teacher of 20 years, is that to undervalue the Arts in such ways is essentially saying (just as Ray expressed) that visual arts *is* the lowest of the fine arts and that there isn't much cognitive skill that goes into the creative process of artmaking. As Greene (1980) states, many see Arts Education as “self-indulgent play” (p. 318). I note that these are considerations for future research. Findings from this study suggest it may be worthwhile to interview high school students and ask what *their* intentions are in artmaking. To

go even further with a critical lens, it could be asked, do students feel that their aesthetic experiences are encouraged/censored by their teachers? And what place do classroom experiences, communication and exchanges, as well as competition activities, play in recognizing and supporting their talent, ideas and aesthetic experiences? While these questions fall outside the scope of this study, the results do point to this and important future research.

In totality, the data from this study indicates the pinnacle of aesthetic experience for high school visual arts teachers may be reached *through* individualism and *toward* individualism whether it is intentional or not. The *pursuit of happiness* (Rossatto et al., 2020) is emphasized on the *self*. Re-consider Alejandro and the dedicated effort he indicated to motivate students to sell their artwork. It is likely that for students who also place value in producing artwork to sell, Alejandro's approach to art class would be enticing and rewarding to meet these students' goals. Yet, Alejandro's narrative also accentuates a hyperfocus of monetary value of the creative process and the artwork as a *product*. In addition, there is an underlying connotation that hard work guarantees money and money entitles one's wants (while also recognizing Alejandro's intentions are sincere, and he seeks the best interests of his students; Alejandro indicates he wants to encourage students to sell their art because it feels good and builds confidence in their artistic abilities). One may argue that Alejandro's ambitions are valuable initiatives for what society has come to know as tradition. He sees the joy his students experience when selling their work and he remembers the benefits of winning at competitions in his younger years (again, touching on the theme of nostalgia). On the other hand, one may also argue this passage is influenced by the Capitalist agendas of those in power; the visual arts are not immune to the Neoliberal invasion of time and space (Apple, 1999; Harvey, 2010; Peck & Tickell, 2002).

The findings of this study seem to offer support for the scholarship asserting that high stakes testing, competitive initiatives, and a hyperfocus on business capital, create attitudes of *individualism* and *self-preservation* (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). So, rather than schools investing in teachers for the long-term—nurturing aspects in which to grow professionally—teachers are seen as merely quick turnaround of revenue. So, why are these considerations significant to the broader context of Art Education? Well, if teachers believe that schools make only short-term investments in them, this likely causes them to be in a survival mode—they are not necessarily reflecting on being recognized for the assets they bring or see themselves as role models for their students (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Not visualizing themselves as part of the community *long-term*, may be one reason why several teachers in the study seemed to encourage their students toward short-term, personal goals.

Consider the issue of motivation exposed by the high school teachers in this study—it is likely difficult to put effort into developing students into critical thinkers who articulate their imaginative world to others, when the data from this study suggests so much time is spent just getting them to put the pencil to paper. Another consideration is the real concerns expressed by the teachers of what conversations may be deemed by the school as “appropriate”—There may be impediments to asking big questions about why we are in the world if there is no incentive from school communities (or perceived threat of punishment as indicated in the data) to ask these questions as a collective. There may be a suppression for aiming toward transcendence anywhere but the personal (or but upward to the divine per the narrative of Sean), if as the data suggests, through issues of class size, technology, and funding, there seems to be little space for teachers to put efforts toward such goals. These considerations should encourage policy makers, fine arts departments, administrators, and school communities to consider, as Hargreaves & Fullan (2012)

suggest, a re-culture of existing educational goals. The findings from this study suggest that attention needs to be directed toward the type of capital investment made in, and support offered to art teachers. Are teachers trained solely for the short-term, to teach students to assimilate to the world as it is presented until they decide to leave the profession after a few years, or should the goal be to help them develop into *progressive* teachers (Apple, 2014; Berry, 2010; Dewey, 1934; Freire, 1993; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012)?

Aesthetic Experience Facilitated with Minimal Consideration for Postmodern/Contextualism Views

A Postmodern/Contextualism approach considers artmaking a way to engage social, historical, and political influences. This includes connecting students' identities, social awareness, and their lived experience throughout the creative process. These topics and related dialogue will be referred to as *complicated conversations* (Pinar, 2012). However, the data revealed that teachers, overall, steer clear of complicated conversations regarding political views and religion. There was discomfort explicitly expressed by some participants (Carlos and Sean) about engaging in subjects involving preferences in pronouns and students wanting to share their transgender journey. There was also a concentrated effort expressed by some teachers (Alejandro, Iris, and Sean) to purposely censor themes in which students might advocate for one specific minority or religious group over others and to highlight a religion or the status quo in a negative light.

There were several examples highlighted in the previous chapter in which Alejandro, Iris, and Carlos either avoided such dialogue or felt very uneasy and even regretful when they took place; Ray was the only participant who provided narrative that suggests he touches on some topics that may be deemed complicated, yet he seems to do this only in the context of social

awareness related to explaining artistic choices in history (not in relations to connection to students' identity or own creative process or challenging status quo). It is notable that Alejandro worries about being recorded and his comments taken out of context (connected to detriments of technology). Yet, the deliberate effort to avoid (or not explore fully) complicated conversations may be considered as presenting a disadvantage for students in really connecting to the personal (which was another theme derived from the teacher's narratives). The drawback is that students might be limited as to topics they feel are valuable and relevant to them. This is a significant consideration. Rossatto (2005) argues that when students do not find lessons applicable to their lives, students may develop a *blind* or *fatalistic optimism*—essentially, they don't recognize their value in creating change in their lives.

Although examples of my participants have been shared regarding the avoidance of certain topics, the subject matter to avoid in the narratives were quite vague. For instance, it was stated by several teachers that religious topics, politics, and topics related to identity are averted. Yet, specific topics in these areas were not clearly identified.

The exception that stood out was Ray's willingness to discuss nudity in the context of artistic choices in history (See Chapter 6). However, as previously noted, this topic was discussed because it was "assigned" by the textbook, and it did not delve into the levels that would suggest a Postmodern/Contextualism approach according to Sotiropoulou-Zormpala and Mouriki (2020). As this study did not include interviewing students or collecting samples of their artwork, it cannot be confirmed if Ray's willingness to engage in such conversations may have influenced the quality of student work over other teachers' explicitly stated approaches to censoring. However, based on the work of Sotiropoulou-Zormpala and Mouriki (2020), to engage a Postmodern/Contextualism

approach means “protecting the diversity among children in a school classroom and allow[s] for the subjectivity each child expresses” (p. 27). Thus, this sort of approach respects the principles of democracy, considers how social factors influence perceptions about art, and how students’ engagement with art also influences their lives. Ray’s narrative was the only data that suggested this might be happening in a limited way, while the other teachers’ narratives clearly indicated censorship of students’ artmaking.

To exclude the Postmodern/Contextualism approach from the classroom, is to detach art from students’ everyday lives. As Barrett (2017) asserts “art and aesthetics are too important to be isolated from life” (p. 161). Therefore, postmodernism isn’t just about reflecting on war, religion, nudity, or subjects typically known to be challenging in the public-school context, but it also consists of “popular forms of expression, fashion, environment and lifestyles” (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020, p. 14). Moreover, this approach isn’t necessarily a justification to talk about controversial topics with students, it has more to do with engaging students’ interests, values, identity, culture, lived experience, as well as the social and economic forces that influence both their challenges and successes (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020). To ignore postmodernism within Arts Education is to also silence “experiences of individuals or groups defined by class, sex, ethnicity, etc. and seeks meanings that contribute to the understanding of these experiences” (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki, 2020, p. 15). On the other hand, to employ a postmodern approach within the classroom means that students can create artworks in which they take into consideration their daily lives and interactions within a social context that make a commentary on our condition as a society. Furthermore, students can make connections between their artwork and their social involvement—reflecting on it and even transforming it (Duncum, 2001; Freedman, 2000).

Reflecting on the minimal consideration for the Postmodern/Contextualism approach in teachers' classrooms found in the data, conclusions for future research may be drawn. One of the teachers' major challenges in facilitating aesthetic experience noted in the results is they express a lack of motivation and a lack of creativity from their students. It is possible that this lack of motivation and lack of creativity may be mistaken for a disinterest to engage in class activities because students do not find them relevant to their lives. Even if students were allowed full freedom, with absolutely no censorship toward content within their artwork, there still might be challenges in how to come up with ideas. Given the results of this study, this is something significant to be contemplated in future research. Consider that if students are censored on sensitive themes of war, violence, sex, or even other complicated conversations such as homosexuality or their current stance on Gaza, Ukraine, or tensions with North Korea, why should teachers become disappointed when their students resort to exact copies of Dragon Ball, SpongeBob, Bladerunner, Blues Clues, or Spiderman, as indicated in the data. When students have been trained as to what is considered appropriate content to be accepted within schools, perhaps drawing these popular cartoon characters is a better alternative than confronting teachers and validating reasons for drawing something more relevant to their lives. This contrasts with what the research states is currently taking place within elementary schools, such as the work of Dunkerly-Bean et al. (2017) in which four-year-old children are considering themes of inequalities and what solutions they might come up with regarding issues of poverty and the homeless as part of their artmaking. Results of this study clearly suggest that deeper empirical investigation is needed at the high school level regarding a balance of the appropriateness of complicated conversations within schools and artworks inspired by them and distinctions found at different grade levels.

This study indicates that teachers suppress complicated conversations, not necessarily because of personal reasons, but because they worry about crossing lines of appropriateness within the high school context. In addition, teachers in this study indicated that they are concerned that their students and administration might retaliate against them if conversations get too heated or offend someone. Taken together, this suggests future lines of inquiry should include secondary teacher preparation programs and school district administrations. Specifically, investigation of how teacher education programs train (or not) on strategies to engage high school students in complicated conversations through developmentally appropriate ways, while at the same time, being sensitive to the school culture. The school administration, as well as the school community, may also play a role in communicating to teachers the goals and mission of the school to align complicated conversations toward those objectives; explorations on these external factors also bear further investigation on how they impact classroom practice and enactment of aesthetic experience in high school visual arts classrooms.

A Disconnect of Self from Classroom Experience

There were three sub-themes brought up in the previous chapter about teachers disconnecting from classroom experience. One is that there seems to be an intentional disconnect from students' creative process and aesthetic experience found in their narratives. Another is that teachers seem to—unintentionally—view their own aesthetic development as distinct from students. Most of the teachers expressed their aesthetic experience to be had by visiting museums and special places of beauty while students' experiences seem vastly different from what a classroom environment can offer. Finally, that data show that aesthetic experience is not something intentionally realized within teachers' own artmaking processes. Most teachers do not recognize

aesthetic experience as something happening for themselves—especially when they talk about creating art themselves.

Going back to the idea that aesthetic experience is a personal activity, most teachers feel it is necessary to leave their students alone for much of their creative process. Iris' reasoning is that she wants her students to develop creative independence. After years of having checkpoints and preliminary sketches, Alejandro now finds these engagements a waste of time as students rarely stick to their plans. He pointed out that especially with more of his “serious” students who take longer to complete assignments; if he was to “hover” over them and rush their process, this would be counterproductive. Both Carlos and Sean feel that a teachers' constant presence does not allow students to become deeply embedded in an “art world.” Carlos says he's not going to be “policing” his students and Sean believes his students will work better if he “leaves them alone.” The teachers seem to be placing responsibility on students if they want to work or not—therefore earning the grade they deserve and producing the quality of work that matches their investment. While they express the reasoning behind intentionally withdrawing to give students their space, one may still question if this is the best strategy when students—even at this age-level—are still developing an understanding of their aesthetic literacy (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970; 1987). As Greene (2001), Gulla (2018), and Güvenç & Toprak (2022) argue, aesthetic literacy necessitates teacher modeling and guidance.

Unexpected, at the onset of this study, most of the teachers discussed aesthetic experience as achieved in an art museum or other places—but not so much in their classroom. There was agreement that aesthetic experience can happen within the classroom—as illustrated in their aesthetic experience levels (See Chapter 5)—Yet there seems to be focused enthusiasm from some of the participants about aesthetic experiences happening beyond the classroom walls. This

sentiment was especially apparent with Alejandro and Ray. For Sean, aesthetic experience does take place in museums but also extends to everyday life experiences beyond both the museum and classrooms. During data collection, places, such as Amsterdam, The Louvre, and the Vatican were highlighted with a certain level of passion that was not equally apparent when discussing aesthetic experience within the classroom, suggesting the belief that aesthetic experiences achieved outside of the classroom might be greater/of more importance. This finding is significant to note, because if teachers truly feel that the quality of aesthetic experience is superior at places other than the classroom or achieved at a far superior quality in privacy, then this may impact teachers highlighting their potential within the classroom.

Also unexpected was that most teachers did not elaborate on their aesthetic experiences in their own artmaking; the data suggested that their own creating was not a time/space viewed as prompting aesthetic experiences. For example, Carlos shared that while he feels he has aesthetic experiences listening to music or watching cinema, he does not have such experiences when viewing or creating his own artwork. Similarly, Alejandro explained that although he might have an aesthetic experience involving his own work, it happens long after it has been created—it happens when he acknowledges the work as a success because it sells. This perception might lead students into thinking that aesthetic experience can be achieved in other places and possibly within other endeavors besides artmaking—but *not* so much within the art classroom. Thus, it may be that aesthetic experience might be commonly perceived in high school as mostly an *observational* endeavor. In other words, the implication from the data is that teachers seem to view observing other people's artwork as the way toward achieving an aesthetic experience—not having one from their own personal creations, this bears further investigation. The literature on aesthetic experience can give perspective as to the level of engagement that seems to be missing from interpretations

of aesthetic experience in this study. For example, Gulla (2018) mentions a “reciprocal relationship” with a work of art (p. 108). Eisner (2002) talks about allowing ourselves to “surrender” to artwork, permitting our emotions to be affected (p. 87). Chang (2017) talks about purposely absorbing oneself in an artwork and working toward an aesthetic experience being “achieved” (Greene, 1980, p. 316). Finally, Gulla (2018) gives perspective to the level of engagement toward aesthetic experience, expressing that it requires “lending a work of art your life” (p. 108).

The data further indicates that the art training of the participants mostly focused aesthetic appreciation on observing works of art more than on a consideration of what happens within the creative processes. Yet, Tilley & Taylor (2013) argue that when teachers are trained to teach *only* what the curriculum provides, they are essentially entering the class “empty” regarding their lived experience. They further assert that beyond the requirements of the basic curriculum, teachers need to be taught the importance of interweaving planned curricula with the lived experience of both themselves, as well as their students. The benefit of this approach is to allow such life experiences to shape lessons within the classroom. This is not to imply that the participating teachers are entering their classrooms “empty.” However, regarding their students’ engagement of aesthetic experience through the capacity of their own artmaking could be developed further as this potential is found to be unexplored based on the teachers’ narratives.

The results from this study suggest that art education and related training may not involve this depth and complexity regarding aesthetic experience. This indicates the potential need for initiatives to train art teachers in how to first recognize aesthetic experience for themselves, and then how to model and facilitate it for their students. Without this, it might mean that experiences with the aesthetic in high school, as detailed in this study, focus on observations of others artwork

in realms beyond the classroom. If this is the case, a *social reproduction* (Apple, 1990; Bernal, 2005; Carnoy & Levin, 1986; McLaren, 2003; Pinar, 2012) may happen as teachers might not capitalize on their potential to produce, appreciate, and harness aesthetic experiences with their own innovations—an outlook may also get passed down to their students.

Challenges in Facilitating Aesthetic Experience

There were several challenges brought up in the data regarding the facilitation of aesthetic experience. The teachers unanimously agree that large class sizes, one-dimensional views of art class, and discourteous placement of students serves to get in the way of facilitating aesthetic experience. These issues, which could be reconsidered by school administration, suggest a disregard for the potential the art classroom has in imagining and creating positive societal change. The findings are analogous with the literature in which the hyperfocus of standardized testing and one-dimensional assessments continues to narrow all curriculum—including Arts curriculum (Apple, 2003; Au, 2007; Greene, 1980; 1986; Rossatto, 2005).

Also noted in the data was a post-Covid disconnectedness (described by Alejandro), as well as issues related to the integration of technology in schools. Considering these challenges in light of the literature from Dewey (1934), Eisner (2002), and Sunday (2015) on the significance of aesthetic experience within public education as a means toward temporality, self-assessment, and interpersonal aesthetic experiences, suggests that reaching these aesthetic goals requires much more support. This support goes beyond school administrators and community because throughout teachers' narratives are indications that their views of visual arts have become fixed, detached, and commonsense (Apple, 1990; 2014). Thus, findings indicate that support may be needed in the form of reconstructing Visual Arts Education.

The results further suggest that efforts to navigate challenges—much of which seem to be out of the teachers’ control—have the potential to create unintentional limitations. Greene (1980) describes current learning environments and teaching approaches as becoming increasingly constrained by a hyperfocus on objective, tangible products. As the teachers try their best to confront and address challenges highlighted in this study, they inadvertently facilitate learning “down narrower and narrower channels,” perhaps causing students to become “alienated from the appearances of the world, distanced from their feelings, caught between sensory indulgence and a bored passivity” (Greene, 1980, p. 318). The narratives of the teachers indicate that they are trying to keep their classroom environment a safe, nurturing, and committed space for students to engage their imagination and creativity. Yet, at the same time, the need to focus on overcoming barriers may be reducing time building relationship with their students, impairing the potential of aesthetic experience, as well as their contribution in facilitating them.

Students’ lack of motivation, as well as the efforts teachers put forth to inspire them, was also identified in the data as a barrier. Why is there a lack of motivation and critical thinking skills from students as denoted by the teachers in this study? Could it be that curriculum focuses *only* on the objective, the tangible, the standardized, and the assessable (Au, 2007; Apple, 2003; 2006; 2014; Greene, 1980; 2001)? Does the current art curriculum promote “doing work in school” as basically memorizing information and testing for retention of it (Darder, 2021; Freire, 1970; Greene, 1980; Rossatto, 2005)? As Freire (1970) asserts, this view of education results in merely depositing *official* information into barren depositories. Data from this study that targets instruction toward a hyperfocus on students’ technical skill, art element integration, winning competitions, and selling artwork suggest that some of these initiatives might play a significant

role in students' lack of motivation—Perhaps students view current art curriculum as irrelevant to their everyday life, needs, and goals.

Technology, specifically the use of cellphones, was also noted as a barrier. Could cellphones be a potential Capitalist effort to use the *superstructure* of schools to reproduce norms and values (Apple, 2006; 2013; 2014; Bradbury et al., 2013; Carnoy & Levin, 1986)? Could the engagement with cellphones be a way to promote *enduring* experience, rather than *reconstructing it* (Aronowitz, 2004)? Might the use of technology, in general, be a means to make students indifferent, desensitized, and *Posthuman* (Pinar, 2012)? The findings suggest that students consume a great deal of time watching videos of others experiencing life rather than creating their own experiences. Harvey (2010) argues that Capitalist agendas are about the conquest of time, space, and human nature or “time space compression (p. 21). Hence, in an attempt toward *Neoliberalizing* space, cellphones may be another means of replacing *experience* with *space* (Harvey, 2010; Peck and Tickell, 2002). This issue prompts the need for further investigation as to the links between modern technology, education practice, and aesthetic experience. The findings of this study point to cellphones as being more of a negative influence within the classroom. However, perhaps future research might initiate a dialogue about the possible benefits of cellphones and related technology within the high school art classroom, enhancing the facilitation of aesthetic experience.

Novel Views of Aesthetic Experience

Several novel perspectives of aesthetic experience were elicited by the participants. These include selling artwork; a sense of nostalgia; appreciating aesthetic experiences in everyday life; entering competitions to connect with others; a sense of community making the collaboration

between colleagues visible to students; and leaving students alone throughout their creative process. These themes have already been reviewed in the previous chapter; therefore, the goal here is to highlight more subtle aspects within these novel views. Through these nuances, I underscore how competitions continue to influence the facilitation of aesthetic experience, areas needed for self-reflection as an educator, and new ways that aesthetic experience may establish connectivity with others.

Competitions Serve as Validation and Representation

A consideration surfaced from the data about art competitions that was not expected given the current literature. This factor is not necessarily a novel view of aesthetic experience itself, but it may influence the facilitation of it. It has to do with conforming to the tradition of competition so that the potential for aesthetic experience can exist. Although all the teachers enter their students into art shows and competitions, both Sean and Carlos do not value the rivalry aspect of them as do the other teachers. These teachers appreciate competitive initiatives because they say it brings validation to what they do in the classroom. The teachers indicate that visual arts class tends to be perceived by parents, administration, and even students as an easy grade that does not require as much investment as some of the other arts seem to—for example, band or theatre. So, the teachers recognize that when their students are competitive in student art awards, the school administration and surrounding community are likely to praise these efforts. For example, Iris explicitly stated that administrators take note of the competitions and see it as something good, beyond which Art Education is not on their minds.

It might be convenient to criticize high school teachers for their hyperfocus on technical skills and competitive initiatives without taking into consideration how these endeavors might

support aesthetic experience in the long run. Yet, there is a tendency to overlook what the school community regards as commonsense or official knowledge (Apple, 1990; 2014). As outlined in the findings, the underlying consensus is that if an art program doesn't win competitions, the program isn't effective, and neither is the teacher. Or if a school has a reputation of not being competitive, the art program can remain on the school's agenda with little regard to its significance. As suggested by Ray, when an art program only gets approximately \$300 (for all their students) per semester, or even the entire school year, it doesn't make sense if a teacher would ask for more resources if they were not winning or at least entering competitions so that the school can get recognized. All the teachers agree that when the visual arts program represents the school in a good light (surpassing other schools), the result is usually more support, as well as respect for the level of student achievement a teacher can accomplish through the subject of art. Therefore, even if a teacher does not necessarily believe that competitive initiatives are the most meaningful way to facilitate aesthetic experience, they might still be motivated in that direction if it means more resources for students. It is significant to note that more resources might mean more aesthetic experiences, especially for those teachers who believe that an aesthetic experience results from mastering technique, art elements, winning competitions, or becoming well-known. Moreover, a school that is continuously represented as successful because of the visual arts, is likely to value them. And if they value them, a teacher might be better equipped to facilitate aesthetic experience in more ways. Ray illuminated such approaches:

Actually, we've discussed it as a serious topic to keep the art program...because they're not gonna cut programs that are being productive. You know...we're bringing recognition to the school by being in these art shows.

This specific finding should motivate policymakers, curriculum writers, fine arts programs, and school administration to consider the magnitude of art competitions, related art award shows, and their influence on teachers' approaches. Results from this study suggest that teachers might place their attention on art competitions, not because they believe it yields the most meaningful experiences for students, but because it might be the *only* way to obtain support. Whether it is intentional or not, this motivation to enter students in competitions is, in a sense, a coercive strategy. It equates to a *Behaviorist* strategy in which teachers and students either get rewarded or punished through *pseudo choice* (Kohn, 2006) [In other words, it is totally your choice whether you want to enter students into competitions, but you are guaranteed additional resources for your art program, and you will have the support of your administration if you do].

Leaving Students Alone Throughout their Creative Process

While the findings indicate that teachers “leave students alone” during their artmaking process, they also show that the teachers *are* supporting their students' aesthetic experiences in other ways that may not be obvious. There are numerous factors that art teachers must consider and address to make the classroom space a place that students feel inspired to create. For instance, Alejandro, Ray, and Carlos utilize music in their classrooms to support inspiration. Both Ray and Carlos encourage their students to consider and make connections to other art fields, such as cinema, theatre, music, costume design, make-up art, and dance. Ray creates a safe classroom space by inviting his friends and colleagues to share their aesthetic experiences with his students. Alejandro not only focuses on teaching specific technical skills so that students have the skills needed to engage and create, but he also models an appreciation for other forms of art, such as anime, comics, figurines, collectibles, and certain types of merchandise. Iris models how to have

conversations about artistic decisions, use of art elements, and how certain feelings and emotions were conveyed within artwork. Alejandro, Iris, and Ray model what a respected community looks like within a school and offer networks in which students can consult for a variety of expertise. Moreover, Sean puts a great amount of effort into creating a space filled with voids, gaps, and a certain level of frustration and boredom (likely factors in real-world scenarios), but also makes himself available for support. The findings describe many factors that art teachers consider, plan for, and facilitate even when they say they “leave students alone.”

The results indicate that the teachers regularly engage in prepping, arranging, and adjusting the classroom environment to address their students’ interests, preferences, and variety in skills with tools and materials. However, they may not necessarily be “present” for each aspect of every student at the same time. This novel view of aesthetic experience as found in this study is something that needs to be reflected upon within the context of Arts Education—and specifically, aesthetic experience research.

Aesthetic Experience as Third Space and Embracing Nepantla

Maxwell (2005) argues that genuine qualitative research considers the perspectives and theories of those being studied. Maxwell (2005) continues that rather than relying exclusively on established theoretical frameworks, it would be wise to take participants’ theories seriously—even as a source of theory for one’s research. Lincoln (1990) also agrees that imposing external, dominant theories without factoring in participants’ understandings within the research can pose an ethical concern.

Encouraged by this reasoning and to hopefully add validity to this research, I conclude with a perspective that one of my participants—Sean—had on the topic of interjecting a social justice

lens in his approach to teaching. Sean was very adamant that apart from portfolios and critiques, social justice themes had absolutely no place in his classroom. He shared that he openly mocks social justice themes in portfolios and critiques. He argued that he would never use a social justice lens to influence his students' artwork. He continued that social justice is "the great evil of our age," and that to integrate it in his classroom would be a "disservice to my students." He went on to explain that he tells students if they wish to create artwork incorporating social justice themes, then they are essentially making propaganda. The following is part of an excerpt I shared in chapter six that did not underscore the social justice aspect of it. Sean went on to elaborate:

There is a line of visual inquiry there and I'm certainly not going to disallow it...like if you want to do that AP portfolio go for it...I'll help you do it...I'll help you do it better...but just know that you're making propaganda...you've stepped out of the world of fine art. In art, you should be able to walk in all worlds and be a part of none. I'm looking for them to develop their own style...their own voice. So, if I were to inject social justice in there, that's not their voice...that's Karl Marx' voice echoing through the centuries.

However, as suggested by Maxwell (2005), Sean's perspective needs to be taken into consideration with understanding that, though it counters much of the literature, it has worth and adds value to aesthetic research. My training as a critical scholar has included countless readings and extensive discussions about colonialism, the caste-class system, apartheid, the hidden curriculum, eugenics, and horrific oppression tactics on various minority groups—just to name a few. Reflecting on these matters, developing, and activating my critical consciousness, or *conscientization* (Freire, 1970), are a significant part of who I am as a scholar, researcher, and critical thinker. Yet, it is discussions with teachers such as Sean, that motivate one to be even critical about how and where critical scholarship knowledge is applied. So, it is significant to be

critical thinkers about how we apply knowledge within educational contexts—especially when it comes to children.

It may be hard for some to necessarily agree with Sean’s suggestion that the world of fine art is a *neutral* space, as individuals will always bring their unique values to any space, and this engagement influences it; it is hard to claim that any space, especially within educational settings, can be said to be neutral (Apple, 1990; 2003; 2006; 2013; Bradbury et al., 2013). Thus, it may be that censoring social justice themes within the classroom could also be imposing further political values within a supposed neutral zone. However, Sean also makes an important argument for critical consideration—that the classroom space should be open enough to allow students to confront their identity, their relationship with others, and their role within society, without the imposition of certain themes to push students in specific directions. This sentiment is in line with Greene’s (2001) recommendation not to force an aesthetic experience, not to grade others based on their attainment or level, or even to inhabit someone else’s experience for too long judging it through our own agendas. Greene (2001) details:

I want to assert that we cannot *make* such experiences take place; nor can we intrude when persons do become aware in this fashion. We cannot grade them on whether or not the phenomenon occurs. We need to try to invent situations that make it more likely that people will notice. All we can do is point, as well as we can, to the qualities we hope our students will see. All we can do is try to find (or invent) a language, perhaps a metaphorical language, to make it more likely for them to notice and share some of our perceptions—and then move on (p. 60).

This admonition inspires one to comprehend that someone else’s aesthetic experience is not for anyone to try and manipulate or control. In addition to Greene (2001), this resonates with

Bhabha's (1994) reflection on *Third Space*, regarding his reasoning behind eliminating the common binaries within society, as well as entering this space with preconceived agendas. The beauty of third space is the "quiet" of that location regarding stereotypes and biased thinking. This is very similar to the "neutrality" Sean seeks within the world of the fine arts but might be unsuccessful in achieving.

In chapter two, I made mention of this concept as it might have emerged from the data naturally. There was an indication of its existence that I would like to underscore. One of the most substantial findings in this study—highlighted as a "novel view of aesthetic experience"—was leaving students alone throughout their creative process. As teachers would talk about removing themselves from this "space", one may recognize the respect teachers would give to a space they felt they were not to enter with their students. Perhaps, this realm could be perceived as a *third space*. The Arts might be perceived as such a space for creative thinking and imagining the world in new ways. However, as seen throughout the data, it is evident that there are subtle forms of censorship. Combine this with students' lack of originality, critical thinking skills, dependency on cellphones, and teachers' efforts to lower expectations, it is likely that there is less imagination employed than may be expected. Yet, the data does show that teachers *are* facilitating a special space for students (albeit perhaps without the openness and hybridity expected/advocated for in the literature).

As educators, it is important to reflect on what students were encouraged to do before they enter this space. Have they been influenced by Neoliberalism, shaping their voice toward market-based goals? Or are students encouraged to develop their aesthetic skills, critical consciousness, and critical voice to apply these to their artmaking (Apple, 2014; Au, 2007; Drinkwater, 2014; Foley, 2014; Green, 1980; 1986; 1995; 2000; 2001; Ingram, 2013; Ingram & Drinkwater, 2013)?

Have we become the educator that Apple (1990) describes, as an *institutional abstraction* that uses neutral *commodity language* to continue the status quo but pretend that we play no part in the reproduction because of the supposed neutrality of our workplace? At the same time, we also need to recognize that third space is intended to be a “middle-ground,” or an “in-betweenness” within the “spacialities” of our identity and offers a place to construct something new about oneself and new alternatives (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996; 2009). Kerdeman (2005) offers insight that may motivate educators to be very cautious about how we proceed in facilitating aesthetic experience. Kerdeman (2005) argues that because educational settings are typically bounded within highly predictable, short-term moments; to use aesthetic experience for specific purposes, or through specific lenses, can undermine its potential. The same holds true with the idea of third space, Bhabha (1994) asserts that a “newness enters the world” after “splitting,” or simultaneously accepting and rejecting privileged ways of knowing (p. 98-99, 131, 212). Therefore, wielding aesthetic experience in front of specific lenses might encourage stark binaries to persist (i.e. product versus product, individual versus collective, happenstance versus intentional, etc.). My perspective of third space, as indicated by Bhabha (1994) and Soja (1996; 2009), is that *new* ideologies are to be conceived—it is not a space to reproduce the status quo.

To view aesthetic experience as third space offers both teachers and students a *resilient* and *transformative* optimism (Rossatto, 2005) about how artwork created in classrooms can influence our outlook in our personal lives and society. Perhaps, even beyond that, to view the space that teachers give to students when they “leave them alone” as a place to draw their own conclusions about themselves and society is allowing them something that, really, they are entitled to. As suggested by Deci and Ryan (1990), one of three universal human needs is *autonomy* (along with relatedness and competence). Kohn (2006) goes on to assert that this reference to autonomy is not

about privacy, it is about “self-determination, the experience of oneself as origin of decisions rather than as the victim of things outside one’s control” (p. 9).

I briefly return to the concept of *nepantla* as it was mentioned at the end of chapter two alongside third space. Again, the concept of *nepantla* and border pedagogies, such as *Platicas* and *Testimonios* extends well beyond the scope of this study. It was a deliberate researcher choice (discussed more in the limitations section) to remain open to *all individuals* who can benefit from aesthetic experience scholarship. Yet, my study was conducted within a transborder city, and I do not want to dismiss the potential that aesthetic experience has to empower individuals toward reflection, healing, hope, and creating hybrid identities. *Four* of the five participants identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino/a, and although deficit views, colonialism, and authoritative discourse regarding their identity were *not* examined, I do want to acknowledge that their identity likely plays a factor in their teaching practices and response to aesthetic experience—although this consideration necessitates further study. Going back to Medina’s (2012) argument to engage one’s body in learning, appreciating, and enacting embedded experiences; employing *nepantla* and border pedagogies within the scholarship of aesthetic experience, and aesthetic experience as third space, would continue to support one’s body as a “vehicle of self-authorship and resistance”—allowing students to name themselves and tell stories using their own words (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016, p. 288; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981).

Appreciating Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life

It is significant to note that across much of the literature to employ creativity for purposes of imagining the world otherwise comes with some limitations. Just as Medina (2012) expressed limitations within Critical Pedagogy—in which views are sometimes too deterministic—there may

be considered a similar tendency within the aesthetic experience literature. There is an inclination that aesthetic experience can be attained from reflecting on social injustices and creating artwork that voices opinions about them (Drinkwater, 2014; Ingram, 2013; Sosin et al, 2010), or to use an aesthetic experience to consider the oppressive mechanisms of society to ignite motivation to change it (Medina, 2012). Even some art forms, such as theatre arts, have been geared toward conveying the struggles of the oppressed and encourage spectators to be *spect-actors* and engage in plays (Boal, 1985). It is well understood that reflecting on the suffering of others *does* help in developing empathy and aids us in contemplating how *we* might be doing the oppressing (Darder, 2021; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; 2010; Medina, 2012). While Stinson's (1985) third level of aesthetic experience—reflecting on the suffering of others and being motivated to aid them—may be critical to Art Education, this may not necessarily be the *only* way to achieve the third level. In other words, this process may not be a prerequisite for an aesthetic experience, nor may it be the only way toward one. Moreover, this process may not be the only way toward reflection, connecting, and helping each other heal. Findings from this study shed light that the third level of aesthetic experience could also be considered as coming from acknowledging, appreciating, and honoring our current (everyday) accomplishments.

The importance of artistic exploration of positive aspects of everyday life as espoused by teachers in this study highlights a lack in current aesthetic experience research, namely studies that explore the value of students reflecting on and appreciating the positive circumstances within their current lives, as well as their pasts. This is where *a sense of nostalgia* and *a sense of community* (novel views found in this study) may aid in the facilitation of appreciating beauty, as well as the good, the attributes, and the quality that students *do* maintain in their lives. This can be likened to the many assets that can be acknowledged from underrepresented groups (Anzaldúa,

2002; Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016; Cervantes-Soon, 2017); the significance of informal knowledge (Soja 1996; 2009); and the value of second discourses (Gee, 1989; Moje et al., 2004). This situates my findings within the larger context of research in aesthetic experience, as it pertains to Art Education. There is value to make a practice of putting ourselves in the shoes of others to understand and change how we negatively affect others through our actions. As Stinson (1985) suggests, “If we truly feel the pain of another as our own, and simultaneously feel our own part in causing that pain, we are less inclined to cause it (p. 11). At the same time, she also asserts: “If we truly feel the pleasure of another as our own, and simultaneously feel our own capacity to generate that pleasure, we are likely to seek to increase it” (Stinson, 1985, p. 11). Therefore, we should feel just as motivated to celebrate the gains we are making within society, realizing the assets we bring toward this cause, and repeat our actions where we are getting them right.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation highlighted early on in chapter one, is the acknowledgment that there are likely infinite ways to interpret aesthetic experience and its purposes. A key feature of this study was examining how teachers *intentionally* plan for the facilitation of aesthetic experience—*not* how aesthetic experience inadvertently happens or *must have* happened. As Greene (2001) argues, “the beholder or listener has work to do, that the one who is too lazy, idle, or indurated in convention to perform this work will not see or hear” (p. 58). Therefore, this research is framed from the standpoint one must put forth effort to recognize and respond to an aesthetic experience. Yet, aesthetic experience may happen without the facilitation of the teacher or might be regarded as an intuitive aspect of human nature which happens automatically. Since this study of aesthetic experience is bounded within research lenses of intentionality, effort, and societal change that initiates within art classrooms, future research might extend investigations of aesthetic experience

connecting formal knowledge and experience to other social aspects of students' lives. I note that novel components of aesthetic experience were identified in this study, yet such future research endeavors and different lenses may provide other critical aspects for consideration in Art Education.

It is significant to note that interpretations of aesthetic experience within this study are solely from the point of view of teachers. The perspectives of students, school administration and other related school community is not heard on these matters. Future studies in the high school context would benefit from investigation of other voices. Further, exploration of teacher-student interactions within the classroom as Art Education is being facilitated may produce important additional knowledge on aesthetic experience. To witness classroom practice, while comparing it to data from teacher interviews from this study, may aid in understanding the connections, validations, and perhaps reveal contradictions in teachers' narratives versus practice. Despite these limitations, this study does represent a thorough investigation, both descriptive and interpretive, of high school art teacher perspectives of aesthetic experience and it provides critical knowledge on their understandings and related teaching practice.

Finally, the last limitation concerns the demographics of the participants in this study; only one participant in the study identified as female, four out of five of the participants identified as either Hispanic or Latino/a, and all the participants are from the same large school district in a border city in West Texas. These specific characteristics likely impact the generalizability of results. First, it is conceivable that new/different knowledge may have been gained had this study included more teachers who identify as female. Yet, one positive to this noted limitation of having mostly male participants in this study is that much of the literature on aesthetic experiences is represented by/includes women's voices. For instance, some scholars, such as Ingram (2013),

intentionally chose only adolescent girls to study. Therefore, while there is a skewing of male voice in this study, it also is valuable to have male representation and perspective on aesthetic experience to widen the literature. Additionally, four out of five of the participants ethnically identified as either Hispanic or Latino/a and all are in a border city of West Texas. It is significant to note that other than when introducing my five participants, I did not use their ethnicities to drive any of the analyses. Yet, it is very likely that their narratives reflect their sociocultural background and context (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Lemke, 1997; Martinez, 2010; Moje et al., 2004; Moll et al., 1992; Moll, 2013; Palmer, 1993; 1997; 2003; Rogoff, 1994). At the same time, including voices of populations traditionally marginalized by the dominant culture is extremely valuable to aesthetic experience research (D'Olimpio, 2022; Denac, 2014; Drinkwater, 2014; Ingram, 2013; Ingram & Drinkwater; n.d.; Medina, 2012; Sosin et al., 2010). Regardless, replication of this study with teachers of other ethnicities and other locations in the U.S. would be beneficial in validating and expanding this study's findings.

Additionally, future scholars may wish to continue in the line of my study (with teachers and expanded to students and other stakeholders) using additional social justice lenses, such as Critical Race Theory (e.g., hooks, 1994) or take a critical perspective related to gender. However, I chose not to only analyze the data through a *social justice* lens, as I felt it would narrow the application of theoretical lenses available to view my data. While many critical scholars (such as myself) advocate that aesthetic experience *should be* developed toward endeavors of positive change within society, the purpose of this study was to explore high school art teacher voice, rather than to impose a specific agenda/single way of viewing the purpose of aesthetic experience and Art Education. This choice serves as both a limitation, as well as a potential asset for future research on aesthetic experience in high school contexts. While I acknowledge that some of my

theoretical lens advocates for social justice, the social justice term opens additional agendas that extend well beyond the scope of my study. Deliberate choices in utilizing multiple lenses for interpreting the data did serve to influence the results and direction of the subsequent discussion/implications of the findings. Yet, I want to propose that this direction, the inclusion of multiple lenses including and beyond social justice, be seen as a progression within the scholarship of aesthetic experience research—especially when it comes to interweaving other concepts, such as third space. Future research in aesthetic experience may benefit from continuing to remain open and seen as beneficial for *all* individuals and *all* voices. Everyone can benefit from aesthetic experience—both the *oppressed* and *oppressors* (Freire, 1970). Because we are dealing with a phenomenon so significant in influencing positive change within society, while at the same time, being such a boundless space—it should be treated with great respect for its limitlessness. In other words, it is capable of encompassing *everyone's* ideals toward aesthetic experience.

Chapter 8

Conclusions, Implications, and Directions for Future Research

Conclusions

Through a descriptive approach, I was able to categorize a hierarchy of aesthetic levels with high school art teachers based on their own interpretations of aesthetic experience. The utilization of this approach brought unexpected insights. Since focus was aimed at eliciting objective, universal, and untainted characteristics of aesthetic experience from high school art teachers, the levels attained were quite raw and brought a new component to this line of research. A variety of hierarchies in levels, or stages of aesthetic appreciation and/or aesthetic experience already in existence from scholars, such as Housen (1992; 2000; 2001), Parsons (1987; 1994), and Stinson (1985), and these levels have been evaluated through various theoretical frameworks. However, to my knowledge, I have yet to come across raw and unanalyzed levels derived straight from semi-structured interviews within this specific context of high school visual arts. The use of a descriptive approach, before an interpretive one was engaged, yielded the purest form of the phenomenon of aesthetic experience from the perspective of high school visual arts teachers—taken directly from their voice.

The descriptive aesthetic levels acquired were then engaged with my theoretical framework and my own experience as a high school visual arts teacher. Since the *Hybrid Phenomenological* approach greatly encouraged an imaginative variation, in which my own area of expertise was welcomed within the data analysis, new considerations and questions emerged that might not have happened otherwise, all still with a focus on teacher voice. This process of interweaving participants' unanalyzed aesthetic experience levels and my theoretical lenses elicited a transition from a

theoretical study of aesthetic experience toward a more practical application of it within the classroom. Thus, the use of a hybrid phenomenological model allowed for the interweaving of theory and practice that was the fullest intent of this research.

This research study sought to gain understandings of the aesthetic experience phenomenon within the high school context, according to the interpretations of visual arts teachers. It is significant to understand how teachers recognize, plan, and facilitate aesthetic experience within their classrooms, as most literature on this topic is found only in elementary and college contexts. Specifically, this study found:

What is aesthetic experience according to high school visual arts teachers?

According to the results of this study, they all view it—in some way, shape, or form—as transcendence. Some view it as transcendence toward emotional engagement with artwork while others see it as the means to integrate and articulate art elements and directions within their work. Others see it as a portal to reminisce and appreciate the “good times.” Still, others view aesthetic experience as transcendence toward a connectivity with one another, nature, or a higher being.

How do teachers recognize Aesthetic Experience?

The findings indicate that teachers recognize aesthetic experience when their students are immersed in their artwork. For some teachers, students demonstrate this by looking “lost in their art,” “lost in the art world,” or when it appears that a “light flicker” or “light click” has happened. Other teachers assume an aesthetic experience might happen for students when they engage in student art awards, win at an art competition, sell their work, or create an artwork demonstrating a high level of precision with art element integration and technique. Still, others recognize aesthetic experience in students when they are willing to initiate their creative process and nothing beyond

that. Finally, some feel aesthetic experience is demonstrated in how well the student can engage in their creative process *alone*, as well as how well they can articulate that process when asked.

How do teachers facilitate their students in recognizing Aesthetic Experience; and how do they plan for and facilitate it?

The results of this study illuminate that for the most part, teachers make it a point *not* to discuss aesthetic experience with students because it is seen as a private matter that usually happens when students are left alone. However, aesthetic experience is still recognized and facilitated in a variety of ways. Some teachers emphasize the quality of finished art products and students' ability to attract buyers. To do this, there is much time invested in mastering technique through modeling, practice, and rigorous coaching. Some teachers focus on the integration of art elements and principals and how well students can articulate their use. This approach requires interaction between teacher and student; focusing on what meaning artists are trying to convey in their work. Some teachers minimize the focus on the “product” aspect of art and encourage students to be vulnerable, trusting, and willing to try. Some teachers encourage their students to use their artwork to ask big questions about our purpose in life. To facilitate this, teachers foster the experimentation and manipulation of art tools and materials. Finally, others facilitate aesthetic experience through gaps, voids, frustration, and boredom—inspiring students to develop work ethic, a personal aesthetic, and a life-long appreciation for beauty in the world.

How do teachers construct meanings with their students about Aesthetic Experience?

Teachers do this in a variety of ways. For some, the meaning is implied. In other words, through making beautiful products, placing in art competitions, and selling artwork—teachers express their favor when students do this and show their support. Teachers do the groundwork for

these shows by matting the artwork, helping students to select work for shows or portfolios, communicating to parents and gaining consent to enter competitions, and even deliver work to various locations. Some teachers encourage students to talk about their artwork by eliciting conversations asking questions to promote dialogue. By encouraging students to ask big questions through their artwork they come to an understanding that the artwork is an extension of our cognition and our emotions. In addition, the manipulation of tools and materials to create the artworks also becomes an extension of our abstract and creative thinking. When teachers minimize the focus on perfect products or artistic talent and allow room for mistakes, students learn that accomplishments in art can come from putting in your best effort. For most teachers, intentionally leaving students alone during their creative process helps to communicate to students the importance of self-study, developing independence, and navigating their creative process.

What goal(s) do teachers place on Aesthetic Experience?

In this study, noticeably, teachers' goals have a lot to do with how they plan for and facilitate aesthetic experience. Yet, they do agree on common themes. For example, they all want students to enjoy their time in class. They all aim to create a class environment that is safe and inspires creativity. They hope to develop their students into critical thinkers, problem solvers, and independent creators. In addition, they want their students to develop a personal aesthetic and a life-long appreciation for beauty in the world.

What role do teachers play in the dialogue initiated by Aesthetic Experience?

Results from this study indicate that many teachers do not communicate with their students about their aesthetic experiences. Some feel that aesthetic experience is too private of a matter. Some feel they are personally still trying to get a grasp on understanding their own aesthetic

experiences, so they don't feel comfortable assisting students with theirs. Because teachers focus mostly on representationalism and formalist aesthetic approaches, there is for the most part a lack of complicated conversations—or Postmodern/Contextualism approaches. Therefore, dialogue pertaining to aesthetic experiences tends to be minimal and mostly pertaining to use of art elements and the artwork as an aesthetically pleasing product. Dialogue is not concentrated on eliciting emotions from within students' bodies—the artwork is intended to convey these feelings—not students.

Is Aesthetic Experience recognized in a novel way that differs from the literature?

Yes, some teachers view aesthetic experience as eliciting a sense of nostalgia or reminiscing and longing for occurrences of the past. Competitions are seen beyond the “rivalry aspect.” Instead, they are understood as an opportunity to connect with others by seeing how others react to their artwork. Leaving students alone during their creative process is seen to increase the likelihood of an aesthetic experience, as well as the quality of them. Selling artwork was seen as a way toward aesthetic experience because of the self-confidence and artistic ability realized within oneself. Aesthetic experience was also described as being achieved through a sense of community. In other words, when students see the comradery and respect between their teachers, this nurtures a professional networking system, and it heightens the creative process and potential for aesthetic experience. A concerted effort is made on the part of teachers to help students recognize aesthetic experience beyond the walls of the classroom, and even beyond the realms of art competitions and museums. Students are encouraged to notice beautiful things within their daily interactions with nature. Along with these novel views came several challenges that pose a threat to aesthetic experience, such as views of art class, size, and placement of students; students lack in motivation,

originality, and critical thinking skills; detriment of technology; and difficulty gauging aesthetic experience.

Implications

This study offers new knowledge to address the gap in research at the high school level. Results indicate that aesthetic experience is being facilitated at the high school level as a significant, yet private matter, in which the goal is toward individual pursuits. This is counter to much of the aesthetic experience literature which conveys that aesthetic experience towards collective pursuits, as well as complicated conversations, are taking place at the elementary and college level. The results further indicate that the phenomenon of aesthetic experience, although considered by high school art teachers as significant in Visual Arts Education, is deemed extremely challenging to facilitate in the classroom because of several factors. For example, students are said to lack originality and critical thinking skills. Some challenges seem to extend beyond the control of both students and teacher, such as the detriment of technology and the view of art class, class size, and placement of students.

To view aesthetic experience as more of an open space in which students can enter a realm free from binaries and presumptions, where they can immerse into it and emerge utilizing their own ideas and drawing their own conclusions about the way they see the world; I proposed that we might come to view aesthetic experience as third space. The results of this study show that high school teachers may already be developing such a space by teacher's novel view of leaving students alone during their creative process. This may open opportunities for students to engage themselves and come to an understanding of who they are and where they can position themselves within society. Yet, much of the literature contends that this space needs to be continually nurtured as a safe area where students not only reinvent themselves, but also are guided to reflect on their

obligation to emerge from that space with ideas to make society a better place (Abraham, 2014; Anzaldúa, 1987; 2002; Bhabha, 1994; Cashman, 2021; Delanty, 2006; Greene, 2001; Lefebvre, 2016; Medina, 2012; Moje et al., 2004; Soja, 1996; 2009). Data from this study showed that this may not be the intent/practice of high school art teachers; given this, further investigation is needed.

Based on the novel views of aesthetic experience and challenges shared from teachers, this study may motivate us to consider a reconstruction of art education programs, including more collective engagements and more dialogue between teacher and students. Although several new positive elements about competitions were discovered, it still was found that there was considerable concentration on competition as the *only* means for students to get recognized. Thus, deeper consideration as to where teacher focus lies regarding the production of art products, short-term aesthetic benefits, and relationship building through critical dialogue/complicated conversations. For example, if teacher training incorporated concepts of an *Engaged Pedagogy* (Tilley & Taylor, 2013) or a *Postmodern/Contextualism* aesthetic approach (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki (2020), teachers might be more motivated to use students' lived experiences to aid in shaping their lessons.

It is important to consider that within these changing times where hybrid identities continue to develop, engaging in complicated conversations may be encouraged as a normal function of daily dialogue as students consider the artwork of others and create their own. Teachers conveyed a pressure to suppress these conversations with students in this study, which as noted by other scholars, likely tarnishes their relationship (Apple, 1990; Kohn, 2006; Pinar, 2012). To pretend as though the realm of schools is untouchable from outside influence is not only viewing students as unintelligible of seeing through this façade, but a constant censoring of topics relevant to them

may lead to a blind and fatalistic outlook of themselves and society (Rossatto, 2005). This consideration goes well beyond teachers. School administration, as well as the school community can maintain a resilient approach and work together in meeting students' needs, even if this warrants navigation around dominant ideologies and related school policies.

The findings from this study expand the literature to include a recognition of the positive and hopeful aspects in everyday life. This includes acknowledging the “good times” when engaged in a sense of nostalgia and recognizing accomplishments where society *has* and *is* upholding social justice. In other words, rather than facilitating aesthetic experiences confronting *only* the negative aspects of society, it seems constructive to also acknowledge current innovations toward a better future for society. Moreover, it seems appropriate to be thankful for our independence of thought and agency; our potential for imagination, creativity, and appreciation to recognize the beauty within our surroundings, as well as our triumphs.

This research has shown that despite the challenges teachers face to facilitate aesthetic experience, they each bring their own unique perspective to the classroom that enhances the potential of aesthetic experience in broader ways. This might have the potential to create new spaces for aesthetic experience, not only within the high school classroom, but perhaps also within and around the school community. Thus, there is potential for practical application of aesthetic experience that bridges the classroom space between students' artmaking and their lived experience.

Future Directions for the Research

This study sought to illuminate high school art teachers' voices. Future endeavors within this line of scholarship should expand to ask *students* their interpretation. What are *their* goals for taking art classes? Are their goals corresponding to their teachers'? Do they also value the

development of their creativity, their aesthetic skillset, their life-long personal aesthetic outlook? If they are working on a portfolio, what do *they* feel its purpose is? Do they have a balanced view between their developing technical skill and their aesthetic growth, or does one precede over the other? As they create and observe the artwork of others, do they feel they have aesthetic experiences? Do they find that their teachers' model, share, and facilitate aesthetic experiences, or do they feel that their teachers inhibit them? Do they acknowledge aesthetic experiences happening both in the art classroom and beyond the school walls? What value do they place on these experiences? Taking into account Sotiropoulou-Zormpala & Mouriki's (2020) advice to also engage students through a Postmodern/Contextualism approach, it may be advantageous not only to interview students as to how they view complicated conversations in the classroom setting, but also to view their works of art. Being able to see students' work and hear how they engage in conversations about it may indicate the influence of a particular teacher approach. Perhaps it could be learned which types of approaches yield more inspiration for ideas or engage students toward more of a *resilient* and *transformative optimism* (Rossatto, 2005).

Although teachers were asked in this study what they felt were the goals of their administrators, fine arts department, and community, these individuals need to be asked personally. Knowledge in the field may be deepened from further exploration on whether fine arts departments, school administration, or the school community consider art competitions to be the most meaningful way to facilitate aesthetic experiences. Other questions for consideration are to obtain reactions to the notion of teachers "leaving their students alone" throughout their creative process, and questioning if these stakeholders view artmaking and art viewing as a way toward reimagining and creating a better society. Do parents see art classrooms as a place for their children to engage in collaborative endeavors to reimagine society and their roles within it? Or is the art

classroom supposed to be a place where their children acquire the skills necessary to succeed individually? Does the school administration view art class as just another insignificant subject to be cut the next time the budget becomes restrained? Are Fine Art Departments only concerned with how they are perceived in achieving student success through competitive means during students' tenure within the district? Or are they also concerned with students' long-term aesthetic development toward a productive life after school is completed? Future research in aesthetic experience may be enriched by extending this study's questions beyond the scope of the Arts classroom to see how these outside perspectives might influence the attitudes, teaching approaches, and classroom experiences within high schools.

Chapter 9

Epilogue: Closure with this “Aesthetic Experience”

Participants’ Views of Aesthetic Experience

I am deeply appreciative of my participants’ contributions as it demonstrates a current and authentic understanding of aesthetic experience in the high school context. I was deliberate in not sharing any part of my theoretical framework with participants, nor did I reveal much in the way of how I interpreted aesthetic experience in the context of public education. The interpretations that were shared are quite raw and unanticipated. During the interviews, I did feel some hesitation on how to answer: “What do the words *aesthetic* and *aesthetic experience* mean to you?” and “How would you know that your students had such an experience?” The implication that I infer from the uneasiness to answer is that these conversations are not the norm for them. Iris expressed that she felt undeveloped as a teacher to engage in such conversations about something she felt was almost too personal to share with others. Carlos shared that much of his aesthetic experiences would not be shared with his students as he felt most would not be mature for those types of conversations. His words were, “I don’t get too deep with them.” Alejandro and Iris both asked that I provide some background information about my understanding of aesthetic experience before offering their views.

I want to be very clear that I am in no way criticizing my participants’ responses. Had anyone asked me what aesthetic experience was some twenty years ago when I taught high school art, I would have said that aesthetics had to do with art critiques and art history. This is because I would see the word “aesthetics” as one of the components in an art textbook or curriculum guide that recommended asking students about an artwork’s form—be it shape, color, or use of line. So,

I came to understand aesthetics as the study of beauty in art. And I perceived an “aesthetic experience” simply as the experience of analyzing an artwork regarding beauty during a group or self-critique. It wasn’t until my third year of teaching when I would have multiple conversations with a colleague—who was working toward a Ph.D. in Music Education at the time—that I began to understand aesthetic experience as a heightened consciousness of my senses. Moreover, not that I could force the experience, but I began to purposefully anticipate such an encounter when admiring a completed artwork, or even an artwork in-the-making. The point is that I am still on a journey in developing my understanding of aesthetic experience, how it pertains to my life, and how that meaning translates—or doesn’t—to my teaching approach, and now to my role as a researcher.

Is My Interpretation of Aesthetic Experience too “Romantic?”

As I mentioned previously in the introduction, when I think about an aesthetic experience, I see it very closely to Medina’s (2012) definition—as a “heightened sense of awareness,” as well as Greene’s (2001) view, as an approach toward “alternate realities.” Similarly, I do not merely view aesthetic experience as a skillset to view the beauty in artworks, or even the creative process to create something pleasing to the eye. I also see it as having the ability to transcend and recognize ourselves and others in alternate realities using our imaginations. As this dissertation concludes, I feel it is now appropriate to share *my* interpretation of aesthetic experience. I would define aesthetic experience as a moment recognized during the process of creating and transcending between realities. During this moment of heightened awareness, we not only appreciate our potential to manipulate and cross these worlds, but we also come to understand our power to wield this ability for good throughout our process in becoming. Becoming what? Hopefully, a better human. And, yes, the next step on the way to becoming is noticing, connecting, and harnessing energy with

others, to be better people for one another. What does it mean to be better for one another? Well, as Stinson (1985) was quoted at the very start—the primary goal is to put other’s needs before our own. If there is one contribution I would like to make within this scholarship, is that aesthetic experience offers a practical pathway within Arts Education to recognize the value and capacity in ourselves so that we can recognize it in others and support them.

To quickly illustrate this perspective of, “transcending between realities,” I will use my personal life as an example. I see myself constantly transcending between worlds, or spaces of being. In one sphere I am an aspiring researcher and teacher of pre-service teachers at a university, in another, I am a 20-year veteran, public school art teacher. I am also the father of two daughters, a grandfather, a husband, a son, and a brother. I am White, yet I am also Latino. I am also French and Aztec. My grandfather on my dad’s side had a farm in Maine, while my grandmother on my mom’s side was from Mexico City. I am one person with my family, another person for my college students, another for my elementary students, another for this research study, and, yet another when I engage with the classic car community. I don’t always want to think critically. Sometimes I just want to concentrate on figuring out whether I need a $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{9}{16}$ wrench to turn the next bolt on a project or admire a fresh bead of weld that not only looks beautiful, but I know it got good penetration within the metal. Sometimes I look forward to my project running into a carburetor or ignition issue, because I like the challenge of figuring it out. I perceive all these as different worlds in which to transcend, appreciate, nurture, imagine, reinterpret, and evolve. It is within all these spaces that aesthetic experience can be engaged as our imagination can be used to appreciate how

each component of ourselves connects to others and how that compatibility can be channeled toward becoming better people for one another.

I see aesthetic experience as a pathway to initiate, harness, and enact change. I view the artworks that we create, as well as our creative process in making them as a way of understanding ourselves and a pursuit toward being better humans. This, of course, is also based on Sunday's (2015) framework of relational aesthetics in which artwork and the process in creating it is seen as the catalyst for change in society. Based on this research, creating student artwork and discussions about their creative process is not seen as a way toward change in our society. This is not to say that teachers do not aspire to motivate their students toward reflecting on positive change in society—but the approach might not be through student artwork. Instead, the initiative might utilize the work of masters, such as Van Gogh, Matisse, O'Keefe, or Andy Warhol. In other words, the data indicates that perhaps we might be better inspired by the great masters and do what is best for our own aesthetic development than consult each other in how we come to recognize purposes of art, our role within it, and how it might be changed for the better. Hopefully, we can develop a profound respect in pursuing more of the latter.

Through this study, it has become clear to me that my idealistic view of aesthetic experience is not entirely shared in the context of high school Visual Arts Education. As my participants' definitions of aesthetic experience reside mostly in the viewing of artworks within museums, it makes me feel as if Dewey's (1934) motivation to move aesthetic experience beyond the "elitist" realm of museums has not made much advancement. This is not a jab at teachers, and I can most certainly relate. I remember teaching at the high school level some 20 years ago and my students would try to negotiate deals with me so that I would be okay with them putting their hoodies over their heads and listening to their headphones to disconnect from my class. Similarly, my

participants expressed challenges, such as lazy students, the lack of creativity, the marginal view of art class, and the detrimental influences of technology. The teachers expressed how these concerns limit the quality of aesthetic experiences for their students. It should also be taken into consideration that some of my participants had professions other than teaching and were quickly immersed in public school education with little training. Perhaps these factors might account for their viewing of the aesthetic and related experiences as mostly happening beyond the classroom walls—in spaces where the artwork of art masters and their influence are revered. Based on my experience teaching pre-service teachers, I would suggest that maybe the way we view children plays a significant role in how seriously they can attend phenomena, understand it, and wield it (Edwards, 2005; Kohn, 2006).

Aesthetic Experience is: “_____”

Simply put, aesthetic experience means different things to different people. Through conversations—long before this study began—some friends have expressed to me that they feel they have had aesthetic experiences while reading a book or engaging in a hobby, such as playing the guitar. They have described the experience as being so overwhelmed with their emotions that they felt a moment of connectedness between themselves and others, as well as better understanding their place in the world. Recently, when considering the third level in Stinson’s (1985) work—the artwork becomes a catalyst for change—one of my professor’s asked if attending a LGBTQ march would be considered reaching that level. Being totally unprepared to answer that question, I quickly replied, “yes, of course.” It was at this moment I realized the magnitude of these conversations. Before my study, I was just some random person contemplating what others have said about aesthetic experience. Now, I realize that I stand on the shoulders of great scholars and their theoretical frameworks to wield my voice in a particular way. As I express

this passion of mine to acknowledge our process in creating art as a motivation toward making positive change in society, I recognize that some might look to me to answer questions, such as: “Well, what makes an experience an aesthetic one?” Or “what makes the aesthetic an experience?” And “if I do _____ or _____, does that count toward level one, two, or three?”

Bottom line is—I don’t have those answers and, honestly, I don’t want to answer those questions. Who am I to answer them? However, while I admit I am “no one,” to determine whether, or not someone had an aesthetic experience, or judge toward what purpose it is nurtured, I am “someone” who cares deeply about where we currently are as a society and where we are going; and I feel that the way we approach teaching art influences students’ perceptions of themselves and the world when they create art. Believe me when I say that I over agonize when reflecting on what role I play in making the world a better place. I often think about the horrific school shootings or even the shootings that have recently taken place locally, like the one at a nearby Walmart. When these occurrences happen, I ponder on where I can make the most positive impact in serving the community. I think of those strong and courageous individuals, such as law enforcement, who typically bring individuals to justice as a reactive measure. My physical appearance and demeanor wouldn’t suit me well for that line of work. However, I can continue to be *proactive* in my mission as an educator. Educators can initiate change as our students are still developing at an early age. It is my responsibility to model for students what it means to be a kind, patient, and thoughtful person. Since the visual arts is the field that I have come to know in the education world, I see aesthetic experience as an opportunity to engage students emotionally, ethically, and creatively. Moreover, I see my role as not dictating others’ aesthetic experiences and deciding at what varying

level(s) of aesthetic they categorize themselves in. On the other hand, I just want to play a part in highlighting them as a potential growth area toward being better human beings.

Aesthetic Experience Beyond the Arts

Although this research has been situated within the context of Visual Arts Education, I want to acknowledge that the phenomenon of aesthetic experience must exist beyond the world of the Arts. It makes sense that a concert pianist, a Broadway actor, or even an amateur dancer could have aesthetic experiences while performing—so long as they were willing to “attend” and recognize the encounter (Greene, 2001). However, I would like to take this time to consider the many moments in our daily routine that might also be regarded as aesthetic experiences. I would like to share some examples of this. During the summer months in West Texas when I am mowing my backyard lawn, I often take the time to pay extra attention to my surroundings. I will shut off the lawnmower, close my eyes, breathe in the freshly-cut-grass-fragrance, and take notice of the way the morning sun gently touches my eyes and cheeks. I will open my eyes and notice the leaves gently twitch because of the light breeze; the subtle rhythmic sound it makes as its leaves touch each other—almost like the trickling water of a small stream. This movement of the leaves makes the sunlight flicker on the foliage beneath. I am inspired to walk over to the tree and run my hands across its hard texture and appreciate its strength and purpose. I will sometimes lay in the grass, spreading my arms and hands around my body and above my head, being completely vulnerable to the small red ants, Roly-Polys, and the soft soil that conforms to my body and tolerates my

presence for a moment. It is in these moments that I will reflect on my connection with nature and my role in our relationship.

At other times, I will find myself replaying a song while I am driving to work. It is a sad song or makes me think of an experience in my life that I have yet to move on from. The song causes me to get that lump in the throat, my breathing pattern skips a beat, my chest hurts, and I give way to my emotions. My tears begin to well up, getting in the way of seeing the road and vehicles in front of me. I will replay the song, again and again, or even replay just that part that gets me, just to remain in that moment a little longer. In that moment, I am reminded of a face, a smell, a feeling, a touch, a particular memory. And if some parts of that memory are vague, then I fill in the blanks with images and colors to my liking. Sometimes, I will create an alternate reality of the memory to remove something traumatic or fantasize an alternate ending. In the end, though, I usually embrace what really happened. Yes, it is a moment of sadness, but in that moment, it feels good to center myself on those emotions. It is a sense of healing, accepting, and moving on. Sometimes I find myself going through this process for an event that has not yet happened, but I am trying to prepare myself for. As silly as this sounds, I feel this speaks to the power we possess to influence and navigate our experiences—even those that are beyond our control. For example, if there is something that we are waiting for—which will come inevitably—we do still have the power to manage how we will respond.

Not all my “car time” is sad. Sometimes, I will come across a song that gets me moving. My body might even be completely still as I drive but I become in tune with every single note. I have this experience in which I hear and imagine playing all the instruments simultaneously. I can visualize myself on stage with my guitar hanging low, my left hand holding that sweet sounding power-cord and my right hand gently palm muting heavy, steady, jolts of clean distorted riff that

will make you want to bob your head with conviction. Intertwined with that momentum is the ease of the double-bass pedal on the drums that sneaks up on you that kick or two you didn't expect but complements the groove in all the right places. Then you have that bass line that walks along the journey and provides those pulsing slap sounds of the metal string hitting the frets and the talented fingers that are plucking hard and purposefully. It is at about this moment in time when I am getting ready to sing the song lyrics that I feel goosebumps on my arms and even a sense of nervousness as I acknowledge the crowd in front of my microphone. At this point, I am approaching a streetlight and get prepared to stop and chuckle at why I let myself get so overtaken by this fantasy.

I would say that at times, I have aesthetic experiences while teaching—even when the topic has absolutely nothing to do with art. This usually happens when I have a moment with a student or group of students, usually engaging in conversation. It is a space in which we feel connected, aspiring toward similar goals, and we acknowledge the power we possess as a collective. A similar experience is when I attend my student's ceremonies or graduation. It is in these spaces when I see my students elevated, acknowledged for their achievement, attaining their goals, that I reflect on my role throughout their educational journey. My emotions get the best of me, and I feel an overwhelming sense of being a part of something larger than myself—I even feel guilty that I am not worthy to be a part of something so transcendental.

In fact, there were many times during this research process that I felt an aesthetic experience. Sometimes this occurred when I would listen to my participants, and I became overcome with such connectedness and gratitude. How fortunate I am to be a part of this significant work. There were times in which I joined my family for car rides, trips to the park, or stroll around the mall, and admittedly, I was not present for these activities because I was coming down from a “high” after writing all day. I feel so grateful to have this opportunity to learn from other visual

art teachers. I am very fortunate that my participants were willing to take the time to have in-depth conversations with me about their personal experiences and connections with their artwork and their students. I am very thankful to my family for granting me the space to interview, write, and time to stare out into nothing and just reflect. All these experiences are now memories that I will ponder in the future and likely have an aesthetic moment, or as Alejandro calls them, *a sense of nostalgia*.

Speaking of nostalgia, I must confess that some of my most profound aesthetic experiences do happen in my garage working on cars. Since I started my teaching career in 2003, I have built many motors, hotrods, muscle cars, and motorcycles. Some of these consist of a 1932 Ford Roadster, 1946 Chevy Style line, 1964 ½ Ford Mustang, 1970 Ford Torino Fastback, 1971 and 1972 Chevelle, 1967 Oldsmobile 442, 1975 Triumph TR6, 1956 and 1957 Chevy Bel Air, 1956 Ford Gasser, 1976 Corvette, 1963 Ford Thunderbird, 1963 Ford Fairlane, 1972 Triumph 500 Tiger, 1965 Panhead, and a 1972 Shovelhead Chopper—just to name a few of my favorites. There is a sense of nostalgia to be had when taking apart a motor for the first time since it was first assembled in the early 60's. Think about it. It was assembled before John F. Kennedy was assassinated, when the space race was in full effect, and at the heart of the civil rights movement. To give a piece of machinery, an aesthetic work of art a second life so that we can share with others an appreciation for that era and possibly relive it through our imagination—Wow!

I share these personal experiences with you because I believe aesthetic experiences happen more often than we may realize and do so within informal contexts. Although aesthetic experiences that take place while artmaking or art viewing within formal, educational contexts should be of greatest concern to art teachers, so should the ones that happen beyond the classroom walls. Reflecting on how the aesthetic interweaves through our everyday experiences can better inform

our approach to the classroom. Perhaps if we help students see that similar experiences can happen at home, amongst friends and family, or when they are involved in a beloved activity, hobby, or sport, we can continue to bridge the gap between formal and informal learning. We need to eliminate the perspective that these experiences of admiring beauty, appreciating our connectivity between ourselves and others, or to transcend beyond ourselves is only attainable to the artistically talented or an elite few. I would like to end this section with a quote from Greene (2001), which captures the essence of these journeys we take reflecting on our experiences. She expounds:

But there is more, another phase of the imaginative creativity; the savoring of what we have seen and heard in inner time, the elaboration of it, the seeping down. If we have attended authentically enough, broken significantly with the habitual and the conventional, we will find ourselves discovering dimensions of our own experiences never quite suspected before. We will find ourselves making connections, discerning meanings, or coming on new perspectives because of what we have beheld (p. 60).

These experiences can be achieved by everyone, and should be, to enhance our quality of life and recognize our agency toward change.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Letter

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Appendix C: Sample Interview Questions

Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Letter

Presentation/E-mail Script

Date: _____

Dear _____,

Hello, my name is Kenneth Dore. I am a PhD candidate in UTEP's Teaching, Learning, and Cultural doctoral program. I am conducting a qualitative research study on the interpretations and facilitation of aesthetic experiences in advanced-level, high school Visual Arts classrooms.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about how high school visual arts teachers understand and utilize aesthetic experiences in their classrooms. To be selected for this study, you need to have taught visual arts for at least three years at the high school level and currently teach an advanced-level Art class. If you fit these criteria and are interested in participating in the study, I will contact you via email or Zoom conferencing to explain the study and provide more details on the consent process. You will be asked to sign a consent form before participating in any or all parts of the study. These parts will include: three 60-90-minute, one-on-one interviews. You will be given and/or choose a pseudonym to protect your identity. All information shared with me as the researcher will be kept confidential and secure. Individual interviews will be at a time and location that best accommodates you.

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to consider taking part in this study. Participation is completely voluntary. If you have additional questions and are interested in participating in any or all parts of this study, please feel free to contact me, Kenneth Dore at kadore@utep.edu or 915-731-2492.

Respectfully,

Kenneth A. Dore, III

Appendix B: Informed Consent

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Title: Interpretations of Aesthetic Experience and Its Enactment in High School Visual Arts Education

Principal Investigator: Kenneth A. Dore, III

Department: UTEP, College of Education

In this consent form, “you” always means the study subject. If you are a legally authorized representative, please remember that “you” refers to the study subject.

Introduction

You are being asked to take part voluntarily in the research project described below. You are encouraged to take your time in making your decision. It is important that you read the information that describes the study. Please ask me to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore how high school visual arts teachers interpret the aesthetic experiences their students have in the classroom, as well as their role in facilitating those experiences. Discovering teacher interpretations and ways in which they utilize aesthetic experiences in their classrooms will contribute to the minimal amount of literature at the high school level. In addition, this study can be influential to teacher preparation, Art Education practices, and professional development.

A total of five teachers will be enrolling in this study across several campuses in EPISD. You are being asked to be in the study because you have taught at least three years or more in a high school setting and you teach a section or more of advanced-level Art.

What is involved in the study?

If you agree to take part in this study, I will ask that you fill out an informed consent prior to any interviews. Next, I will ask you to participate in three in-person, one-on-one 60-90-minute interviews with me. Interviews will be audio recorded to preserve accuracy, as well as transcribed word for word by me. The interviews will take place at a time and location that is convenient for you.

If you decide to enroll in this study, your involvement will last one semester (spring of 2024) which would equate to approximately 18 weeks or 90 days. Throughout the course of the semester, three semi-structured, face-to-face interviews will be used to collect data. The interviews will take approximately 60-90 minutes each. All interviews will be held face to face or through Zoom video

conference. The interviews can be scheduled at a time and location designated by you. Your participation in this study for interviews equates to approximately 240-360 minutes or 4-6 hours of your time throughout the course of one semester.

What are the risks and discomforts of the study?

The risks associated with this research are no greater than those involved in daily activities. There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participation. However, because you are talking about experiences from your life, strong feelings may come up. If you feel the need to talk with a counselor, the following organization may be contacted.

Centro de Salud Familiar La Fe

1314 E. Yandell

El Paso, TX 79902

915-534-7979

What will happen if I am injured in this study?

The University of Texas at El Paso and its affiliates do not offer to pay for or cover the cost of medical treatment for research related illness or injury. No funds have been set aside to pay or reimburse you in the event of such injury or illness. You will not give up any of your legal rights by signing this consent form. You should report any such injury to Kenneth A. Dore, III at (915) 731-2492, and to the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-6590) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

Are there benefits to taking part in this study?

You are not likely to benefit by taking part in this study. However, this research may help us to understand how high school visual arts teachers interpret and facilitate aesthetic experiences in the context of advanced-level art classes. Developing such awareness will contribute to the minimal amount of literature in the high school arena. In addition, this research can potentially aid in the enhancement of art curriculum and pedagogical practices to empower student voice and their creative processes. So, you may feel a sense of pride contributing to this research.

What are my costs?

There are no direct costs.

Will I be paid to participate in this study?

You will not be compensated for taking part in this research study.
What other options are there?

What other options are there?

You have the option not to take part in this study. There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

What if I want to withdraw, or am asked to withdraw from this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you do not take part in the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit.

If you choose to take part, you have the right to skip any questions or stop at any time. However, we encourage you to talk to a member of the research group so that they know why you are leaving the study. If there are any new findings during the study that may affect whether you want to continue to take part, you will be told about them.

The researcher may decide to stop your participation without your permission, if he or she thinks that being in the study may cause you harm.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call or email me, Kenneth Dore, at (915) 731-2492, or kadore@utep.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your participation as a research subject, please contact the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-6590 or irb.orsp@utep.edu).

What about confidentiality?

Your part in this study is confidential. The following procedures will be followed to keep your personal information confidential. You will be given and/or select a pseudonym to protect your identity. Pseudonyms will be utilized for all contexts within the study except for the informed consent forms which will be stored separately and securely. An appropriate time and place will be negotiated between us for the interviews. This approach will assist in making you feel comfortable and that your privacy is sustained both during and after being interviewed. Ultimately, the interview setting will be designated by you. You may choose not to answer a particular question(s). At any time, you may choose not to be audio recorded. You may discontinue participation in the study at any time by contacting me via phone, e-mail, or in person.

The results of this research study may be presented at meetings or in publications; however, your name will not be disclosed in those presentations or in the data itself—pseudonyms will be used.

Every effort will be made to keep your information confidential. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Office of Human Research Protections
- UTEP Institutional Review Board

Because of the need to release information to these parties, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

All records will be accessible only to the researcher. Actual names will not be used on any data collected. Pseudonyms will be used for participants and institutions they are affiliated with. The informed consent form which contains actual names will be stored securely and separately from all other data collected.

The researcher will be the only one who will have access to audio recordings. Audio recordings will be stored with the researcher in a secured location. Audio recordings will be played back only by the researcher and only for purposes of data analysis. The researcher will utilize this data to identify patterns and develop themes about the phenomenon studied. Audio recordings will be deleted 6 months after the end of data collection.

Mandatory reporting

If information is revealed about child abuse or neglect, or potentially dangerous future behavior to others, the law requires that this information be reported to the proper authorities.

Authorization Statement

I have read each page of this paper about the study (or it was read to me). I will be given a copy of the form to keep. I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I know that being in this study is voluntary and I choose to be in this study.

Participant's Name (printed)

Participant's Signature

Date

Kenneth A. Dore, III, Researcher

Date

Appendix C: Sample Interview Questions

PART I: (Background, Teacher Education, Influences)

- What grade level(s) do you currently teach? And, how long have you been teaching art?
- What are the art sections (the specific names/titles) that you currently teach? And, how long have you been teaching these specific sections of art classes?
- Do you have a preferred pseudonym?
- How do you self-identify? What is your gender? What is your ethnicity?
- What does teaching art mean to you? And, what would you say is your top priority(s) when educating your art students?
- Please sketch/draw a timeline of experiences and people that have influenced that meaning or the priorities you have for your students.
- Now on that timeline can you tell me about the people, experiences, and events that have contributed to the shaping of your approach to teaching art?
- Can you walk me through your teacher education experience? And, how do you feel it may have influenced your current approach to teaching art?
- Would you like to share a new art approach that you are currently implementing? Is there an approach you tried recently with great success and you would like to share your experience with me? Or, is there something new you would like to try?

PART II: (Curriculum Planning, Activities, Lessons, Creative Processes)

- Suppose you are planning the next lesson for your students. What steps do you take? Can you describe what that process would look like? Can you walk me through the requirements of an assignment or activity as if I were one of your students?
- Can you describe the process of how students generate ideas for their artworks? How do they go about “getting to work?” What does their creative process involve (based on what you observe or perhaps based on what process you implement)? How long does it take?
- Please describe your approach or process when collaborating with your students about ideas or concerns with their artwork? In what aspects of their process are you involved or not involved in?
- What methods do you utilize to make students’ creative processes visible and accessible so that you can assess them? Do you grade it? How? Do you talk about it with your students?
- How do you initiate dialogue with your students about their artwork and/or experiences? (For example, when talking about obstacles with their artwork, issues coming up with ideas, or issues finishing their art).
- What would you say your students’ goals are in your classroom, or purposes for artmaking? What do you feel the community’s expectation is for you as an art teacher? What do you feel is the purpose of your classroom and/or goals for artmaking?

PART III: (Interpretations of AE, Relationships/Influence, Dialogue about AE)

- How would you define aesthetic experiences as they pertain to you?
- Would you say your students have aesthetic experiences? How would you know that they did?
- How would you define the aesthetic experiences of your students? How do you perceive them? Do you see them differently than your own? Why do you answer in this way?
- What role do you feel aesthetic experiences play in your classroom? What role do you feel you play in facilitating aesthetic experiences in your classroom? What do you feel is the role of your students to engage in them?
- How would you describe the relationship you have with your students overall? How about as it pertains to supporting their creative process? How about as it pertains to their aesthetic experiences? How do you feel about discussing issues they have beyond the school context that may, or may not affect their artwork or productivity in the class?
- How do you feel about sharing your aesthetic experiences with your students? Please give me an example of such an experience.
- How do you feel about having complicated conversations (moral, political, religious, etc.) with your students that might be initiated by way of aesthetic experiences?
- Are there certain spaces or times within the classroom or schedule in which aesthetic experience would be more likely to take place? Can you describe them? And reasons why they would better facilitate AE?

Additional Questions:

- Susan Stinson (1985) defines aesthetic experience as a heightened awareness in which one's feelings and emotions are fully engaged by either the artwork they are creating or looking at. She also presents three levels: (1) appreciation for the artwork; (2) self-reflection of artist and relationship with world; and (3) moved with compassion to act. What would you say in response to this?
- Based on her definition: At what level would you place your students when they create artworks in your classroom? Why do you respond this way? At what level would you place yourself when you typically engage in aesthetic experience? Does it vary? Based on what criteria?
- Is there a new definition you would like to add to the understanding of aesthetic experience? Perhaps, you have your own levels. Do you view aesthetic experience differently than what has been proposed by Stinson?
- Some art teachers might say that the aesthetic is already embedded into the art curriculum. Or others may say that aesthetic experiences will inevitably occur without the facilitation of the teacher. What would you tell them?
- Please describe the collaboration you might have with your colleagues (the other art teachers at your school who teach the introductory art classes) as it pertains to students' creative processes and aesthetic experiences. How do you feel they view aesthetic experiences or purposes of art?
- Please describe your relationship with your administrators. What is your administrations' view of the purpose for artmaking? How might they view aesthetic experiences?

Vita

Kenneth Dore earned his Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts in 2003 from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). In 2018, he received his Master of Education in Early Childhood Curriculum and Instruction—also from UTEP. He joined the doctoral program in Teaching, Learning, and Culture at UTEP in 2019. He currently teaches as a faculty Lecturer in Early Childhood Education in the Teacher Education department at UTEP. He has additional experience working in higher education as an Adjunct Instructor since the spring of 2019.

Mr. Dore has worked as an Art educator in El Paso, TX, within various grade levels. He has 20 years' experience teaching Visual Arts in a local public school district. Those years include five years at the high school level, eight years in an elementary school, and seven years as a mobile 3rd grade art teacher visiting several campuses across the district. He also has experience presenting at local professional development conferences and workshops at the capacities of both the university, as well as within a local public school district.

His research interests include Aesthetic Education; Arts Education; Bridging Formal and Informal Knowledge; Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy; Critical Pedagogy; Embedded Cognition; Engaged Pedagogy; Environment as Extension of Cognition; Feminist Theory; Figured Worlds; Foucault's Theory of Power; Funds of Knowledge; Pedagogy of the Soul; Responsive Classroom Management; Relational Aesthetics; Relationships and Co-Construction between Teachers and Students; and Third Space.

Contact Information: kadore@utep.edu