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Making Sense of “Making Special”: *Art and Intimacy* in Musical Lives and Educational Practice

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Prelude: Arts-Informed¹ Critique

Artistic activity is multi-faceted, complex, dynamic, and humanizing. Through engagement with artistic materials—whether pitch, rhythm, paint, clay, syllables or gestures—we express personal circumstance and individual style. Reveling in familiar media, artists seek to reveal meaning through juxtaposition of certainty and exploration, comfort and discomfort, surprise and delight. Artists do more asking than telling, inviting interpretation in a presentation that provides spaces for interactive thought. Those of us groomed for scholarly work through artistic practice find that the crafting of research designs and even critical essays calls forth these dispositions.

The contributions of such artistic thinking to the collective intellectual climate has indeed been the subject of recent interest, from John-Steiner’s (1996) acknowledgement of the arts as “notebooks of the mind” to Wilson’s (1999) view of artistic interpretation as being associated with scientific method. Arts-informed scholars have noted the shared features between conventional

¹ I take this term from Bresler (2005), who notes the differences between arts-based and arts-informed as a matter of translating practices vs. transferring sensibilities, respectively.

conceptions of research and artistic activity such as the awareness of qualitative relationships (Eisner, 2002), and have explored the use of musical idioms as descriptors for research perspectives and methods (Bresler, 2005). In seeking to understand the contributions of artistic sensibilities to the practice of inquiry, researchers have characterized their own work as involving aesthetic design, embracing ambiguity, using vernacular voice, expressing meaning rather than explicitly stating it, and considering multiple viewpoints (Barone, 2001).

Such is the character of my review of Dissanayake's *Art and Intimacy: How the Arts Began*. As musician, educator, and researcher my interpretation is informed by the aesthetic, the communicative, and the relational significance of presented ideas and ideology. In this arts-informed critique, I examine the applicability of the text through its viability in lived experience and consider what such an examination might reveal about educative responsibility, a subject of key interest to the readership of this journal. I juxtapose my voice, the voice of the author, and the vernacular voices of pre-service early childhood education students, writing about how the arts, here, specifically music, began for them, and how this way of knowing was supported or discouraged.

Of Making Meaning and Method

In *Art and Intimacy*, Ellen Dissanayake identifies a common human heritage through examining art making from a developmental stance, encompassing both evolutionary and ontological points of view. Her focus is how the temporal rhythms and impressionistic modes of both the arts and intimate relationships with others are manifest in sympathetic and emotional expression, beginning with infant-mother mutuality. From this foundation in mutuality, she explains how we amass capacities for meeting our basic psychobiological needs: Belonging, hands-on competence and meaning making, culminate in elaboration, or the "making special" of objects and events. Through thoughtful revelations gleaned from such disparate fields as musicology, anthropology, art history, biology, psychology, and sociology, Dissanayake provides an intriguing argument for why the arts matter to human growth and to the sustainability of lifelong fulfillment and purpose.

These psychobiological needs provide an inviting play space for cross-disciplinary insight and dialogue, a forum to discuss the infinitely compelling and humanizing qualities of the arts through the social nature of practices and malleable nature of materials. Dissanayake invites such a process in her introduction, where she states that her book is about love and art. Upon first encountering the word "love," the myriad of possibilities for interpretation are overwhelming. This concept has been defined and addressed with such diversity across social and historical contexts, and has been appropriated to such meaninglessness in today's vernacular that its interpretive usefulness is questionable. However, in *Art and Intimacy* Dissanayake acknowledges complexity: Mutuality, belonging, hands on competence, meaning making, and elaboration are the operationalizations of love and art – a taxonomy of sorts, whereby both the individual's efforts and the social interactions through which we construct our day to day experiences become elevated to the extraordinary.

For Dissanayake, the arts are inextricably intertwined with the rituals of life, and she is adamant and convincing about their contributions to well being. Each psychobiological need comprises a full chapter in her book, followed by a discussion regarding the value of the arts in human lives and an appendix that grapples with the issue of criteria for evaluating art. She claims in the "Preface" to the book that her "thesis of the joint origins of love and art is not only theoretical but also has practical and tangible implications for the way we live today" (p. xiii). Such promise for relevance to our immediate historical context motivated the form and content of this essay. Although in the final chapter Dissanayake addresses how the psychobiological needs operate in the

lived experience of those who have defined themselves as artists, I was more interested in how these needs were or were not met in the lives of people who did not necessarily perceive the arts as central to their professional identity. Because of the evidence she presents for the primacy of artistic experiences and their role in human adaptation, I was interested in how using the psychobiological needs as lenses might inform perspectives of how the arts, specifically music, are taught and learned.

To address these concerns, I use archived data – autobiographical accounts of musical lives and educational practice – as the materials through which I make sense of how people have access to the arts as a means for “making special,” and interpreting the qualities of everyday musical experiences that shape perceptions of selves and others. Specifically, we viewed Dissanayake’s theories in relation to 25 musical autobiographies, ranging in length from 2-5 typed double-spaced pages, that were the products of an assignment given in a music education course in the academic year 1997-98 for early childhood pre-service teachers.² Instructions for these reflective self-reports were to write about memories of significant musical experiences in early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, and adulthood vis-à-vis people, events, or specific music.

The criteria for selecting autobiographies to be analyzed were derived based on Dissanayake’s broad conception of artistic experiences, her evolutionary focus on adaptation, and the international audience for this journal. From the 58 papers available, those chosen for inclusion were: 1) complete, inasmuch as they addressed a range of activities over the lifespan, and 2) were written by students who had experiences in more than one geographical culture, that is, their texts reflect immigration to the U.S. within 15 years of the assignment date. The papers selected for analysis represented affiliations with specific regions outside the U.S. including Afghanistan, Armenia, El Salvador, Iran, Japan, Korea, Mexico, and Nigeria. Ages of the participants ranged in years from 18 to mid-30s. These were students typically working as part-time teachers of 3-5-year-olds while earning their 4-year college degree. There were 23 females and 2 males represented in the examined data, a gender ratio similar to the classes from which they were drawn.

These data are used to examine the psychobiological needs as phenomena experienced in musical activity. Adopting the methodological stance of phenomenography (Marton & Booth, 1997), individuals’ experiences of music in relationship to these needs are explored in terms of “ways of seeing them, ways of knowing about them, and having skills related to them” (p. 117). The goal for such inquiry is to reveal differences in experiences and to uncover questions – in this case questions involving educational conditions that may influence such experiences. The process involved devising a concise definition for each psychobiological need, and culling the autobiographies for descriptions of experience that reflected those definitions in both positive and negative ways. The 2-person research team and two additional readers reached consensus about the interpretive applications of Dissanayake’s categories.

Art making calls us to reflect on our own processes and resultant creative work, and to interpret others’ artistry through active, empathetic re-creation. Artistic encounters provide opportunity for human growth, as we are both agents of change in our shaping of malleable artistic materials, and are ourselves changed, often transformed, by the conditions of our aesthetic agency. Encountering Ellen Dissanayake’s *Art as Intimacy*, one is confronted with such opportunities for revising, renewing, and re-envisioning conceptions of art making and its function in our lives. The ideas set forth in this book have been lending themselves to improvisatory play in my professional activity for several years, and they continue to resonate with both my experience and my sense of inquiry, both of which I engage for the purposes of this essay. In this arts-informed critique, each of

² When referring to the autobiographical data, I use the collective “we” to acknowledge the contributions of my research assistant, Faye Timmer, who worked with me on the coding process.

the psychobiological needs is addressed through the juxtaposition of multiple voices—author, reviewer, and pre-service teachers—to present a perspective on Dissanayake’s work. Readers are asked to construct understanding based on familiar and unfamiliar renderings of musical experiences and to further interpret and consider how the presence or absence of mutuality, belonging, hands-on competence, meaning making and elaboration was and can be propelled or disrupted by artistic encounters.

Mutuality: Love and Intimacy as Foundation for Artistic Expression

According to Dissanayake, mutuality originates in the intimate moments of responsive interaction between mothers and infants. The lyrical speech of adults directed toward infants, what she refers to as “baby talk” and others have called “motherese,” (e.g., Fernald, 1985) is sustained through overt invitations by the child – a reciprocal counterpoint of vocalizations, physical movement, and facial cues. These duets are characterized by skills we associate with musical performance – matching pitches and rhythms in thematic coherence, an antecedent and consequent turn taking structure, and the anticipated regularity of metric synchrony – and language skills including sequencing and processing culturally specific linguistic signals. Both adults and infants are biologically disposed to mutuality. Infants need adult guidance through their prolonged period of immaturity, and so respond with signals adults can read – eye contact, smiles, and, perhaps most significant in this context, imitation of the adult. The adult, in turn, exaggerates speech and expression, making the information neurologically accessible for the infant.

With convincing resolve, Dissanayake writes “Lacking mutuality, we lack humanity,” (p. 43). She argues, with credible sources, that this compelling communicative activity is universal not only across cultures, but also has shaped our evolution as human beings. She offers a new perspective on the survival of the species: that humanity has evolved and been sustained by a complex yearning for responsiveness and shared intention rather than only the one-dimensional urge to procreate. It is the link between our innate proclivities toward listening and responding to another in our earliest experiences that leads to our art making, and the fulfillment of our humanity. A particularly persuasive bit of evidence relating these early experiences as infants to mature art making is the similarity in what constitutes a meaningful structure – the length of a typical phrase of infant-directed speech, about 3.5 – 5 seconds, is roughly equal to the temporal length of a poetic line or musical phrase.

Reciprocity is the essence of mutuality, and Dissanayake traces related themes such as attachment (Bowlby, 1969) across disparate cultures and even across species – one cannot help but linger with side by side photos of a human and an orangutan mother, each with her baby draped around her neck. In text and photographs throughout the book, Dissanayake draws heavily on the work of Colwyn Trevarthen; his work on intersubjectivity (e.g., Trevarthen & Hubley, 1978) is central to the understanding of mutuality. The conceptualization of music’s temporal nature as an “intrinsic motive pulse” (Trevarthen, 1999) makes a case for shared rhythmic understanding as a primary motivator for interactive communication and learning, and is similar to Dissanayake’s descriptions of conjoinment between infants and mothers through the coordination and expression of emotional states.

Many of the personal autobiographical accounts of pre-service teachers reflected themes of mutuality, particularly intimacy and reciprocity. We interpreted mutuality as “recognizing oneself in the actions and expressions of another,” and found people wrote about their music-based attachments to family, friends, and teachers with great emotion. In the example below, the responsiveness of a caring grandmother is recalled:

My grandmother...introduced the beauty of music into my world. Her voice always provided much comfort to me. I was notorious among our housekeepers for having temper tantrums when anyone attempted to make me [take a] nap. My grandmother was the only person who could help me to settle down. She used soothing chants, children's rhymes and Vietnamese songs to calm me during my afternoon naps. I remember her touching my forehead while she sang to me, helping me to close my eyes and rest my restless body. She would lie next to me and sing until I fell asleep.

The intimacy of the moment is clear – one can sense the shared intent and even in the writing itself, can sense a movement toward calm – a drawing of the child into a shared experience.

These autobiographical accounts provide a context to consider how the capacities we have for art making are enacted across the lifespan and how they might be supported or thwarted under a variety of conditions. Many people wrote about their school experiences, and in the example below, one can see how the student describes the mutuality between herself and her teacher, as she recognized the shared joy in active music making:

It was really during my elementary school years that my passion for music was rekindled in Mr. O'Neil's classroom, who was my sixth grade teacher. He taught us how to read music and play soprano recorder. This was my first musical instrument and I was so thrilled that I played it at home as well as at school. He provided us with the means to practice and eventually to play at our own culmination. He truly enjoyed teaching us to play the recorder, while encouraging us to appreciate and enjoy the music that surrounded us daily.

Although Dissanayake presents a cross-cultural view of mutuality, one issue that arises in the application of her theories to practice is the way cultural rhythms and modes might influence both capacity and need for mutuality. Parenting and educational practice are cultural phenomena, yet, there seem to be consistent messages about the contribution of mutual engagement to the personal valuing of experiences that transcend geographical, religious and ethnic belief systems. The example below is representative of several similar stories, where the focus on physical skill, interpreted as punitive by the student, masked any potential for the reciprocity evident in the previous account.

My parents were just like other typical Korean parents who want their child to be the best in every area. Most Korean children start their musical life by learning piano, and of course, I started taking piano lessons at a very young age, which I think ...was too young, with my brother. I remember when I was taking a lesson, my piano teacher used to put a sharp pointed pencil underneath my hand. The reason was to make my hand look like [I was] holding an egg. I was only 6 years old and as [such]... I couldn't always keep my hands in [this] egg holding shape so my hands will always go down and get poked by the sharp pencil and it ... hurt ... I *didn't like* it! I started not enjoying playing piano, but I had no other choice.

Here, the feeling of not having choice indicates the perception that the student's perspective is not considered worthy – that she is not heard. The teacher could be inflicting a “teaching as we were taught” approach to invoke a mutual sharing of success, which in his or her experience, may have involved physical discomfort. Dissanayake's focus on the significance of the early years in establishing foundations for art making may be extended to include dispositions about specific practices. The student above concludes her autobiography with the following:

I never played any instrument after I graduated from high school. My parents ask me to play piano sometimes, but I don't enjoy playing either the saxophone or piano because it brings me back [to] my memories and sometimes it hurts.

The permeating influence of mutuality both in and on artistic development seems profound. While the consequences of its absence can be traumatic, its presence can be transcendent – even immortal, as this last example suggests:

Mr. K. is also the one who has given me a chance to play the world's greatest violin of all times, the Stradivarius. Unfortunately, he passed away a couple of months ago. I learned so much from him and he also gave me so much love that I was devastated when he passed away. For sentimental reasons, I decided to purchase his violin and his bow. Whenever I play with it I always feel like he is in the room watching over me.

Belonging, Meaning Making, and Hands on Competence: Community and Agency in Artistic Expression

The *Art* in Dissanayake's title is discussed in the text as elaboration, building upon the idea of "making special"; *Intimacy* is reflected in mutuality or the social-emotional foundation for shared understanding that leads to such artistic activity. Along the way from foundation to artistic realization, we develop capacities that draw from inter and intra personal resources. These begin with belonging, through which we build affiliations, identity, and culture vis-à-vis the communities in which we find ourselves. While belonging refers to our situatedness, meaning making refers to the way we process information, which, according to Dissanayake, takes the form of systems and stories, based on our proclivities to classify, sequence and narrate. Hands-on competence is the self-evident confirmation provided by first hand experience. Gleaned from feedback, both kinesthetic (how does this feel?) and aesthetic (how does this reflect my expectations?), competence provides satisfaction through acknowledging human agency, that what one does matters. Like the mutuality, these remaining psychobiological needs are discussed in dialogue with three voices including the author's, the reviewer's and the pre-service teachers.

Belonging

For Dissanayake, belonging is a sort of collective mutuality, and much of what she discusses about belonging can be considered in the context of music educational practice. Rituals provide the rhythms and modes that initiate and sustain belonging – they epitomize shared understanding and draw upon proximity to create affiliation. She describes the use of music through examples from ceremonies in the hunter-gatherer societies, an idea that has correlates in present day such as the playing of national anthems for gold medal athletes at the Olympic games. Music education relies on this idea of ritual – there are the greeting songs and warm-up exercises that begin a class, and ceremonies that bring together the cultures of performing groups, as in this account:

I pursued the clarinet, and I was filled with much enthusiasm at my ability to produce such wonderful sounds. We played for the school on special occasions and parades and I felt very proud to be part of a band.

The nature of belonging is shaped by enculturation, and music represents a vehicle through which it occurs. In the student autobiographies there were many examples of the relationship between music and language learning in a new country. Here are two examples from our data that speak to two different perspectives regarding what types of experiences a community values:

Music was an important aid for me in learning the language. From turning on the radio to watching shows on television like Sesame Street, I heard a wide variety of songs in English. I feel music made the task of learning a new language much more enjoyable. Music also eased my fear of starting a new school with no friends. My first grade teacher was very big on playing the auto harp, with us singing in a circle around her. The rest of my memories of my elementary school years include several class performances that I delightfully participated in.

When I attended preschool my bilingual abilities were not appreciated and I soon forgot how to sing and speak Spanish.

Another aspect of Dissanayake's theory evident in accounts of lived experience is her assertion about developmental differences between groups to which we belong at various times over our lifespan. Our identities are very much linked to the distinct groups to which we belong. Compare the following school-aged recollections with those of the earlier memory of the preschool child and grandmother:

At recess time [my friends and I] had various singing games that we had fun playing, some songs required two groups in order to play the question and answer songs, these songs seemed to be very securing and comforting in what seemed like a giant playground to me, it also connected and related my friends to me and vice versa.

In my secondary school years, I became very engrossed into music. I joined school chorus, joined after school orchestra, started taking voice lessons, I even joined the school band playing the bell so that I can play in the once a year joint performance with high school band. I also gathered three of my friends together and made a quartet.

The other students and I would meet in the practice rooms to work on our pieces and critique each other. It brought together students who would not have given each other the time of day otherwise. I made friends with many great musicians and it was interesting to discover that someone you would never suspect had musical talent!

Music making engenders belonging on playgrounds and in classrooms. It is self-initiated, as in the example where youth form their own quartet, and creates unexpected communities.

One final aspect of belonging that seems to translate to educational practice involves Dissanayake's evolutionary stance: Contrary to popular belief, competition, or survival of the fittest, does not serve evolution as well as the sense of belonging generated by caring acceptance. Music education is often built on the survival of the fittest, with competition being perceived as a motivator. In our data there were a few people for whom competition was a source of reported reward, and facilitated belonging to an elite group.

I always practiced piano by myself at home to achieve my goal, which was to play “Für Elise.” At that time, playing Für Elise was very popular and most of my friends from my piano class were practicing that piece to go on their next contest. I always thought I was better than any other kids from the piano class. The only reason I didn't want to quit was because I wanted to go on the contest. So, I kept practicing and practicing even though I wasn't sure if I could go for the contest.

For those students who had made decisions that they did not belong to the “musician” group the experiences were similar to the following:

When I was in sixth grade I had decided to try out for chorus. Try-outs were hell, they were conducted in a room full of other kids and the teacher, Mr. W., would immediately, in front of everyone, let you know whether you were accepted or not. I was not. I cried to my mom, she called Mr. W. who, unfortunately for me, relented and allowed me in. The rest of the semester was discouraging for me. His method in class was to have the worst singer in class sit on the right hand side progressing up, where the best sat on the left. Every Friday we would sing competitively with the person on our left. Needless to say, I remained on the right hand side of the room, and gave up trying to move left.

We interpreted belonging as “Situating oneself within a group that has a collective understanding.” In this example, disruption occurred when the student was situated not by herself, but by the teacher, who created conditions which clearly established group identity – belonging to the “good singers” group or to the “bad singer” group. The actual physical positioning ensured a collective understanding of this identity.

Meaning making

As evidenced in the quotation above, belonging provides a context for meaning making, as Dissanayake reminds us: “... for millennia it has been adaptive for humans to be receptive and vulnerable to the appeal of group meanings” (p. 96). Meaning making, which emanates from and is reflected in cultural practice, is the imposition of the personally relevant onto daily events and interactions. It is, she believes, what makes us human, although like our primate ancestors, we are still very much acting as interpreters of our own biology. Drawing again from our own ontological beginnings, she cites our earliest experiences, when the infant draws meaning first from that which will sustain her, and attuned to the source of that significance, begins looking to the adult as arbiter of meaning.

From earlier societies Dissanayake coins the term “logico-asthetic” to describe how we find meaning in the orderly and the beautiful. Mutuality and belonging are predispositions for meaning making – for creating systems and telling stories. We make meaning through our recognition of stability and change, systematized in relationship to the stable structural characteristics inherent in an object or experience, and moving through narrative, understanding the world in relationship to past, present and future, engaging others in empathetic interaction. The excerpt below seems to capture both qualities – the stability of planning and organizing and the personal growth over time as a result of personal interactions:

...music helped me connect with people and have insight of my life. I met people with all kinds of personality and talent. Being both a member and a conductor of a church choir helped me grow and be open minded to the [people] I was fond of musically and spiritually. From small events like singing for mass to singing in large concerts, the

process of putting music together helped me to organize my plans in school and my life.

As I write this essay, I am aware that I am constructing meaning through attempts to both systematize the content in order to inform the reader, while simultaneously crafting the text around the unfolding of narrative—actual life experiences with music. Dissanayake acknowledges this: “It remains all too true that for most human minds it seems insufficient to find and make order, nor are our minds easily convinced of something unless it is presented with emotionally appealing personalized relevance” (p. 94). For pre-service teachers the making of meaning through music generated much telling of stories – the violinist who purchased her teacher’s instrument after he died, or the recollections of being sung to in a now far off homeland by a grandmother—each reflecting stability of meaning in the face of changing circumstance. The meaning gleaned from the latter experience continues in this epilogue:

I have been exploring my own ancestral roots and have started collecting Vietnamese songs, chants, rhymes, etc., so that I can teach them to my own children. Music says so much with such fervor. It’s such a crucial part of our human development and existence. It’s a creation of one’s passions, strengths, beliefs and experiences. I could never deny my children of such experiences that music can offer them.

Unlike other disciplines considered core to a civilization, making meaning through the arts is subjective, a trait not necessarily valued by the systems-laden, story-averse scientific milieu of Western societies. Dissanayake writes about the objective nature of written literacy, as it distances one from actual experience, and is mindful of the “poetic knowledge’ ... one receives from ideas that lack exact reference” (p. 91). Acknowledging a human disposition toward inference, she critiques the perceived necessity of scientific disassociation as a universally applicable paradigm. Dissanayake concludes her discussions of meaning making with an examination of today’s rapid pace of change, and how she is unconvinced that we have adapted: “... human individuals and societies have not evolved to prosper in an atmosphere of insistent and accelerating change” (p. 97). The stories evident in so many of the autobiographies we studied seem to hold on to the arts as something consistent (and stable) in their lives³:

I remember being in [a Nigerian] town as a child and hearing a lot of drums being played. To this day I love the sounds of any type of drum, conga or bongo.

I yearn for those carefree days of elementary school when I could pick up my recorder and play and play. I do miss them and every time I think of those happy moments I become nostalgic for those blissful moments wherein music filled my ears and I was part of something much grander than myself.

Music is...something that follows you where it’s needed and necessary. The melodies I have engraved on my heart have been a guide to me, a resting place you can say, where I can just turn the other side when I need to and think about the pleasant things in life.

³ The assignment language did not include direct reference to the function of the music, but asked students to “tell their stories.”

I loved to sing and perform in front of my family. My father used to take pictures of me and record me singing every six months. I still have the recorded tape that my father made for me. Listening to the tape always brings me my father's love and my lovely childhood memories.

These examples suggest musical experience is meaningful, and that the meanings we make are a result of interactions with the materials of sound and the social milieu. The strong associations we have with specific music and people or events can be activated spontaneously when that music is put into our environments. We also can resource these experiences through our own volition, to regulate our psychological states. Dissanayake writes that healthy people have control over their own events – certainly this sense of autonomy (Deci, 1995) is related to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989), what is referred to in this text as “hands on competence.”

Hands on competency

When re-reading Dissanayake's introduction to this topic, I was again moved by her statement “The beauty of hands, even in repose, is in their latent mobility” (p. 99), and was reminded of a recent exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York entitled: *Speaking with Hands: Photographs from the Buhl Collection*. Viewing room after room with these images of gestures frozen in time, I was struck by the potentialities that were provoked, whether in Steiglitz' photo of Georgia O'Keefe's strong, delicate, poised, and potent hands, or the eerily lit photogram by László Moholy-Nagy of two hands superimposed.⁴ The temporal nature of action (and perhaps reaction) was evident; calling forth meaning making steeped in the mutual sense of physicality: Like the artist, and in ways unlike the artist, I know hands and what/how hands do.

Consistent with the other themes of this text, Dissanayake traces the development of competence in both hunter-gatherer societies and in infancy, making a clear case for the importance of connections between the action and understanding. When reviewing the autobiographical data, we defined hands on competence as “self-perceived skill” and noted the content and conditions under which it was discussed. Two emergent concepts having special meaning for educational practice include a) relevance, that is the function of musical competence for the individual, and b) the perceived challenges within the specific activity, especially as it relates to ones' perceived capabilities. In Dissanayake's words, “We want to know not only what to do, but that we are competent or able enough to do it” (p. 117).

The hands on competence we found in the autobiographies involved examples demonstrating focused intent and creative expression and resulting in a sense of belonging, physical involvement, and enjoyment:

My classmates and I were going to perform in front of children and teachers from different grades. I remember I was very nervous to sing. Finally, the day came and every one of us performed the song. When I finished performing I felt a little nervous but yet very excited. The feeling was so intense, that when I saw everybody looking and clapping at me, I felt like a famous singing star.

Because I was competitive in the little things I was able to do and music was not one of them, I practiced [singing] day and night 'till I memorized every word and sound of the song. The day I realized how music can be a pleasant thing was the day after the

⁴To see these and other pieces from the exhibit, see:
<http://develop.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/buhl/highlights03.html>

performance when I was automatically humming "Joy to the World," not because the teacher had told me to, but because it felt good. After that day, I tried to learn any song of music that came into my ears. Though I knew my voice wasn't pretty, I always seemed to feel at peace when I'm humming or singing or just making musical sounds, so I never stopped.

I enjoyed singing, and I got high grades in music class so I was chosen as a chorus member. When I was in junior high school, I was interested in learning guitar. One day I begged my father to buy a guitar and he bought one for me. I was learning the guitar and sang songs with it. I really enjoyed singing songs with my guitar... I enjoy singing. I installed a Karaoke system in my house right before last Christmas time so I can practice and enjoy singing through it. Since I've been singing ... Karaoke, I became more confident [in] myself.

Clear to each of these examples is a sense of enjoyment and of transcendence – in the first and last excerpts the student has transcended the ordinary to extraordinary (even if imagined), in the middle example the student is able to transcend her negative feelings about her voice in order to reap the rewards of participation.

As with each of the psychobiological needs in this framework, the absence of hands on competence – or at least the perception of absence – can be devastating to the individual. From an educational standpoint, this usually came about when there was discord between the perceived competence on the part of the child, and the expectations of the pedagogue: This is a clash of relevance and, interestingly, most of the examples we found were related to reading music – these students may not have found any personal meaning in this skill. Although the absence of hands on competence may have permeating influences, it seems from several of the accounts, that the compulsion to engage musically is resilient.

I started to take piano lessons when I was young but I did not like to practice. I would play by ear and enjoyed it, but whenever my teacher was around she would punish me for doing this.

In the ninth grade, I signed up in a beginners' instrument class to learn to play the bass. I dropped the class after a few weeks because it was too big of an instrument, and I had difficulty learning to read the notes, especially when I could not see them very well. I especially knew then that music was not for me.

However, I did feel that I had passion in my voice and whatever I sang, I believed in it.

My enthusiasm for being an active participant in most of the school events diminished during my Junior High years because I was introduced to the written form of music which to this day I find hard to understand. I remember having to copy musical notes from our music book and then have to read them in front of the whole class. Even though most of us didn't know how to do it, being laughed at or criticized by the teacher was not a good feeling. In these years I no longer offered myself to participate in the school events of the year. Despite my "bad luck" with the written form of music, my love for music in general never decreased.

Dissanayake's attention to relevance is focused on the societal trend that removes people from the source of interaction, whether food that is purchased from a store oftentimes thousands of miles removed from where it was rooted, or a performance removed from performers, and consumed by an audience of one, listening an infinite number of times vis-à-vis a personal CD player. In educational practice, the attention to relevance is also a matter of proximity to the source; both the learner and content represent phenomena that require sensitivity to local culture and concomitant competencies that might constitute what Dissanayake calls "an aptitude for life" (p. 117). It seems worthy to consider that, like the images of hands that introduced this section, learners provide gestures that not only signify meaning, but also reach out to invite possibilities for responsive instruction.

Elaboration: The Realization of Value in Artistic Expression

This culminating capacity, to "make special" the ordinary, is at the heart of Dissanayake's interpretation of artistic activity. She links mutuality, ceremonies, and our more conventional conception of art by a) their common conveyance of rhythms and modes experienced visually, aurally, and kinesthetically; and b) their abilities to create forums for people to belong, to make meaning through systems and stories, and to demonstrate hands on competence. Most profoundly, she writes "elaboration is an outgrowth, manifestation, and indication to others of strong feeling or care" (p. 130). It is this drive to show what is valued that is both inherent and universal: Through carefully crafting words in an essay, dabbing the paintbrush with just the right pressure, or adjusting one's facial muscles to produce the desired pitch on a didgeridoo, our actions are focused on expressing, elevating the nonchalant to the significant.

Indications of elaboration in the autobiographies were so deeply imbedded in the nature of the writing that it is difficult to provide direct examples. The notion of music as "making special" was a common theme, as represented in this student excerpt:

Music to me is just not an ordinary thing. Music is a part of me that not only lifts my spirits up but that it will always be there for me in the good and in the bad times.

Dissanayake's message that the arts are intrinsic to human life is supported by her consistent and inspired vision of what propels human adaptation. Linked to the evolutionary stance of the book, she notes that elaboration is also an act of transformation. She writes:

The fact that we are emotionally and behaviorally susceptible to elaborated movements in time, visual compellingness, skillful execution, and the structuring and manipulation of our sensory experiences, ensured that we would engage in socially reinforcing ceremonial behaviors, remember the information that these practices transmitted, and become emotionally convinced of their (and our) efficacy. (p. 140)

The ceremonial behaviors and rituals in the autobiographical accounts were often examples of mundane activities such as the nap taking cited in the mutuality discussion, and the following example of "emotional and behavioral susceptibility":

After school and on weekends I used to look forward to my mother's instrumental music and her oldies but goodies songs. I used to sing them out loud while I would help her clean the house. My mother's songs made me feel secure and happy. Her music made me relax and feel so comfortable so much that I would dance to it all the time.

One way that ceremonial behaviors were socially reinforced in the autobiographical data was in the students' plans and practices with their own children. The biological drive to attune to others was introduced in their autobiographical descriptions of childhood and recapitulated in their roles as parents, as is depicted in the quotation excerpt which concludes the summary of meaning making.

While Dissanayake understandably limits her discussion of transformation to pre-historic and pre-linguistic perspectives, it seems important to briefly address some of the parallel literature on the inherent nature of transformation in recent creativity scholarship. Of particular interest is David Feldman's (1994) concept of the "transformational imperative," which proposes that we are compelled to change phenomena in our environments, a quality that he, like Dissanayake, refers to as making us human. Both theorists take the broad view – Dissanayake in terms of artistic activity and Feldman in terms of creativity.

What was especially compelling about the autobiographies used for this essay was their adaptive use of musical elaboration. Written by students who had childhoods disrupted by geographical change, the messages expressed regarding the temporal rhythms and modes – born of universal pre-linguistic experiences, were salient:

When the Russians invaded my country, my mother sent me away with my uncle and his family. We took refuge in Pakistan. I spent one year in Pakistan and I went to school there. There I met my second cousin... for the first time. She introduced me to a very different kind of music, the English nursery rhyme. From her I learned "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep"; "Mary Had a Little Lamb"; "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star"; "Baby, Baby, Yes, Mama"; and many more. I was very taken by these songs. Today I still catch myself singing those songs when I am cooking or when I am playing with or putting my 1-year-old niece to bed!

I don't remember a great deal about learning how to play an instrument or having a charitable moment in preschool. I can say though, that I cannot forget the first song that I learned as a child when I immigrated to the United States. I was about 9 years old when my family decided to start new life in this country. Not knowing how to speak English, nor how to communicate with my classmates, I was sent to attend ESL classes ... where I learned the ABC song. When I finally accomplished learning the easy ... song from A-Z, my heart was filled over with enjoyment because I believed that in time I will be an American.

Acts of elaboration are acts of artistry and have meaning and function in everyday by elevating the ordinary. In her final chapter on "Taking the Arts Seriously," Dissanayake provides a thoughtful litany of the positive outcomes of artistic activity – suggested reading for all those proactively advocating for the arts. Her message about the compelling nature of elaboration has special significance for those of us who shudder at the accusation of being "perfectionists," and prefer to think that we are motivated not by some unattainable ideal, but by a vision of possibility that we care deeply about: "If we make or do something, no matter how humble, it mirrors us back. Our skill and talent, or their lack, and the extent of our caring are there to be seen. If we care, it shows, as it shows if we do not care" (p. 196).

Artistic Expression in Educational Practice: Care-full Teaching and Learning

Ellen Dissanayake's *Art and Intimacy* is about more than how the arts began – it is about how the arts sustain us as individuals and as a species. In searching for the connections to educational practice through reports of musical experiences, the significance of each of the psychobiological needs revealed issues for contemplation. Using music education as a point of reference I conclude with a brief consideration of how situating our teaching and learning in a paradigm based on the essence of artistic activity may ask more and provide more than we currently expect from our profession.

Mutuality honors the recognition of sameness and requires that we attend and respond to students, listening and watching for cues to what is most compelling and relevant. There is a danger when looking for what is shared to ignore what is discrepant between individuals or groups. By ignoring difference we often blind ourselves to injustices and inequities that call for action, or make assumptions about demonstrations that are culturally insular and complex, for which mutuality may be hidden from the outsider view. Remaining awake to possibilities in learner responses, sharing one's own passion for the art, and allowing empathetic understanding to guide pedagogical choices, mutuality can transform educational practice – an admittedly arduous task for those who serve hundreds of students, but an effort that guarantees continued growth and eventual reward.

In the arts, the immediacy of hearing, seeing, and feeling provides counterpoint to what has been retained in our cognitive memory. Often there is dissonance between what is known to us and what we experience, and it is by working through that discord, that our understanding evolves. There is often such dissonance between musical lives and musical instruction, and whether or not outcomes facilitate artistry or shut it down is often a result of educational practice. In the autobiographical data it was clear that when we categorize students, they situate themselves as belonging to the family of artists – what I believe Dissanayake might say is the human family – or the non-artists, and take on an identity that can have permeating influence, both positive and negative.

Negotiating possible dissonance between experiences in the present and the past, as well as anticipating the future is how meaning is made. Rather than only teaching to the concert or to the “standards,” educational practice needs to consider the lifelong implications of music as a resource, and design curriculum through which learners have the tools for lifelong enjoyment. The role of hands on competence in making meaning is crucial – direct experience with music making provides the proximity that Dissanayake bemoans is lacking, a situation created by the technological disconnect between the source of art making and its consumption. It is often in the self-referenced delivery of hands on competence, void of mutuality, where things go wrong in music education practices. It is imperative that we address the crisis of relevance in our teaching; by embracing mutuality as pedagogy, we can assess relevance by taking on the learner's perspective.

Elaboration, founded in the mutuality of shared experience and motivated by the opportunity to express what we value, seems a worthwhile educational goal. Yet there exist several obstacles to such humanistic outcomes. The concept of elaboration seems dissonant with the conventional focus on skill development, usually achieved through replication of a model, which defines much of contemporary arts education. Additionally, there is the struggle to meet the measurement needs of today's educational systems, needs that often arise from the competitive and the fearful rather than the mutual and the biological. It may be that as we work through the challenges of providing a relevant education in the arts, we best contribute to the survival of artistry by cultivating a passion for artistic activity. We elaborate to maintain the dynamic nature of life, for

it is through the transformation of the ordinary that we can imagine, engage with, and share the extraordinary.

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