

## **Introduction: *Welcome to Creative Tension between Theory and Practice***

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I am delighted to introduce the first issue of *The Journal of School & Society*, the online journal of the John Dewey Society. Serving as the editor for a new journal, and editing this first issue, has presented some remarkable challenges, and equally remarkable rewards. Aside from overcoming the technical issues involved in creating a website that would function reasonably well for our purposes, I had to find a way to introduce and demonstrate the kinds of conversations we hoped to have. Fortunately, I have been mentored and supported by the members of the Board of the John Dewey Society, and have enjoyed enormous support from members of the wider educational community.

Notably, Walter Gershon was willing to take a flyer on a new journal and contribute his paper on sensual curricula. Walter presented portions of this paper at the inaugural Past President's Symposium at the John Dewey Society meeting in Vancouver, BC in April, 2012, and I immediately asked him if he would consider submitting to us. In this work, he moves beyond the broad and comfortable acceptance of the idea that the aesthetic realm is vital to the whole person, and thus to the learning process, and into a practical exploration of what can happen when we actually implement that idea in the classroom. Along the way, he engages the theoretical realm

with a vengeance, drawing together curriculum theory with sensory studies to propose a model he calls sensual curriculum. Walter and I also wish to extend a special thanks to Bill Doll, who provided extensive and insightful peer review during the development of the paper, and who served as the session respondent for the Symposium.

In yet another example of his extraordinary professional generosity, Gert Biesta agreed to write a response to Walter's article. I asked that he do this in the manner employed at the annual meeting and conference of the Philosophy of Education Society—to engage with Walter's paper in ways that highlight and trouble its contributions, and that open a continuing and dynamic discussion. In accomplishing this, Gert calls upon us to re-open the assumptions from the field of curriculum theory that Walter has adopted as his framework; he proposes that we need to think more deeply about defining and differentiating between learning and education,

One interesting tension that arose for me in working across Walter's and Gert's offerings has been the ways in which their discourses are grounded in subfields with quite different commitments and uses of language—not to mention shared assumptions. My years in my own master's program were spent immersed in cultural studies, and concerns with disciplinary literacy—particularly in my primary field, history. Moving from that into a teacher licensure program for secondary history, I entered the world of practice with something of a jolt; where was the theory, the perspective about what we were doing, and why? Where was any commitment to historical literacy, to imbuing our students with an awareness of the highly selective and idiosyncratic history-making process involved in authoring a textbook? Most of all, where was the larger consciousness about ourselves and the enterprise of public education?

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Pursuing doctoral coursework in curriculum studies while teaching high school full-time, I spent the next four years weaving an unsteady path between the critical understandings I found through my immersion in the scholarship of Freire and Giroux, and the practical demands of remaining employed in a public school classroom. While few of my teaching colleagues were interested in my theoretical grounding, I learned through innumerable discussions in the teachers' lounge that they shared my frustrations. Yes, certainly we were committed to the liberation of our students, to helping them to see behind and to escape or subvert the oppressive mechanisms we knew they encountered. At the same time, when Monday morning came, and on every day thereafter, each of us would see 160 of them across five class periods—and we would be expected to teach our content, to provide support with basic literacy and numeracy skills, and to advise on academic, social, and personal issues. Where was the time and practical support we needed to make change? Was it really so surprising that so many teachers I knew spoke derisively of the Ivory Tower and its denizens' pronouncements about liberatory teaching methods?

Having spent some time in each world, and also participating in a variety of professional communities, I find myself inserting explanations to myself as I read Walter's article and Gert's response: "Ah, yes, Walter is writing for an audience that has, for the moment, reached some consensus on issues surrounding the nature of education and of learning for the context he is addressing, and who are seeking to create a more humane space inside the classroom." And "Ah, Gert is picking up on the strands he began to raise some time ago about the nature of the *bildung*, and in particular is problematizing the ways in which we cast the educational process when we focus upon it as a matter of learning." This is yet another facet—and another challenge—that we face as educational philosophers and

practitioners who seek to work across the theory-practice/praxis gap—a degree of incommensurability or unintelligibility when we leave our familiar subfields and specializations and their shared linguistic codes.

Walter and Gert also invite us to stand in two rather different places to consider the balance we must strike when we attempt to work across theory and practice. On Walter's side, I see the urgency of thinking carefully about the kinds of experiences our children are having in public school classrooms—especially our children from minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. I, too, am familiar with the kind of disenfranchisement experienced by our children of color: the mind-numbing scripted curricula inflicted upon them, and the desperate need not to lose a generation (or more) as we strip their humanity away. Standing with Gert, I worry that attending to experience at the expense of critique of the larger enterprise will not only fritter away valuable time and energy; it will actually serve to reify the existing order with only very minor cosmetic adjustments.

I found my own path through these tensions in the work of John Dewey—in his embrace of an evolutionary (rather than revolutionary) understanding of human processes, his balance between the critical and the humane, his commitment to an interpretivist and constructivist stance, and in his deep awareness of the rift that two millennia of bifurcation between body and mind, and theory and practice, has wrought. Rather than looking for a neat solution, as I read Dewey I began to appreciate the dynamic balance at work when we seek to explore theory and practice in conversation with one another. In the members of the John Dewey Society, I have encountered others who were willing to cross philosophic boundaries, along with those imposed by a traditional approach to the disciplines. And ultimately, I have found an organization willing to commit to the School & Society Initiative and to this journal—a place

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where we can entertain the discussion. Walter's paper, and Gert's response, call upon us to juggle precisely the dilemma that Dewey saw so clearly: the challenge of keeping those plates

spinning simultaneously, all while hair is on fire in every direction.

Again, we welcome you to the discussion, and hope that you will enjoy taking part as well!

# ***Resonance, Affect, and Ways of Being: Implications of Sensual Curriculum for Educational Theory and Urban First Graders' Literacy Practices***

**Walter Gershon**

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**W**hat is happening here? How should this educational moment be understood? Whose knowledge is being expressed? In what ways are their ideas and ideals being conveyed and conceptualized? How do these two first graders' ways of being inform their perceptions of academic content? What academic content is being expressed, and to what end? How do these two students understand the complex nexus of the signification and sensation in action so that this experience is rendered ordinarily sensible?

Central to these and other such questions are processes of making sense. Making sense is how people understand their worlds—their relationships to local and less local ecologies, others, and themselves. Sense-making, however, is not purely a process of signification: the cognitive action of organizing and naming. What is sensible necessarily involves questions of sensation (the senses) and process (emergent experiences). Additionally, what is sensed is not the same as what is perceived: the meanings one gains through a

sensory experience. This is because making sense resides at the paradox of the human experience—inexorably individualistic yet strongly informed by nested layers of sociocultural contexts through which those individual experiences are mediated. Furthermore, because humans experience the world through the sensorium—the broad range of possible constructions of the sensory (Howes, 2009)—processes of signification are not possible without sensation (cf. Dewey, 1929).

These connections are crucial because it is everyday experiences of making sense that constitute much of what students do in formal educational contexts such as schools and classrooms. Similarly, focusing on making sense as an aesthetically political endeavor creates the theoretical and practical space to consider how the construction of meaning can resonate across layers of personal taste and the sociocultural contexts in which those tastes are embedded (on resonance, see Erlmann, 2004, 2010; Gershon, 2011a, 2011b; Goodman, 2010; Price, 2011). Because educational experiences emerge in often-unconsidered moments of the ordinarily sensible, as well as in the equally sensual interruptions of those understandings, sensual curriculum is a strong lens for the consideration of the intersection between educational theory and everyday educational interactions.

In order to express the inseparable connections between making sense, the sensorium, and the ordinarily sensible, the first portion of the article provides the theoretical groundwork for the empirical evidence presented in the remainder of this piece. The first half is divided into three sections that provide the theoretical foundation for this article and is divided as follows: a re-articulation of definitions for making sense and sensual curriculum as well as the connections between them (see also, Gershon, 2011a); the

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relationships between meaning, being, and the ordinarily sensible; and a discussion of relevance, resonance, and literacy.

The second half of the article uses video recordings, sonic data, and text to empirically enunciate the material ways in which daily classroom interactions are deeply imbricated with the sensual curriculum. To do so, I draw from the case of the two children in the opening vignette, Zykira and Noah[1], as well as some of their first grade classmates, all of whom were part of a larger study described in greater detail below. Similarly divided into three subsections, this latter portion addresses: the introduction and description of how Zykira and Noah's processes as an exemplar of how students' worked; sensual curriculum as ways of knowing; and sensual curriculum as ways of being. A brief concluding section rounds out the piece.

Finally, this paper engages the sensual curriculum on three levels, as formal curriculum, enacted curriculum, and performatively. Specifically, the curricular tool at the center of the interpretive research project is an intentionally sensual formal curriculum, the use of songwriting as a possible means to bridge race and gender gaps in science education for urban P-8 students.[2] As such, this project also examined the ways in which the sensual is enacted in the daily life of classrooms, and how meanings are negotiated between educational actors in face-to-face interactions. Additionally, this piece is performatively sensual in its combination of text, video and sonic data.

This kind of intra-media approach is often referred to as multimodal: the use of various modes of expression. However, the construction of "multimodal" continues to privilege textual ways of knowing, as the "multi" of multimodal tends to refer to non-textual representations. My use of the term "performatively sensual" here is meant to underscore the ways in which all media engage the sensorium. It is also used to expressly

indicate that, although this piece is texted, the points raised here could be equally well represented through video or sound, that such representations are not necessarily addenda to text, and that texts can obfuscate as much as they reveal (Gershon, 2011b, 2011c, 2012). For, as important as questions of relevance and constructions literacy are to educational experiences, both relevance and literacy can and do serve as gatekeepers for the status quo in ways that reify marginalized populations' marginal status, as I outline below.

## **Making Sense and Sensual Curriculum**

Making sense in education is most often constructed as an intellectual endeavor, a cognitive act of signification. However, as the burgeoning field of sensory studies has documented, studies that consider sensation are often sublimated in favor of constructions of signification to the detriment of understanding human interactions (Howes, 2003; Stoller, 1997). Additionally, what one senses is not the same as how those senses are perceived, understandings that are in turn not necessarily analogous to the knowledge one constructs based on those perceptions. This is because although sensation, perception, and signification are in some key ways unique, the ways in which one understands or experiences sensual information is deeply informed by social and cultural norms and values (cf. Erlman, 2010; Gershon, 2011a; Geurts, 2002; Howes, 2009). For example, although how one hears is a singularity of one's physiognomy, the meanings ascribed to those sounds are strongly informed by nested layers of sociocultural norms and values, as well as previous experiences that are similarly informed by sociocultural ideas and ideals. Processes of making sense can therefore be described in at least the following ways:

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- Sensation—how the senses are the means through which humans interact with their outside and inner worlds;
  - Perception—the meanings of sensation people construct based on their sensory understandings;
  - Signification—the ideas and ideals constructed as a result of sensory input and the perception of those sensations (Howes, 2003; Massumi, 2002; Panagia, 2009; Stoller, 1997).

Such constructions of making sense have important implications for conceptualizing educational theory and practice that are encapsulated in a field I call sensual curriculum (Gershon, 2011a). Unlike typical connotations of curriculum and the direction of the field prior to the mid-1970s, the field of curriculum studies understands “curriculum” to mean not only the intentional, formal knowledge delivered to students in formal educational contexts (textbooks, assessments, assignments) but also such curricula as: the unintentional knowledge delivered to students about their place in school and society (hidden curriculum); ways in which educational actors like teachers and students negotiate meaning through face to face classroom interactions (enacted curriculum); and knowledge that is noticeable for its absence, such as the gay rights movement in many contemporary social studies textbooks, or discussions of female scientists of color in science texts (null curriculum). Given this broad range of curricular possibilities, what is the need for yet another?

One answer to this question is that the field of curriculum studies has long had connections to considerations of the centrality of sensual, aesthetic, and politics in education. Consider for example an excerpt from the opening chapter of John Dewey’s (1934) *Art as Experience* in which he critiques connections between capitalism—what Bourdieu (1986) would later call cultural capital—museums, and art.

Not merely individuals, but communities and nations, put their cultural good taste in evidence by building opera houses, galleries, and museums. These show that a community is not wholly absorbed in material wealth, because it is willing to spend its gains in patronage of art. It erects these buildings and collects their contents as it now builds a cathedral. These things reflect and establish superior cultural status, while their segregation from the common life reflects the fact that they are not part of a native and spontaneous culture. (p. 9)

W.E. B. DuBois (1928) made similar connections between the significance of a group’s ability to decide its aesthetic values, and the political possibilities of art, freedom, and democracy, in his speech to a meeting of the NAACP that has come to be known as “A Critique of a Negro Art.”

Thus all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent. (para 29)

From positions such as these, sensual curriculum can be understood as part of a nearly 100-year return to the consideration of the significance of aesthetics and its relationship to politics. This return can also be seen in the writings of philosophers such as Jacques Ranciere (2010), Jean Luc Nancy (2007), Alain Badiou (1999), and Giles Deleuze (1990)—scholars who, while they do not agree with one another, all deeply engage questions of aesthetics and politics. Perhaps somewhat ironically, given their disagreement with one another, these philosophers agree that aesthetics—the interconnections of perception, sensation, affect, and art—relate to the kinds of choices people make, and their choices are strongly informed by these same aspects of the human experience. Connections between race

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and aesthetics, though often absent from discussions of philosophy over the past eighty years, are also beginning to emerge (Roelofs, 2009; Young & Braziel, 2007) and are similarly evident throughout this history of curriculum studies (e.g. Greene, 1995; Pinar & Irwin, 2005; Schwab, 1971; Woodson, 1933).

As with his connections between the aesthetic and the political, Dewey (1934) similarly underlined the importance of sensation in understanding the arts and in having experiences. For example, of the relationship between viewer and object, he notes that: “It is a causal condition for having any and every ‘sensation.’ Similarly vibrations sent out from an object are causal conditions of every kind of perception; accordingly they do not mark out one kind of perception from others” (p. 213).

Dewey also linked the sensory to the aesthetic and both to action:

The sensory satisfaction of eye and ear, when esthetic, is so because it does not stand by itself but is linked to the activity of which it is the consequence. Even the pleasures of the palate are different in quality to an epicure than in one who merely likes his food as he tastes it. The difference is not of mere intensity. The epicure is conscious of much more than that taste of the food. (p. 49)

However, Dewey had a tendency to unintentionally bracket aesthetic experiences from other kinds of experiences. He similarly tended to give weight to vision, and to a lesser degree sound, over the other “lower senses,” as can be seen in the last quotation above. For example, here Dewey begins with the eye, then moves to the ear, parallel to his moves from visual art to music throughout *Art as Experience*. He then privileges an epicure’s contexts over non-epicure’s, as if one who does not eat for a living would not consider contexts

in which she eats or somehow be unaware of sensations outside of the process of ingesting sustenance. As Latour’s (2004) presentation of the construction of smell in perfume factories demonstrates, and can be seen in popular television programs such as *Top Chef*, experts’ tastes and smells are as socially constructed and constrained as anyone else’s perceptions. Rather, through their sociocultural construction as “expert,” those individuals have greater cultural capital. In addition, this passage is one of the few if only moments in *Art as Experience* in which Dewey specifically addresses senses or art forms that do not expressly relate to visual arts or music. Nevertheless, as Dewey (1929, 1934) and DuBois (1903, 1929) argue, the aesthetic is political and experience is both sensual and political.

Contrary to these understandings of making sense, strong aesthetic discussions tend not to engage the political, and political discussions tend not to engage either the aesthetic or the sensual (Gershon, 2011a). Similarly, although there are notable exceptions such as the works of Ted T. Aoki, curriculum studies, for all its connections to the arts and aesthetics, tends to be a texted affair that privileges the visual over other sensual ways of knowing and ways of knowing over ways of being (see Gershon, 2011a, 2011c). However, the field of curriculum studies is much more sensually and aesthetically attuned than most mainstream constructions of education and our contemporary educational moment—one in which students are understood through the measurement of narrow bands of knowledge on standardized measurements that have a deep history of continually marginalizing particular populations and in which formal curriculum is often thought to be best delivered or practiced through direct instruction of scripted texts.

Furthermore, important debates about the boundaries and possibilities for embodiment momentarily set aside, sensation involves bodies and is therefore embodied in material

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ways. One smells through one's nose and mouth, hears through one's ears and feels sounds in one's body, and physically touches with (and is touched by) hands, skin, voice, and bodily fluids. As can be seen here, even a relatively limited traditional Western five-senses model of sensation is necessarily false in its separation of one sense from another as somehow discreet. Further, there are many non-Western constructions and complications of this Western mode of sensation we still adhere to in schools—a point that I do not have the time to fully dismantle here (see, for example, Aoki, 1991; Classen, 1993; Feld & Basso, 1996; Guerts, 2002; Howes, 2009).

Reemphasizing the importance of sensation provides room for the critical theoretical, methodological, and practical use of affect to consider the social and cultural (e.g., Clough, 2007; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Protevi, 2009). As Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010) write in their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, “In this ever-gathering accretion of force-relations (or, conversely, in the peeling or wearing away of such sedimentations) lie the real powers of affect, affect as a potential: a body's capacity to affect and be affected” (p. 2). This embodied, sensual politic not only echoes Dewey's constructions of experience, Spinoza's (1959) open-ended, unfinished-ness, and Maxine Greene's resonance of not yet (Pinar, 1998), but also resonates with similar critical understandings in the field of curriculum studies about the significance of bodies, embodiment, and politics (e.g., Lather & Smithies, 1997; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2008; Springgay, 2008). Additionally, as I argued in the introduction to the special issue on sensual curriculum (Gershon 2011a), the centrality of sensation and embodiment is significant in fields such as post-colonial studies, as can be seen in the title of Spivak's (2012) recent book on the possibilities for “an aesthetic education in an age of globalization.”

What sensual curriculum brings to the table, then, is a theoretical and practical space for the

consideration of all educational ways of knowing and being to be conceptualized as processes of making sense that are necessarily both aesthetic and political. By this I mean that all educational experiences are perceived through the senses, and all perceptions are sociocultural constructions—choices of one set of possibilities over another. For example, in the special issue, the contributors addressed topics including: how a lack of touch can negatively impact educational experiences in museums and for young children in school; the braided relationships between metaphorical and literal taste of food, place, and identities as sensual ways of knowing; and represented knowledge through video, audio, movement, poetry, and recipes (Boske, 2011; Gershon, 2011a; Gershon, 2011b; Hurren & Hasebe-Ludt, 2011; Wood & Latham, 2011). In each case, contributing authors demonstrated how attention to the sensorium inherently involves power, and that the exploration of the sensual can explicate nested layers of ecologies that contextualize local actors' interactions as well as the material and theoretical consequences and possibilities of such sense-making.

In these ways, sensual curriculum addresses the often-hidden ways in which dominant norms and values operate (hidden and null curriculum) as well as the ways in which educational actors negotiate the nexus of personal taste, available choices, ideas, and ideals through daily face-to-face interactions (enacted curriculum). As such, sensual curriculum both resonates with contemporary critical and artistic traditions in curriculum studies, and returns the field to its senses (for more on this move in anthropology and sensory studies, see Howes, 2003). It is an understanding that, without sensation, signification is difficult at best. It is also an understanding that the sensual is a fruitful site for considering the complex interrelationships between people, ideas, ideals, and the possibilities and contexts that constrain and/or enable those imbricated potentialities. In sum,

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ways of knowing are processes of making sense that are in turn always processes of sensual signification. From this perspective, and as I argue more concretely below, as the sensual and affective give rise to the cognitively signifying, ways of knowing are in many ways predicated on ways of being—an inversion of many Western constructions about the relationships between ideas and being.

## **Meaning, Being, and the Ordinarily Sensible**

Making sense is the process of constructing meaning. If sense-making consists of processes of sensation and signification that are always aesthetic and political—that are as affectively embodied as they are cognitively mindful—then making sense necessarily regards ways of being. As suggested in the previous section, constructions of making sense often seem to imply that signification is necessary for perception: that one must name in order to know, or that epistemologies are most central to educational experiences. To be clear, epistemologies are indeed important and processes of signification are crucial to the construction and negotiation of knowledge that are educational interactions (with others, ideas, ideals, or self). However, as Dewey and other curriculum scholars suggest (e.g., Jardine, 2004/1992; Pinar & Irwin, 2005), ways of being are also of paramount importance in any context, process, or possibility that might be considered to be educative.

What is ordinarily sensible in educational interactions writ large—everyday ways in which one makes sense, processes of sensation and signification that have become normalized to the point that their aesthetic and political aspects often go largely unnoticed—is in many ways a manifestation of how one “is.” Furthermore, given that the ontological strongly informs both how one constructs knowledge and what counts as knowledge,

ontology should be one of, if not the, central concern of studies of education. For, if sensation is indeed required for signification, and the political choices that govern academic content, interactional possibilities, and the kinds of knowledge that are considered worthy are necessarily affective, aesthetic, and embodied, then all educational experiences are ontologically driven.

Similarly to what one knows, how one “is” is an imbrication of self and context. How one is can be understood as possibilities and roadblocks based on sociocultural norms and values, as well as how one negotiates those openings and constraints according to one’s available wiggle room to do so. These are aesthetically political choices to work within, around, through, or outside of available ontologies, an equally complex set of decisions, predilections, tendencies, and being. Such choices all fall into a spectrum of material consequences, between intended vs. unintended and positive vs. negative consequences, each of which are subjective and socioculturally contextualized—what is play to one person is not for another (Houseman, 2001).

Ontologies are not static. Instead, they are ontogenic, emergent processes of being-ness (Massumi, 2002). Christopher Salter (2011) reemphasized and slightly reframed this point as a call to more deeply attend to questions of “is-ness,” of ways of being, in a paper presented at the annual conference of the American Anthropological Association, a call Salter linked to Dewey’s connections between aesthetics, experience, and processes of doing. What Massumi, Salter, and others interested in the theoretical and empirical possibilities for affect emphasize (e.g., Aoki, 1991; Greene, 1995; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Sedgwick, 2003; Stewart, 2007) is that ways of being not only are part and parcel of making sense but are the ways that people make sense (Gershon, 2011a, 2012a, 2012b; Rocha, in press). In short, one’s is-ness is a strong determinant for one’s knowing.

What can make this conceptualization of experiences in some ways difficult is the notion that knowledge and being are somehow static (Massumi, 2002). Further complicating matters is a longstanding understanding that one must name something to know what it is, or for that idea, object, animal (writ large), ecology, relationship, or sensation to either matter or be understood. However, one can know something that one cannot name and provide names to ways of being experiences that lack language for deep explication (Gershon, 2012b). The first instance includes moments of intuition and awareness such as those when the hair stands up on the back of one's neck, in the metaphoric pit of one's stomach, or is immediately comfortable or uncomfortable in response to a person, context, or object. From this perspective, liminality is integral to the affective—a temporality that is central to the strength of affective understandings.

A “teachable moment” is a strong example of the latter possibility. There is a name for the experiential moment in which a teacher recognizes that it would be a good time to emphasize, introduce, or review a particular concept, construct, or ideal. However, although this experience can be named, it is a particular kind of embodied resonance (Erlmann, 2010; Gershon, 2011a), an awareness of one's way of being in relation to others'. An epiphany can be similarly categorized (a signification of is-ness). While not universally experienced, an epiphany is an experience that is common enough in learning that if one shares that one has had an epiphany, another person will be able to relate to the experience. One can also describe how it feels to have an epiphany to some degree, and perhaps even the thought that triggered the experience. Yet, in most cases, how one had an epiphany or how one now understands something that did not make sense moments ago is nearly impossible to name. Additionally, one's orientation and openness to processes of inquiry might increase epiphanous moments, just as an openness to teachable moments

could further engender the frequency and quality of teachable moments.

Epiphanies and teachable moments are everyday examples of how one's is-ness affects or is affected by complex combinations of others, ideas, environments and self. Furthermore, because epiphanies and teachable moments are sensual, affective, and embodied, knowing that they exist is not the same as having those experiences. From this perspective, attention to ontogenic aspects of educational experiences can serve to deepen how learners can be lost in moments of inquiry and other such important educational ways of being (Gershon & Ben-Horin, n.d.).

Thus, making sense regards aesthetic and political ontologies as well as epistemologies, understandings that are sensual, embodied, and affective, as well as those that are cognitive, codified and signified. This is significant not only theoretically as a means towards deepening how educational experiences are conceptualized, but also because how one is has material consequences in and out of education: what can be conceptualized as the possibilities and consequences of the ordinarily sensible (Apple, 1990; Gershon, 2011b, 2012; Jackson, 1968; Kumashiro, 2008; M.M. Smith, 2008; Stewart, 2007; Tsing, 2005).

It is this complex nexus of making sense and the ordinarily sensible that is sensual curriculum. Sensual curriculum is a rich site of study because it attends to the often-overlooked aspects of the ordinarily sensible and the ways in which that sense-making is interrupted. From a Deweyan (1929) perspective, sensual curriculum maintains the holism, interrelatedness, and emphasis on sensual, aesthetic ways of knowing. It does so while removing the implicit Hegelian bracketing of the aesthetic from the everyday, and further emphasizes how sensation and being give rise to cognition and signification as set forth in *Experience and Nature*.

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## **On Relevance, Resonance, and Literacy**

At its surface, relevance is a straightforward construct: the determination that one person, idea, ideal, or process appreciably matters to another person, idea, ideal, or process. However, “relevance” is in many ways parallel to Bill Readings’ (1996) discussion of “excellence” as an empty signifier designating whatever a particular group (in this case administrators or academics) claim to be of excellence.

“Relevant” and “relevance” are the terms used by groups to signify those whose work lies within and outside of their particular sphere of importance. Through the lens of Ranciere’s (2010) ongoing discussions of dissensus, aesthetics, and politics, relevance can be understood to function as a process of consensus that operates according to a particular set of ethics. Ranciere calls groups that follow a particular set of ethics “ethical communities.” Ethical communities’ conceptualizations of ethics are often derived through a process where increasingly smaller subgroups’ processes of consensus make exponentially larger decisions for the group as a whole.

Following Ranciere’s arguments, people, ideas, or ideals that lie outside the boundaries of what an ethical community deems to be relevant are at once: a) excluded as irrelevant and b) deserving of no further consideration because they are also unethical according to the group’s consensus perspective.

Embedded in this construction of relevance are two other aspects of how the concept is often used and understood. First, relevance is meant to describe that which is significant, a move that delineates what is irrelevant. Second, as noted above, relevance is subjective. While this may seem self-evident, it is nonetheless central to the discussion here. Where an individual can make an argument for or against

why an idea, ideal, person, object, or ecology might be relevant, it takes a community, no matter how small or largely defined, to agree (come to consensus that) the topic of discussion indeed relevant. It is through this process that what is and remains relevant to any one individual can be continually ignored by a community (even if it is the community to which she belongs), or how that which is relevant to a particular community can be similarly dismissed by the larger, more encompassing group in which that smaller community resides.

In these ways, classroom interactions that are central to how students enact their classroom roles—their ways of being in the classroom—are often excluded from educational conversations about teaching and learning as irrelevant to student learning (cf. Gershon, 2007). For example, students are often “in trouble” for how they prefer to sit, a tendency to doodle or draw as they listen, or for thinking deeply about something that is not the lesson at hand. Additionally, students, the very people for whom schooling is constructed, are also often excluded from conversations about education that range from daily classroom lessons to state and national educational policies.

Therefore, rather than arguing for relevance, my focus here is on noting layers of resonance. In order to do so, I draw from the fertile ground provided by Viet Elrmann’s (2010) articulation of the possible coexistence of reason and resonance in his tracing of aurality throughout modernity, Steve Goodman’s (2010) uses Spinoza, Whitehead, James, Lefebvre and others to present an ontology of vibrational aesthetics, the centrality of resonance in Peter Price’s (2012) philosophy of a sonic art, and the multitude of ways that resonance continues to re/sound throughout the field of sound studies (Pinch & Bijsterveld, 2011; Sterne, 2012).

By resonance, I mean the ability for the physical or virtual vibrational qualities of an

object, idea, process, or ecology to affect and be affected by another's (Gershon, 2013). There is not the space to delve too deeply into such a reimagining of education through these kinds of ontological possibilities here.<sup>[3]</sup> However, unlike relevance, resonance is not predicated on the consensus of others, nor does it place any one person's resonances over another's. Instead, resonance lies as much in liminal echoes as it does in resounding experiences. Similarly, resonance is not necessarily consonant, dissonant, physical, virtual, or otherwise. Instead, resonance enunciates multiple forms and pathways of connectedness between possible and present affectations.

My use of resonance here is therefore a means to demonstrate the interconnectedness between theory and practice and to articulate the importance of affect and sensation in understanding daily classroom interactions. By documenting the paths, possibilities, and expressions of resonance, it is my hope that this also contributes to reconceptualizing the centrality of affectively ontogenic classroom interactions that are often marginalized because they are perceived as cognitively insignificant.

## On Literacy

Given its wide-ranging uses and characterizations, definitions of literacy are difficult to pin down. The difficulty is due in no small part to the fact that literacy has moved from being generally discreet sets of measurable skills and fluencies in language to an all-encompassing unbounded set of possible skills and fluencies across fields, disciplines, interactions, ideas and ideals. From this perspective anything and everything might be a form of literacy because literacies are ways of knowing and being. The difficulty here, for this paper and for conceptualizing ontologies and epistemologies more generally, is that such a definition of literacies often becomes the

central metaphor for thinking about of moments of learning and being.

Before continuing with my concerns of this framing, I wish to underscore the following significant and positive points about literacy(ies). First, literacy as it is more traditionally defined as reading and writing is important for a wide variety of reasons from the practical to the liberatory. Second, I tend to align with constructions of literacy that are inclusive of literacy as sets of practices and possibilities that are multiple, socioculturally contextualized, not necessarily text-based, critical, and that value myriad group and individual understandings of what literacy might mean and how those meanings could be/are enacted. Finally, the ability to metaphorically read interactions, ideas, and ideals as texts so that they can be critically unpacked—vis-à-vis processes of decontextualization, for example—is vital in its ability to render the familiar strange and to uncover injustices.

This being said, it would appear as though some of the difficulties in utilizing literacy as a means to frame ways of knowing and being are as follows. The idea of reading the world as a metaphor has the same metaphorical concerns as the use of material texts. Rendering events, ideas, and ideals in written form removes much of the sensual in favor of the signified. The possibilities of imagining talk are not the same thing as hearing speech, and notation is not the same as presence. This also tends to again privilege the visual over all other senses, a move that has conceptual and metaphorical as well as material consequences (Erlmann, 2010; Howes, 2003; Kim-Cohen, 2009; Stoller, 1997).

Literacy is also a Western and particularly English construction that came into existence as a response to the use of illiteracy (Janks, 2010, pp. 1-2), a notion of possibility in response to a deficit. In this way, literacies tend to exist as binary oppositions to illiteracies that, like Kliebard's (2004) critique of Ralph Tyler's rationale, and Reading's (1996) critique of

excellence, are empty signifiers filled by the meanings of expert groups through consensus that marginalize others' ways of knowing and being. Of this point, just as there can be no success without others' failure (Varenne & McDermott, 1998), no one can be literate without others being illiterate. Literacy, then, is necessarily a measure of what one is and another is not, a construction that has its roots in histories and practices that have intentionally operated in racist, classist, gendered, and other such negatively powerful ways (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Winfield, 2007)—a tradition of colonization that is alive and well in contemporary US schools (Pennington, 2005). From a slightly different perspective, if everyday ways of knowing and being can be conceptualized as literacies then this construction of the ordinarily sensible must also necessarily include “the fear of being caught in something you can't master, of being found out. A kind of illiteracy” (Stewart, 2007, p. 64).

Finally, literacies tend to focus on how one knows and the processes of knowing. In so doing, literacy tends to privilege epistemologies over ontologies. More critical discussions of literacy practices do indeed consider one's interactions with self, others, and contexts but tend not to overly attend to how one “is.” For example, many discussions of literacy practices in early childhood education note the importance of particular approaches to reading with children, such as modeling reading, reading with children as an act of caring, and particular ways to nurture young children's interest in books—ways of being to foster particular ways of knowing. However, as I have seen many times in classrooms across the US, ways of being can be stumbling blocks for literacy practices. This is because, on the one hand, many mainstream and even some critical literacy practices are presented as universals, approaches to knowledge that work across contexts, individuals, and groups. On the other hand, students' whose ways of being are contrary to established ways of doing literacy or

ideas about literacy are often treated as illiterate, as can be seen, though perhaps not in these exact words, in qualitative studies of literacy and language for over thirty years (e.g., Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981; Foster, 2001; Grenfell, Bloome, Hardy, Pahl, Roswell & Street, 2012a).

In sum, a literacy is not the equivalent of Dewey's use of experience. Not everything can be read as a text, vision is not paramount, and sensation and ontology are nearly always necessary precursors to signification and epistemology. In light of this understanding, my use of literacy here is critical in that it attends to questions of power and speaks to a variety of practices and possibilities, particularly as they relate to computer literacy and print literacy.

Moving from the theoretical to empirical, the following section documents some of the ways in which sensual curriculum can be used to explicate the ordinarily sensible in everyday classroom interactions. Here I return to the video vignette and subsequent events of that day that focus on making sense of Zykira and Noah's experiences and particularly on Zykira's interpretations of those experiences.

## **Sensual Curriculum and Daily Classroom Interactions: The Case of Zykira and Noah**

As presented in the introduction, the two students in the opening video vignette are Zykira and Noah, who were beginning to put together a song about science content as part of an ongoing longitudinal collaborative research project designed to explore how songwriting might help bridge race and gender gaps in science education. As I have described and documented elsewhere (Gershon, 2012; in press; Gershon & The Listening to the Sounds of Science Project, 2012), over time, this project has become the Listening to the Sounds of Science Project, a title that reflects the wide variety of sounds, ideas, and ideals that

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participants have conveyed about academic content, their lives, and themselves. Part of the purpose of this study was both to examine whether there was still space in an increasingly measured curriculum for a critically creative curricular tool like writing songs about academic content, and because it is my belief that teachers should be treated as the experts who most know their students' daily educational needs. Participating teachers were therefore free to make all decisions about how they wished to have students write songs about science and the ways in which they wanted me to facilitate processes in their respective rooms.

This project was collaborative in that students not only wrote songs about science, but also recorded and collected their reflections about their songwriting processes, as well as occasionally audio and/or video recording the interviews they conducted with one another. Teachers participated similarly, organizing their classrooms so that students could write songs about science in ways that maintained the flow and organization of their lessons, helping to keep track of which students worked on a particular computer—especially of students' work between visits—and occasionally taking photos or videos of students working. My participation was somewhat more traditionally ethnographic: I took fieldnotes, conducted and recorded interviews, audio and video recorded classroom interactions, and collected documents.

While I was welcome to visit the class on most days, I visited the first grade classroom where John Bennett teaches approximately once every two weeks. Each visit lasted about two hours. Early on, John decided that he wanted to use me as a resource and that I would work with small groups of students, most often in pairs, one of whom would be chosen to facilitate the next group's process in learning how to use the songwriting software. Because students could decide whether they wished to serve as a helper for the next group or participate in class, and because some

students occasionally left the room for various school-related reasons such as counseling or working with a resource specialist, student helpers were part of the process just over half of the time I was in the first graders' classroom.

In this case, because students had just finished a science experiment and were continuing to think about the experiment as a class when John selected Zykira and Noah to work with me, students in the previous pairing elected to continue working with the class—all of whom had moved to the rug as Mr. Bennett read in the back of the video clip. As was the case in the opening video vignette, first graders and most students who have worked in this project tended to use the prerecorded sound samples that Apple provides as part of the Garage Band program.

The following audio recording is what students were listening to in the opening video vignette, the first time they heard the four sound files they selected played back simultaneously.

### **Media 1: First Four Tracks (Audio)**

Once Zykira and Noah finished putting the musical aspects of their song together, they then began writing the lyrics for their song. Rather than working on one set of lyrics together, following an emergent class pattern for the year, Noah and Zykria each wrote their own set of lyrics that they then combined to create a single set of lyrics for their song. The kids began working next to each other, then Zykira left and came back to work at the same space. Directly before the following video, Zykira had turned to show me her lyrics that read, "This is about solids, solids, solids, is fun because we have so much..."

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## **Media 2: Zykira and Noah Writing (Video)**

Zykira continued writing about science and fun for the remainder of this class period, a total of about 20 minutes of writing. When I met again with her and Noah the following week, as happened from time to time, Zykira was no longer satisfied with the lyrics she had written. She decided that she wanted her lyrics to be more about the experiment she had conducted than about science in general, and spent another 30 minutes rewriting them. When Noah heard Zykira's newly written lyrics, he decided that they expressed the same ideas he had in mind. As a result, Noah set aside his lyrics for Zykira's but with an adjustment in rhyme that Noah suggested and Zykira particularly liked.

## **Media 3: The Blue Ball Floated (Audio)**

Returning to the questions asked at the beginning of this paper, what do these experiences mean? How do students make sense of them? How can they be understood in terms of students' ways of knowing and being? The remainder of this section examines sensual curriculum as in terms of how students make sense of processes of sensation and signification that are their ways of knowing and being.

## **Sensual Curriculum as Ways of Knowing: Formal, Hidden, and Enacted Curriculum**

As noted in the introduction, this project involves sensual curriculum as a formal curriculum: the textbooks, assessments, assignments and other aspects of knowledge

students are intended to learn during classroom lessons. In this case, the formal curriculum was a relatively open-ended process for students to learn academic content: science and student-generated-texts in the form of songs, through a curricular tool—processes of songwriting using a computer. Unlike many contemporary approaches for learning that involve a great deal of direct instruction, modeling, and prescriptive frameworks, the formal curriculum here was more like jazz—a fluid framework designed to lead towards emergent possibilities. By this I mean that students were given a guiding framework (writing songs about science), curricular tools (a computer, computer program, headphones and a microphone), and a facilitator (me or a student helper) who worked with them on the technical skills necessary for creating a song.

Though students had a good deal of flexibility in how to engage with the program in order to build the songs' musical and lyrical components, creating those components also required a set of procedures that produced particular results—dragging and dropping or elongating sound samples, for example. Over the course of the project, John Bennett, the kids, and I also arrived at the following understandings of their songwriting process: each student would have an equal number of opportunities to select a sound sample—choices that could be negotiated with their partner(s) but did not have to be—and each had the opportunity, though not the requirement, to write their own lyrics. As with Zykira and Noah's experience, if each student created lyrics on their own, both sets of lyrics would then be further negotiated so that each person had an opportunity to have her or his voice heard as part of the song. Most often, students were responsible for the lyrical content they wrote; however, students occasionally elected to exchange or otherwise voice their lyrics. Each song was finished when participating students were pleased with the song they created, a pleasure that often turned

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to pride as their classmates, and occasionally siblings, cousins, parents, and/or former teachers, heard the song they made.

The rest of the process was purposefully open-ended, and all answers, songs, and processes for songwriting were accepted. This meant that the kinds of sounds students elected to use, the science topic they chose to write about, the order in which they selected their sound samples, whether they wanted to write their lyrics or work on the sounded portion of their song first, how and where they chose to write, and many other such educational choices were at the students' discretion. In addition, because students worked in pairs and often talked about the science ideas that were the focus of their songs, the lyrical content rarely needed their teacher's later corrections about the scientific concepts their song expressed.

The following piece of video data is offered to complement the opening vignette as an example of how student facilitation often operated. Here Sirea' served as a student helper, guiding Sania and Dahmony through the creation of their song.

#### **Media 4: Sirea', Sania and Dahmony**

As is evident here, students were provided a framework in which they could improvise and their improvisations could work within, outside of, or even, in some cases, in reaction against the established frameworks, frames of learning and teaching that were also constantly in a state of flux.

#### **Sensual Curriculum as Knowledge in Formal, Hidden and Enacted Curricula**

The formal curriculum in this study was sensual because all curricula are necessarily sensual; as they involve and are experienced through the

sensorium. It was additionally sensuous in at least two ways. First, it created a space for student to intentionally utilize sounds, movement, and affect in their learning, and second, it was designed for students to express those knowledges through song. As with the lab coats that Noah and Zykira are wearing in the videos (the steps of the scientific process were written on back of each coat) there was a somewhat unique iteration of formal curriculum in this classroom—students literally wearing the official curriculum on their backs.

The white lab coats students wore when they conducted science experiments can be understood as a hidden curriculum that reifies science as high status knowledge, the white lab coat signifying an embodied time with separate more “scientific” rules for behavior and thought. The focus of this study as part of a renewed interest in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) can similarly be interpreted as a reification of science as a high status knowledge that is privileged above the humanities, the arts, physical education, world languages, and other academic content often taught in schools. Similarly, just as the lab coats can denote a special time for students to focus on inquiry, they can also implicitly categorize science as something that is sterile and removed from everyday experiences. In addition, the purpose of this study as a means to bridge race and gender gaps in science education for urban students of color from poor to working class families also works in some ways to reconstitute traditionally marginalized students' marginalized status while reaffirming science as high status knowledge (for more on this point, see Varenne & McDermott, 1998, pp. 183-218).

However, somewhat complicating notions of hidden curriculum—a construct that tends to denote the negative ways in which the dominant norms and values of the status quo reify marginalized groups' subaltern status—a processes of songwriting had what might be called a hidden formal curriculum of print

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literacy for first grade participants, a point Zykira clearly enunciates here:

## **Media 5: Zykira on Garage Band and Songwriting**

Momentarily leaving aside her talk about how you can “act the stuff out,” Zykira and most of the students I interviewed informed me that they saw their processes of songwriting in terms of song/writing: the acts of creating a song and the acts of writing. When I worked with Zykira and Noah at the beginning of March in their first grade year, both students were still emerging readers and writers. Yet both children spent over thirty minutes writing the few sentences of their songs. Not only was this the longest period of time that either of them had spent working continually on a single piece of writing, according to their teacher, they had long writing sessions twice, approximately 20 minutes after creating the music to their songs and for an additional 30 minutes during my next visit.

Although I had considered the possibilities that this project might serve as a means for students to gain further computer literacy, demonstrate gains in skills using computers, and to revisit and further connect to science content, as obvious as it seems in retrospect, I did not think about this project in terms of print literacies. Because this was unintentional and something students saw before I understood what they knew, their emergent curricular understandings can be understood as a hidden formal curriculum of literacy—an implied formal curriculum that students heard but that I had not previously considered. Additionally, because of the ways in which their teacher Mr. Bennett had incorporated technology into his classroom, most students already had the necessarily computer literacies to readily begin using the program to write songs. For example, students understood how to negotiate using a mouse, and had some basic

keyboarding skills, as well as more broad conceptualizations of how computers function, such as the idea that programs exist on computers. They similarly understood that particular programs and created media could be updated and also needed to be saved over time so that revisions to work are not lost.

There is yet another aspect to students’ songwriting as a tool for print literacy, one that is indicative of sensual curriculum as enacted curriculum. Enacted curriculum is the meanings educational actors negotiate together through daily face-to-face interactions. As part of the processes of songwriting in Mr. Bennett’s room that developed over time, when students finished working on a song, Mr. Bennett paused the classroom lesson at hand so that the whole class could hear the most recent group’s science song. The move to render text as sound also created an educational space where participating students could share their work with peers in such a way that their degrees of literacy or illiteracy were literally less visible. Paraphrasing Kathleen Stewart’s point about illiteracy quoted earlier in this piece, students’ ability to write songs had to some degree removed the fear of being found out as less literate, a point of dignity that will also be briefly addressed in the following section on sensual curriculum as ways of being.

Sensation was also central to students’ processes of knowing. They heard the sounds of my voice, of the music samples, and their own voices, both recorded and in conversations. They created new sound spaces within the sound fields of learning (Gershon, 2011b) as they put on and took off their headphones to work on their songs. Zykira and Noah continued to wear their white lab coats, keeping their bodies literally in touch with the material manifestation of science, even as their peers took them off. As can be seen in the video data, both children touched objects and people: pencils, paper, computer keyboard, mouse, one another, and my arm to name but a few examples. And they felt feelings, intuitions

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about what sounds they liked and did not like, feelings and sounds that literally and metaphorically moved them—sensation as ways of knowing.

## **Sensual Curriculum as Ways of Being: Sensation and Affect**

How students are largely determines what they know. Here I return to Zykira and Noah's is-ness, or as Zykira noted, the way she felt free to "act the stuff out," a point that continued to resonate with her three months after her experiment when I conducted group exit interviews from which this sonic data was excerpted. As with the open-ended framework to the ways in which students approached writing songs about science, I also intentionally worked to create the space for students to "be" as they felt. While at its surface this may not seem like that radical an idea, in light of the great deal of bodily control exerted on even young students in school (see Leafgren, 2011; Nespor, 1997), students' ability to be themselves is not necessarily common in schools.

Students were free to move, feel, and otherwise "be" as they created the musical portions of their songs, such as recording their lyrics or listening to playback. At no point did I intentionally ask students to be other than how they were in rather typical school ways such as: sit more still in their seats or stay seated, to stop grooving, not to lean their foreheads so close to the page as Zykira tended to do as she wrote, for Seria to stop sucking her thumb as she concentrated before putting her headphones on, for any of students to move away from one another, or for them to stop talking to each other. Exceptions were such moments as when students asked for help or needed some aid in facilitating conversations (such as stepping in before the moment one student is yelling and another in tears). In other words, students could be themselves and part of the implicit

safety for them to let their ontologies show was an understanding that there were affective boundaries of respect for everyone's is-ness.

Because students in this project were in many ways removed from having to metaphorically squeeze their round ways of being into the square hole that is schooling, students were more apt to be able to be themselves. As a result, students' is-ness was most often a path to learning rather than a stumbling block, allowing students to concentrate more deeply on their work and create products (songs) of which they were proud.<sup>[4]</sup>

Dignity matters. To this I would add that pleasure and pride with processes and one's self, feeling noticed and noticing feelings, and the ability to be lost in experiences are similarly significant educational experiences. This is because to be affected and to affect others in and through sensation are two of the most resonant ways one can make sense.

Consider but two examples from the many educational moments presented in this paper. First, there are Zykira and Noah's movements at the beginning of the opening video vignette. Noah first smiles, then starts moving his head slightly to the beat, then, a mere six seconds later, closes his eyes and starts moving his shoulders and arms, a move that fifteen seconds in has become a full body motion in the groove. Next to him, Zykira holds her hands over the cups of her headphones, then takes her hands down and starts bobbing her head in time to the music [5 seconds]. As Noah starts to shake his shoulders for the first time [9 seconds], Zykira covers her face and laughs. However, she then picks her head up, places her headphones back squarely on her head, quickly looks back over her shoulder at me as I make an adjustment to the volume, then gets into the groove fully in her own way.

Although there are several explanations for the combination of Zykira laughing at Noah then looking over her shoulder at me as Noah's movements increased in their passion, one

strong possibility is that Zykira was distancing herself from a behavior she thought was going to be negatively sanctioned by me in my adult, teacher-like role. The moment it was clear that no such adult-sanction was imminent; Zykira immediately joined Noah and even continued grooving and moving after Noah stopped—movements that included moments of vocalizing the guitar sounds they had created. This space for students to be is equally evident and somewhat more clear in the video example of Siraе’ leading Dahmonyе and Seria through the first steps in creating their song.

In addition to these overall moments, consider also Dahmonyе’s explanation about why he wanted to keep the sample that both Siraе’ and Seria thought they would rather not to keep because, as Seria noted, “no, that’s too crazy.” His response to their objection, accompanied by a full-bodied, seat-bounce-groove was, “but it’s got a lotta light,” a deeply sensual and affective explanation. Furthermore, neither Siraе’ nor Seria asked Dahmonyе to explain himself. Instead, Seria, like her partner, decided that she too would like that sample and he should “drag that over” to be part of their song.

Second, there are the ways that Zykira and Noah wrote: standing, bouncing, moving so close that they occasionally touched, comparing ideas, telling jokes, talking, and voicing their lyrics as they developed. At one point, Zykira stood to share her lyrics with me and I asked her to “tell me a bit more about why you like science” [1:29 in the clip]. She then returned to the table and looked down at her paper, thinking, fingers on her cheek. Zykira was not, however, upset nor did she appear to feel as though her work or process was not either worthwhile or valued: there is no long face, resistance to returning to writing or tears. Instead, after a literal three seconds of thinking, she returned to writing.

Again, this was not an all-possibilities-are-open, lack of personal responsibility to self and/or others positioning. I did explicitly

ensure that students each had a turn to select the samples they wished to use, were free to write the lyrics they had in mind, that students’ songs were indeed about science, and, as can be seen in the clip with Zykira and Noah writing, worked with students across this project (6-15 year olds) to think as deeply, critically, and creatively about how to express the science content they had in mind as was possible. Of at least equal importance was John Bennett’s open approach to teaching young children that gave them a chance to enjoy themselves as children and his similarly respectful approach to me as researcher. Such work would also not have been possible were it not for the friendship and mutual respect we gained for one another over the length of this longitudinal study.

However, it is also clear that students’ ways of being strongly informed what and how they came to know. Students’ is-ness framed their knowing, and making sense required sensation to produce signification. The point is that my pedagogical approach appears to have opened a space for students’ ways of being to be honored, and positively affected how they made sense of science—a point of no small matter to my life as a teacher educator. However, what is perhaps of most significance here is that, regardless of the available ways in which students might have performed their sociocultural role as students, how they were strongly determined what they knew. Without sensation, there was no signification. It is because of this that sensual curriculum is relevant to both students and daily classroom interactions—an understanding that has implications for fields such as teacher education, educational philosophy, and curriculum theory, as well as for educational research, and pedagogical practices.

## Conclusion

In a thoroughly normal organism, these “feelings” have an efficiency of operation

which it is impossible for a thought to match. Even our most highly intellectualized operations depend on them as a “fringe” by which to guide our inferential movements. They give us our sense of rightness and wrongness, of what to select and emphasize and follow up, and what to drop, slur over and ignore, among the multitude of inchoate meanings that are presenting themselves. They give us premonitions of approach to acceptable meanings, and warnings of getting off the track (Dewey, 1929, pp. 299-300).

Sensual curriculum embraces this understanding, further emphasizing the imbricated nature of the affectively ontogenic that is central both to how one is, and to processes of signification (e.g., Clough & Halley, 2007; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003). Sensual curriculum similarly denotes the importance of the sensorium in understanding sociocultural interactions, ideas, ideals, ecologies, and processes (e.g., Behar, 1996; Feld & Basso, 1996; Howes, 2005; Tsing, 2005), understandings that have become the ordinarily sensible, normalized to the point where their construction is overlooked as commonplace and obvious. This is also why sensual curriculum is theoretically and practically significant. In its focus on making sense and the ordinarily sensible, sensual curriculum can provide both a) the means to render their familiarity again strange so that what appears common, obvious or inevitable can be critically and creatively examined and b) an opportunity to study the impact of processes that interrupt what educational actors’ sense-making or what they find to be ordinarily sensible.

In addition to serving as a possible rich site for conceptualizing educational theory and education-in-action, the possibilities and arguments raised here may also hold further implications for contemporary education in the United States. For example, the US educational system has been designed to focus on ways of knowing, conceptualized so that ways of being,

sensation, and aesthetics tend to contribute to students’ differences being recognized as deficits rather than as potential pathways for learning (Gershon, 2011d; M. M. Smith, 2008; Spivak, 2012; Valencia, 2007; Wilson, 2011). Stated more directly, children are most often “in trouble” for how they are rather than what they know (cf. Gershon, 2007). In sum, sensual curriculum seems to provide both the theoretical foundation and practical framework for again considering the significance of conceptualizing US educational policy, curriculum and classroom interactions as ways of being that lead to deeper epistemological understandings and the centrality of students and teachers’ is-ness in teaching and learning.

Resonance also appears to be a powerful theoretical and methodological tool for examining how the myriad possibilities of the physical, virtual, discursive, material, sensible, and nonsensical, can affect and be affected by one another. Because resonance requires neither a consensus perspective nor an opposing force through which it is defined, what did or did not resonate for any person, idea, group, ecology, etc., is open to interpretation. Given this openness to interpretation, if a person or group believes something to be resonant, then that which resonates for them should be given the dignity of consideration and trust that such a resonance exists, irrespective of its relevance to one’s own or another’s understandings. Such an orientation retains the critically complex nature of human interactions, including those with one’s self, while providing the space for the reconsideration and recognition of multitude of educational ways of knowing and being. In the possibility that anything might resonate with someone, nothing can be ruled out as irrelevant.

Additionally, as can be seen with Zykira and Noah, the ability for students to be themselves can have important, concrete benefits for students. In this case, a tripartite sensual curriculum (formal, hidden, enacted)

created an ecology for print literacy for two still emerging writers. That both children spent as much time as they did writing their lyrics, the incidental dignity of being able to be themselves as they wrote their own curriculum, and the pride both students felt in hearing their lyrics played back to the class should not be underestimated. It was something they both remembered at their group exit interview three months after they wrote their song and again informed me in my visits back at the school site as I caught up on the usual odds and ends that remain as studies conclude. In sum, the sensual curriculum affectively resonates both across kinds of curriculum and between bodies, ideas, and ideals.

This has strong implications for daily classroom practices of learning and teaching. For example, what might it mean to organize groups of students by their affective rather than their measured intellectual fit with a given teacher? How might ideas and ideals be otherwise organized so that they are experienced rather than measured according to prescribed lists of answers? When being lost in ideas becomes a central educational goal, what does measurement mean and what is its purpose? How might creating spaces for multiple ways of being reduce the ability to epistemologically render a students' is-ness as a deficit to learning processes?

Such understandings in many ways also resonate with Dewey's suggestions that sensation is central to signification, and that binaries, while helpful in some ways, also present false fronts of framing possibilities. The slices of daily classroom life and the questions here provide but one set of examples of how sensual curriculum can resonate in daily classroom interactions, and the importance of ways of being to educational interactions. It is also a reminder and warning that epistemologies and knowledge cannot be known without attention, sensation, affect, and ontologies; that ways of being are in many ways determinants for both how and what one

comes to understand. Finally, because sensual curriculum exists at the nexus of the individual and sociocultural contexts, its consideration can lead to more robust theorizing and better understandings of the ordinarily sensible that are the ways in which people make sense in and through processes of teaching and learning.

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[1] Due to the collaborative nature of this study, participants had the opportunity to be part of this study as named participants and to have their images and sounds similarly utilized unmasked. It is this set of possibilities that enables me to use children's and their teacher's actual names in this article and for students to be listed as coauthors in a sound installation that was exhibited at the Akron Art Museum in 2012 (March 17-July 15, 2012).

[2] This collaborative longitudinal project was conducted in four classrooms at three different

urban schools in Northeast Ohio. As reported elsewhere (Gershon, 2012, 2013) Teachers were provided the necessary hardware (microphones, headphones, computers) and software (programs) so that they could incorporate students writing songs about the science content they learned as best fit their particular pedagogical and curricular needs. Mr. Bennett's first grade classroom was one of those four participating rooms and is the focus of this article.

[3] "Otology," is a term used for the health/medical aspects of the ear that has also been expanded to the field of sound studies in such a way that it can mean "sound understandings."

[4] It is again important to note that such processes would not have been possible were it not for John Bennett's open-minded and generous approach to pedagogy that both set the stage for students feeling comfortable with such sonic explorations and provided me the opportunity to work with students in manner in which I did. Additionally, there are many possible ways to "do school" and the kinds of schooling to which I refer in the previous sentence are those aspects that tend to limit student inquiry and learning to maintain an ordered sameness rather than the boundaries for kindness, respect, and attention that are also in play in daily classroom life

## **Response Article: “We Gotta Get Out of this Place” – On the Distance between Learning and Education in the Sensory Curriculum**

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Walter Gershon’s essay provides a range of interesting observations on the sensory dimensions of curriculum. Through this he broadens the understanding of the role of sense making in education, thus bringing a wider set of phenomena to the attention of educators, educational researchers and theorists. Nonetheless there is one aspect of Gershon’s essay that puzzles me, and one aspect that intrigues me. Taken together they point in a slightly different direction than the one Gershon is pursuing in his essay. I offer this different direction not in order to refute what Gershon is putting forward, but rather in an attempt to expand his reflections in a way that, as I will suggest, might make it possible to show in a more explicit way where the *educational* potential of the sensory curriculum lie.

In what follows I make a case for keeping a distance between education and learning. With Gershon, I see learning as a process of sense-making, that is, of understanding and comprehending. If we look at the relationship between the student and the curriculum from this angle we could say that the main ‘task’ of the student indeed is to make sense of the

curriculum. But it is important that within the myriad of ways in which students can make sense of the curriculum, some ways of making sense make more sense, so to speak, than others. Here, then, is one important difference between education and learning – and one important reason, therefore to keep a distance between them – in that while learning can be an open, creative process, education always introduces the question which interpretation make sense, that is, the question which interpretations are considered to be valid, useful, socially sanctioned or personally meaningful. While the answer to this question is never simple or straightforward, the question is nonetheless an important one. The second reason why I highlight the important of keeping a distance between education and learning has to do with the fact that education is not only a process through which we engage with the world – for example, through making sense of it – it is also a process of emancipation from the world.

This double task of education – engagement and emancipation – not only refers to the world ‘outside’ of ourselves, but also refers to the relationship we develop with ourselves. While, on the one hand, education may play a role in ‘finding’ ourselves – that is, getting a sense of our feelings, desires and sense of self – there is also a need to introduce a distance between how we ‘find’ ourselves and how we can be and want to be with others. To exist in the world is never just a question of following our desires, but raises the more difficult question which of our desires are desirable, what it is, in other words, that we should desire. If we understand education just in terms of learning and learning just in terms of sense making there is a danger that we miss important educational opportunities for introducing a distance, and in what follows I will not only articulate in more detail how we should understand the distance between

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learning and education and why we should value it, but will also point at educational ways of keeping this distance open and giving it a (more) central place in our educational endeavours, one that focuses on the ways in which we are affected by what is ‘outside’ of us, rather than the ways in which we make sense of it. Let me turn, then, first to my puzzlement.

What puzzles me about Gershon’s essay, is that although he makes extensive use of the words ‘education and ‘educational’ – already in the second sentence he asks “How should this educational moment be understood?” – he never provides a clear description of his conception of education, nor of his conception of what makes something educational. As a result he seems to rely on an assumption that permeates much contemporary research, policy and practice, which is the idea that education is a matter of *learning* (see Biesta 2004; 2006; 2007). This is indeed how I read the main ‘message’ of Gershon’s essay, in that he understands learning as a process of sense making, and that, against conceptions of sense making that focus exclusively on conscious signification, he makes a case for a much wider range of ways in which we make sense and construct meaning. That is why sense making involves sensation, perception and signification; why it has intentional and unintentional dimensions; why it is aesthetic, social and political; why it is not just located in the mind but thoroughly embodied; and why sense making is therefore not just a matter of knowing or even experiencing, but also a matter of being. I have no problem with Gershon’s suggestion that sense making involves much more than conscious signification, and agree that to have the much broader notion of sense making that he puts forward is useful in order to get a greater awareness of the many dimensions that are at stake when sense making occurs in educational settings such as schools, colleges, or universities. And while I do think that a broader notion of sense making can change our understanding of learning, I do not

think that it can, in itself, get us any closer to the educational questions we, as educators, educational researchers and educational theoreticians, should be asking. Put more strongly: I even think that the focus on sense making can distract us from asking those questions and thus such a focus runs the risk of being unhelpful rather than helpful in the context of education and curriculum. Let me explain what I have in mind and where my concerns stem from.

Perhaps the quickest way to highlight the distance between learning and education – or for that matter the distance between sense making and education – is that learning and sense making can happen anywhere and at any time, whereas education always raises the question what kind of sense we are making and ought to make, that is, what kind of learning should happen. Unlike learning and sense making, education inevitably raises the normative question about what good, meaningful or worthwhile learning and sense making are about, and it raises this question in two ways. One can be called analytical and has to do with our evaluation of the processes of sense making and learning that actually go on in our educational institutions – and here a long tradition of critical work has exposed how educational learning and sense making may constrain and confine us, rather than that they provide opportunities for expansion and emancipation. But there is also a programmatic ‘version’ of the normative question where we ask what should be learned in and through education – often expressed in terms of the curricular questions about what should be learned, how should it be learned, and most importantly, for what reasons and with regard to which purposes should it be learned. Of course, such questions are never easy or straightforward, but they nonetheless pose themselves each time we invest time, effort and resources in setting up educational environments and arrangements that seek to provide very specific opportunities for learning

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and making sense. The distance between education and learning is there, therefore, because not any sense making automatically ‘makes sense.’

While Gershon provides detailed descriptions of the manifold ways in which the students in his project made sense, he says very little about what they made sense *of*. Yet the latter question is a crucial one as well. Philosophically we could already say that sense making always has an object – we never make sense in the abstract but there is always something we make sense *of*. Yet educationally the important point is that not any way in which students make sense of what is offered them in education is equally valid. While, again, I am not advocating an authoritarian conception of education where students simply need to swallow what teachers provide them with, this is not an argument for the very opposite side of the spectrum where students’ sense making takes place without any limits. The fact that the students in Gershon’s project are making sense of science – and note that the word itself is used in the essay without much elaboration or critical scrutiny – means that the educational challenge is not one of just making any sense of science, and particularly not any sense that may just make them feel good about their sense making. Science, after all, is not everything, which means that the educational challenge in making sense of science is to figure out what the boundaries of the object of sense making are. The aim of sense making in the context of science education, so we might say, is that students make the *right* sense (without suggesting, of course, that there is only one right way in which sense can be made of science – a question that already starts with making sense of the very word ‘science’). By saying so little about the object of sense making, and perhaps also by providing students with little access to the boundaries and possibilities of sense making of science, there is therefore already a danger that the particular way in which the sense making task is being

presented to the students reinforces stereotypical ways of understanding what science is – note, for example, the use of lab coats or the reference to ‘the scientific process.’

And this is where a further distance between learning and sense making on the one hand and education on the other matters, in that education is precisely ‘there,’ so I wish to suggest, in order to create such a distance. One way to read the word ‘education’ is precisely as a process of leading out (*ex-ducere*), just as the word ‘pedagogy’ refers to the pedagogue, the slave who brought the children to school – which, metaphorically is an act of leading children out of their ‘home,’ out of the place where they are with themselves, to a ‘worldly’ place that takes them beyond where they are, and hence also beyond who they are. While education is not a ‘pure’ process of leading out – after all, if that was all that education was about it would run the risk of becoming a process of indoctrination in which the self is destroyed – it is also not a process of just confirming the self as it is. This means that education is also never just a matter of student expression (which is the one-sided idea of a 100% child-centred education that Dewey rightly was critical of). Education stands for the double task of engaging the child with the world and emancipating the child from the world, as the French educationalist Philip Meirieu has put it (see Meirieu 2007) which, so I wish to suggest, that education also stands for the double task of engaging children and students with themselves and emancipating children and students from themselves. The latter point is educationally important as well, particularly to counter trends that suggest that as long as students are happy or are having fun, education is doing a proper job. I believe that this is a dangerous suggestion, because happiness and fun keep children and students ‘tied’ to their existing desires – in a sense happiness and fun reinforce such desires – rather than that they are put in a position where their desires are questioned, so that they can

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engage in the difficult but crucial question which of their desires can be considered to be desirable. And this question has become even more important in an age of global and all-encompassing capitalism, as capitalism precisely ‘works’ through a multiplication and intensification of our desires – so that ultimately we want to buy more ‘stuff’ – rather than that it summons us to examine our desires.

In Gershon’s analysis of his empirical material I see too much focus on sense making, and too little attention to the question what the object of sense making is and in what ways this object puts boundaries on the ways in which it can be made sense of. Similarly I see too much focus on students’ ‘investment’ in the sense making process – that is in how it connects with their *existing* desires – rather than that it allows for the creation of a critical distance between what they desire, with what at first sight ‘feels good,’ and with what a desirable mode of engagement with their object of sense making should be (leaving aside for the moment the even more complex question of how their initial desires have been constructed in the first place). And I see a similar limitation in the way in which Gershon theorizes the possibilities of the sensual curriculum as for me the educational question is not about resonance as such, but about what it is we should be resonating with and where we should actually refuse to resonate with, and where dissonance – either with the object of sense making or with ourselves – would be the more desirable option, both individually and collectively-politically. That is why I would even make a more positive case for the fact that not everything that happens in the classroom, and not everything that students bring to the classroom is *automatically* relevant. The educational question for me is precisely about making the distinction between what is relevant and what is not relevant, which means that from that angle we can never say *in a general sense* whether how students prefer to sit, prefer to pay attention, prefer to think, prefer to

engage or disengage is relevant or irrelevant from the perspective of their education. (After all, such preferences are to be seen as articulations of their desires, and for that reason should never be simply accepted ‘as they come’ but always be opened for critical scrutiny.)

All this leads me to the observation that education is not just an act of confirmation of what is already ‘there,’ but is also an interruption (see Biesta 2006). Education is, to use the words of Levinas, not simply a matter of my being – as it is – but also of my being-in-question, that is, the way in which I exist, in the literal sense of standing outside of myself, in my engagement with the world as an object that stands outside of me, rather than only a construct of my own sense making. It is precisely in relation to this that a further limitation of sense making comes into view, in that sense making is only one particular way of being, and not necessarily the most desirable one. Gershon writes that “(m)aking sense is how people understand their worlds – their relationships to local and less local ecologies, others, and themselves”. While I agree with this, it does not mean, however, that making sense is therefore the only way in which people can live their lives, or the only way in which they can give form to their relationships to local and less local ecologies, others, and themselves. Sense making is an act of comprehension, where I ‘grasp’ the world in an act of understanding. Sense making thus puts me in a very particular relationship towards the world, one that starts with the ‘I’ and that makes the world into an object of my sense making – the question, after all, is how *I* can make sense, how *I* can understand, how *I* can comprehend – rather than that it allows for the world to speak to me, to put it briefly. Here we encounter the limits of what might be called the ‘hermeneutical worldview,’ one that always puts the self before the world, and envisages the relationship between the two entirely in terms of me making sense of, rather than as a relationship where what is other speaks to me.

These questions move us into much more complex philosophical waters, and I do not have the space to go there (for a first attempt see Biesta 2013). Nonetheless, they are important in the context of Gershon's essay because of brief remark that, in a sense, is at odds with the main thrust of the essay – and it is this brief remark that is the source of what intrigued me and what, I think, opens up a very different direction for the sensual curriculum. The brief remark is to be found in a sentence quotes from Greeg and Weigworth who write that the question of affect is not only about the body's capacity to affect but also the body's capacity *to be affected*. Being affected, so I wish to suggest, precisely points at an existential possibility that is the very opposite of hermeneutics, the opposite of thinking of our lives entirely as acts of sense making, of grasping, understanding and comprehension. To be affected hints at the experience where something speaks to you, where something comes to you from the outside, where something addresses you *beyond* what already makes sense (which means that it can only appear as non-sense or beyond reason). Being affected can therefore seen as an experience of 'being taught' that is the very opposite of the act of 'learning from' (on this distinction see Biesta in press). It is here that I feel that we encounter a very different direction for the sensual curriculum, one where the sensual curriculum does not bind us to our desires, to the acts of sense making that already make sense – so that they never take us into what does not yet make sense, that is beyond our current reason – but where it has a possibility to emancipate, to draw us out into the world, to draw us out of ourselves, into existence in the literal sense of the word. This hints at a sensual curriculum that does not focus on sense making but is rather interested in the encounter with non-sense, with the very thing that is beyond what currently makes sense. Such a curriculum might be better suited to do educational work rather than keep education in the domain of

learning. Gershon's essay points to this possibility as well, but only at its very margins, and perhaps at a point where the sense of the essay itself is put at stake. Yet it is this possibility that for me is educationally the more urgent one, which is why I wish to offer this as a different direction for the sensual curriculum.<sup>[1]</sup>

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[1] In his paper Gershon uses the word 'otological,' which is actually quite relevant for my response, as what I am trying to argue for could perhaps be termed as an 'otological' reading of the sensual curriculum, one that focuses on the ear as a sense organ of receptivity rather than construction (see also Derrida 1988)

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