Art Education and the Encouragement of Affective and Cognitive Empathy in Early Childhood

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Art Education and the Encouragement of Affective and Cognitive Empathy in Early Childhood

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

ART EDUCATION AND THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF AFFECTIVE AND COGNITIVE EMPATHY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

By Luke Meeken, BFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013.

Major Director: Dr. Sara Wilson McKay, Art Education Chair, School of the Arts

This study constructs a theoretical framework for exploring the relationship between art education practice and the development of empathy in early childhood. In this study, I construct a schema for the experience of empathy in kindergarten-aged students, derived from the work of Martin Hoffman, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Vittorio Gallese, which acknowledges both the affective and cognitive dimensions of the experience of empathy. This schema is examined within the context of aesthetic and artistic experience, as distinguished from each other by John Dewey. I articulate several ways that art education’s cultivation of subtle aesthetic perception may encourage affective empathy, and its cultivation of imaginative cognition may encourage cognitive empathy. Suggestions are made for projects and practice in the early childhood classroom.
Chapter 1 - Introduction

Background to the Problem

We live in an increasingly connected and diverse culture where global images are more and more accessible to students from across political, cultural, and religious divides (Jeffers, 2009b). In this cultural and educational milieu, where students encounter and attempt to relate to myriad forms of otherness, empathy is a key skill that can “help place [them] outside their own comfort zone and within the lifeworld of another person” (Campbell & McDonagh, 2009, p. 606).

Despite this apparent need for empathy and place-taking in contemporary culture, American college students’ scores on assessments of empathy have been falling since 1990, and the rate of decline has increased since 2000 (Konrath, O’Brien, & Hsing, 2011). If we turn our gaze from higher education to students’ very earliest school experiences, we find that kindergarten teachers “report that their single greatest challenge is that a majority of the children lack some or all of the needed social and emotional competencies,” and that teachers feel they are less well-equipped to address these challenges than students’ cognitive or academic deficits (Whitted, 2011, p. 10).

In my own experiences teaching early childhood education, I have noticed that preschool and kindergarten comprise a critical time when children are very intensely navigating and forming conceptions of their relationships. At this age the inchoate affective emotional responses of toddlerhood become more resolved as the child gives more complex cognitive attention to interpreting these feelings, and the feelings and intentions of others (Hoffman, 1979).

Sometimes this increased cognitive complexity nonetheless fails to generate an accurate understanding of these feelings and intentions. Such was the case of a five-year-old student of
mine who reasoned aloud after striking an aggressive classmate that, “We’re supposed to treat others how we want to be treated, and he was hitting her, so he wanted me to hit him.” At other times, these experiments in empathy-formation allow a fairly detailed opportunity for place-taking and exploration of others’ motivations. For instance, a four-and-a-half-year-old student in my class, while relating a superhero picture-story he had drawn, made a brief aside to mention, regarding the villain: “He’s the bad guy. There aren’t really bad guys. He just really wants the money. But he’s not being nice to the people.”

In my experience, it is not uncommon for an artistic project such as narrative drawing to engender feelings and conceptions of empathy. And, indeed, empathy has conceptual connections with aesthetic theory in the West. Psychologist Edward Titchener coined the English *empathy* in 1909 as a translation of *einfühlung* (*in-feeling*), a concept denoted by Robert Vischer in his 1873 aesthetic dissertation on emotional projection, “On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics” (Ikonomou & Malgrave, 1994). In this text, Vischer (1873/1994) explored how the subject “projects its own bodily form” (p. 92) onto the aesthetic object. This projection was to Vischer a somatic, kinesthetic response to an affective, aesthetic experience.

More recently, Robert Bersson (1982) characterized art education as a “pedagogy of sensuous aesthetic response,” which could cultivate this affective empathy by “deepening [the] keyboard of feeling” (p. 38).

The arts have also been linked to a more cognitive conception of empathy, which leverages not just feeling, but imaginative thought. Arthur Efland (2004) noted that “[i]t is only in the arts where the imagination is encountered and explored in full consciousness – where it becomes the object of inquiry” (p. 769). Art education fosters the development of imaginative cognition, and Dewey (1934) described imagination as “the chief instrument of the good. It is
more or less a commonplace to say that a person’s ideas and treatment of his fellows are
dependent upon his power to put himself imaginatively in their place” (p. 348).

This study focuses on how art education can encourage these affective and cognitive
dimensions of empathetic experience. I give specific attention to the particular cognitive faculties
of kindergarteners, how the cognitive and affective components of empathy function during this
developmental stage, and how art education may influence such feeling and thinking in this age
group.

**Perspective and Theoretical Framework**

My model of empathy draws largely on the developmental research of Martin Hoffman.
Hoffman (1979) outlined an affective dimension of empathy, which is innate and exists from
infancy, and a cognitive dimension of empathy, which develops over time and interprets the
affective empathic response through the child’s constantly evolving cognizance of other people.
Similarly, Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) discussion of the child’s relation to the other mentioned
“transitivism” (p. 135), an absence of division between the affective experience of self and other,
which is prominent in infancy, but which remains into adulthood and undergirds interpersonal
relations even after the child becomes aware of a self and an other. Merleau-Ponty characterized
this twofold relation as one of “introjection” of the other’s experience into the self and
“projection” of our conceptions into the other (p. 134). Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, I refine
Hoffman’s schema into a model of empathy in early childhood which includes the internalization
of the other’s affective state, and the cognitive projection of that affective experience back onto
the other. This model serves as the framework for my exploration of how art education might
encourage, or create space for, empathetic experience in early childhood.
Both the affective and cognitive dimensions of empathy are addressed in this study, as I find both are fundamental to understanding how empathy functions, how it is experienced, and how it may be encouraged through pedagogy. The affective component is essential to empathy, and it is the primary factor that distinguishes it from the wholly cognitive concept of sympathy – *feeling with*, rather than empathy’s *feeling in* (Fabes, Eisenberg, & Miller, 1990; Feshbach, 1975; Gruen & Mendelsohn, 1986; Hoffman, 1975, 1979b, 2000; Jeffers, 2009a; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). Norma Feshbach (1975) determined from her studies that while empathic experience typically engendered a cognitive understanding of the other, the converse – that social understanding would necessarily entail empathetic experience – was not the case, concluding that “it is the affective component that gives the empathy construct its unique property” (p. 26). Affective empathy precedes cognitive empathy from a developmental perspective, as affective experience of the other’s condition begins in infancy while cognitive interpretation of that experience develops over the course of childhood (Hoffman, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2010; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). The affective component also precedes the cognitive component from a minute situational perspective, as an affective experience of a situation, including the situation of the other, is necessarily pre-cognitive (Hoffman, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Gallese, 2003a).

While the affective dimension is of primary importance to the experience of empathy, and some researchers/studies use an exclusively affective definition of empathy (Bryant, 1990; Feshbach & Roe, 1968; Stotland, 1969), most of the literature encountered in this study acknowledges that cognition also plays a significant role in the experience of empathy (Barnett, 1990; Eisenberg & Strayer (1990); Feshbach, 1975, 1983; Gruen & Mendelsohn, 1986;
The cognitive dimension, while not the defining attribute of empathetic experience, is nonetheless also essential to understanding empathy and pedagogy related to it. Cognition is necessary for all but the most rudimentary forms of empathy (Hoffman, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 1964). A purely affective state of empathy, in which affect is indiscriminately shared between individuals, characterizes infantile egocentrism (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) more so than it does conceptions of empathy which entail place-taking and understanding of the other’s situation. It is via cognition that the subject performs even the fundamental empathetic task of realizing the shared affect is not her/his own experience, and locating the affect in the body of the object (Hoffman, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Because the cognitive component of empathy is more intimately connected to the child’s developmental stages (Hoffman, 2000; Feshbach, 1975; Merleau-Ponty, 1964), its inclusion in the study facilitates my focus on a specific developmental period. Acknowledging the cognitive component of empathy better enables me to examine the particular experience and functioning of empathy during early childhood. Including the cognitive dimension of empathy in this study also facilitates the discussion of pedagogy with respect to empathy, as both the affective and cognitive components afford distinct avenues for encouraging empathy in students (Feshbach, Feshbach, Fauvre, & Ballard-Campbell, 1983), providing this study more opportunities for suggesting practice.

Norma Feshbach is listed as both an advocate of a purely affective definition of empathy and of an affective-cognitive conception of empathy because in her earlier work (Feshbach & Roe, 1968), she employed a definition of empathy as simply “a vicarious affective response” (p. 133), while in later work (Feshbach, 1975, 1983), she outlined a conception of empathy comprised of both affective (affect response) and cognitive (perspective-taking) components. The extension of her research into pedagogical practice, the Learning to Care curriculum (Feshbach, Feshbach, Fauvre, & Ballard-Campbell, 1983), explicitly emphasizes the development of “affective and cognitive skills” (p. 2) to encourage empathy in students.
Some theorists advocate a model of empathy with three, rather than two, components, including a third dimension concerned with the precipitation of prosocial actions from the empathetic experience (Hoffman, 2000; Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003). Vreeke and Van der Mark (2003) asserted that “‘[g]enuine’ empathy includes the urge to provide comfort, to offer support, etc.” (p. 185). This “motivational” (Hoffman, 1979b, p. 2) component of empathy is beyond the focus of this study, which concentrates on the experience of empathy and how it may be encouraged. The question of whether the experience of empathy encourages prosocial, altruistic, or moral action (as well as the question of what constitutes a prosocial, altruistic, or moral action) will not be addressed in this study.

My exploration is situated within a social constructivist dialogic frame. Social constructivist pedagogy draws on the educational theory of Lev Vygotsky (1926/1992) wherein the child constructs her/his cognitive, ethical, and social development through social interactions with peers and instructors, rather than receiving external codified systems representing truth. The social construction of meaning between people posited within the constructivist paradigm reflects Buber’s (1947/1965) notion of dialogue, characterized as a two-way interaction in which meaning is found between subject and object.

This conception of dialogue influenced my formation of a two-way schema of empathy involving “introjection” and “projection” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 134), rather than the traditional aesthetic conception of empathy as a one-way projection of the self into the object/other, wherein “aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self-enjoyment” (Worringer 1908/1963, p. 14). This almost solipsistic conception of empathy was criticized by Buber (1947/1965) as an “exclusion of one’s own concreteness, the extinguishing of the actual situation of life, the absorption in pure aestheticism of the reality in which one participates” (p. 115). The “actual
situation of life” Buber mentions above entails a dialogic relationship which includes the lived experience of two persons, where “one person, without forfeiting any of the felt reality of his activity, at the same time lives through the common event from the standpoint of the other” (p. 115), feeling the other’s experience without ceding the reality of her/his own experience or denying the reality of the other’s. Rather than acknowledging the lived experience of both the subject and object of perception, the traditional aesthetic conception encouraged a model of empathy where “we build up the other from traits of our own personality[...and t]he person beside me, of whom I am conscious, is a doubling and modification of myself” (Lipps, 1903, p. 106). My model, which is explained in greater detail in the second chapter, acknowledges the reality of the lived experience of the object of empathetic perception, and the significance of that experience in inducing the subject’s feelings of empathy.

In addition to informing my theoretical framework, this dialogic constructivist perspective informs my methodology. Bakhtin’s (1963/1984) articulation of dialogue emphasized polyphony, the presence of several distinct, intact voices, over the monologic synthesis of those voices into a single, authoritative perspective. In the development of my schema and my subsequent exploration of the literature, my aim is to construct meaning from those moments when the texts address or interact with each other in unforeseen ways rather than synthesize them into a single, monadic model.

3 Sondern wir bauen sie auf aus Zügen der eigenen Persönlichkeit. Der „Andere“ ist die vorgestellte und je nach der äußeren Erscheinung und den wahrnehmbaren Lebensäußerungen modifizierte eigene Persönlichkeit, ein modifiziertes eigenes Ich. Der Mensch außer mir, von dem ich ein Bewußtsein habe, ist eine Verdoppelung und zugleich eine Modifikation meiner selbst (Lipps, 1903, p. 106).

4 My use of the terms “subject” and “object” in this study is intended to maintain clarity when discussing the different roles the perceiver – who experiences empathy – and the perceived – who induces empathy – play in my schema of empathy. The “object” in this model is also an experiencing subject, and it is entirely possible for two individuals empathizing with each other to be subjects and be the objects of each others’ perception. This usage derives from the use of these terms in grammar – in the sentence “She perceives the boy,” “the boy” is the object of the sentence, and of the verb “perceive,” but rather than designating him as an inanimate object, the term “object” articulates his relation to the subject “she” and to the verb “perceive.”
Consequently, I am interested in qualitatively and theoretically coming to an understanding about empathy via dialogic interaction with the theories and experience of others, rather than epistemically developing a base of data from which to draw quantitative, ‘objective’ conclusions about empathy and artmaking in kindergarteners. Doing so places my research within a constructivist paradigm.

**Research Question**

In conducting this study, I intend to find an answer to the question: “How can a theory-based art education curriculum encourage affective and cognitive empathy in kindergartners?”

The problem focuses on kindergarten-aged learners because my personal years of experience in early childhood programs provide me a context for subjectively understanding this age group, and because this is an age when egocentrism tends to give way to socialization (DeVries, Zan, & Hildebrandt, 2002). Children’s artwork also becomes more deliberate and figurative in this stage (Matthews, 2004), indicating a period of transition rich in implications for study of attitudes towards visual expression and social relationships.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study explores the intersection of theory about the relationship of artmaking to empathy with thought regarding the affective and cognitive development of empathy particular to children from the ages of 4 to 6. The aim of this research is to create a theoretical space for the discussion of empathy in arts education, which could open the way for further experimental research to fill this apparent gap in the literature and address a pressing need of contemporary early childhood educators (Whitted, 2010).

**Gaps in the Existing Literature**
While there are a number of studies examining empathy in art pedagogy, I encountered no studies that discussed early childhood in this context. Several case studies depicted deliberate, empathy-focused arts education practice in late elementary and secondary education (Graham, 2009; Goldstein & Winner, 2012), at the university level (Campbell & McDonagh, 2009; Jeffers, 2009a), and in adult professional education (Alvarez, 2010; Robinson, 2007). There has also been curricular research in general education for encouraging empathy in younger elementary learners (Caselman, 2007; Feshbach et al., 1983). Studies have also been done (typically with adult learners) on the relationship between theater education and empathy (Catterall, 2007; Goldstein & Winner, 2012; Reilly, Trial, Piver, & Schaff, 2012). However, I specifically found no examples of art lessons designed to cultivate empathetic feeling or concepts in very young learners. Brown and Sax (2013) recently published results of an experimental study of the effect of arts enrichment on the expression and regulation of emotions in preschoolers, which did include empathy as a measure, but their study compared a group engaged in multiple arts disciplines (music, dance, and visual arts) to a group engaged in no arts disciplines, and their published data only includes general statistics of “positive” and “negative” recorded emotions (with empathy included in the former), making it impossible to tease out a relationship specifically between empathy and the visual arts.

The conception of empathy is defined in varying ways and with varying degrees of rigor across these studies. Some writers in the field invoke the aesthetic definition of empathy used by 19th-century aestheticians, while others use more contemporary or psychological conceptions of empathy, while still others use functional, uncited common-sense definitions of the term. A theoretical framework could help art educators place these practices and experiences in
meaningful relation to each other and evaluate the different ways – and different degrees of success to which – they encourage empathy.

**Background to the Study**

This study uses a theoretical methodology to examine existing thought and research on empathy in artmaking with conceptions of empathetic development and learning in kindergarteners to generate recommendations for art instruction that specifically address this age group.

Jason Wallin (in press) used the work of Deleuze to highlight the affinity between a constructivist paradigm and theoretical research, asserting that Deleuze repudiates “the habit of framing difference in terms of what already *is*” (p. 2). Instead, “the images we take for ourselves and our world are not *fundamental*. They too have been created, and hence, *might be created differently*” (p. 2). Wallin’s articulation of Deleuze emphasized an indictment of the use of theory to organize and characterize the world according to pre-existing concepts and categories (in making this point, Wallin invoked the metaphor of theory as an “automatic interpretation machine” (Deleuze, 1973/2004, p. 274)). Rather, Wallin advocated that theoretical investigations construct *new* concepts, categories, and theoretical tools for answering research questions. This study subscribes to Wallin’s latter, generative, conception of theoretical methodology, rather than the former, interpretive, conception. My constructivist endeavor in my research to create a new space for understanding how empathy functions in relation to early childhood art education, and to create a new model of empathy to facilitate this understanding, consequently lends itself to a theoretical methodology.

Wallin (in press) also proposed a shift in thinking, necessary for theoretical research, which fundamentally shapes one’s research question and the way it is asked. According to
Wallin (in press), theoretical research is best served by the ethical question “What can art do?” rather than the interpretive “What does this mean?” (p. 4). My research question explicitly probes one aspect of art’s ability to engender empathy, and this focus on ‘ability’ indicates that my question is a permutation of the theoretical query “What can art do?”

Theoretical research is an ideal methodology for evaluating a corpus of thought and research in a particular field, and applying a conceptual framework to it to generate new ideas. For instance, in “Six Acts of Miscognition: Implications for Art Education,” Kevin Tavin (2010) evaluated a number of prevailing ideas concerning cognition in art education through a Lacanian psychoanalytic lens, constructing six acts of “miscognition” (p. 57) which highlight the omissions implicit in cognitive theory’s focus on conscious construction of thought. While my theoretical lens is not psychoanalytic, I am also evaluating and synthesizing a variety of diverse texts and theories regarding empathy. My dialogic constructivist framework, rather than uncovering unspoken meanings in my source texts, places them in relation to each other to construct meaning from moments of intersection and addressivity among the texts and ideas. By drawing connections between the theoretical domains of empathy-in-artmaking and developing-empathy-in-early-childhood, this study aims to construct the theoretical ground upon which to base guiding principles for art education’s fostering of empathetic feeling and cognition in young children.

Significance of the Study

As discussed above, developing empathy is an important goal in an increasingly connected and diverse global culture (Jeffers, 2009b), especially in light of declining U.S. scores on “Empathic Concern” and “Perspective Taking” subsets of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Konrath, O’Brien, & Hsing, 2011). More students are increasingly likely to encounter others, in
life and in mediated experiences, from different cultural milieux, and such encounters may pose a particular challenge to the experience of empathy (Hoffman, 1979c, 2000; Jeffers, 2009a; Momar-Szakacs, Wu, Robles, & Iacoboni, 2007), as empathy tends to have a “similarity bias” that could be addressed by empathy education (Hoffman, 2000, p. 294). Focusing on cultivating affective and cognitive empathy in young children could also help address the aforementioned needs of early childhood educators who identify social and emotional skill levels of their incoming students as a significant challenge (Whitted, 2010). Increased empathy in students also has an observed correlation with reduced aggression (Strayer & Roberts, 1989).

What relevance might there be for generating thought about empathy and its development, beyond hypothetical instrumental aims at improving students’ prosocial behavior? Vittorio Gallese (2003a) contended, from the perspective of neuroscience, that pursuing this line of inquiry may illuminate heretofore neglected dimensions of the human mind:

Why has intersubjectivity progressively gained the centre of the stage? Because more and more scholars are experiencing a growing sense of discomfort with respect to the heuristic value of accounts of human cognition exclusively focusing on a solipsistic, monadic dimension. Intersubjective relations are interesting not only because they capture an essential trait of the human mind – its social character – but also, and even more importantly, because they provide a greater opportunity to understand how the individual mind develops and works (p. 517).

Hoffman (1973), likewise, saw his focus on empathy and altruism as a complement to a preceding history of thought centered on the self, including the “primitive impulses and self-oriented motives” of psychoanalysis and the “self-fulfillment” of “non-deficiency theorists like Maslow” (p. 2). Beyond creating a theoretical space for thought about the socio-emotional needs
of students, this project could help create theoretical spaces for understanding how our students think, feel, and function interpersonally.

**Limitations of the Research**

Because my methodology is theoretical rather than experimental or quasi-experimental, the schema I put forth is untested. There is no quantitative data to support its use in curriculum development or classroom practice, and acquisition of such data is beyond the scope of this study. If a curriculum later crystallizes from this research, further, (quasi-)experimental research could be done to evaluate the effectiveness of the contained lessons and revise the curriculum, or underlying theoretical model, if need be.

Another limit of this study is that it does not examine the relationship of empathy to prosocial action. Some theorists (Hoffmann, 2000; Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003) have argued that the motivation toward prosocial action is an essential component of “genuine empathy” (Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003, p. 185), and the cultivation of prosocial behavior is an advocacy point used by many who argue for empathy in art and general education (e.g. Feshbach, 1983; Hoffmann, 2000; Jeffers, 2009a; Stout, 1999; Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003). However, this study is working on the *experience* of empathy in the child and how art education may encourage that experience, not on the precipitation of prosocial action from that experience. While there is some experimental data showing a correspondence between empathy and prosocial action (e.g. Batson, Batson, Griffitt, Barrientos, Brandt, Spreugelmeyer, & Bayly, 1989; Fabes, Eisenberg, & Miller, 1990; Feshbach, 1975; Strayer & Roberts, 1989), the questions of *how* empathy may elicit prosocial response, and what exactly constitutes a prosocial response, are beyond the focus of this study.
Another potential limit of this study is that it draws upon several disparate scholarly disciplines, including theoretical, philosophical, neuroscientific, and epistemic sources of data without wholly synthesizing them into a uniform conceptual space/tool. In this study, I juxtapose these disciplines, and highlight their concurrent elements – moments where the same or similar phenomena are being approached from different lexical frames – but do not make a case for their synthesis or prove unequivocally that they, or the phenomena they discuss, are identical. This approach is informed by two factors. One factor is the dialogic theoretical framework discussed above, in which aims to preserve the distinct voices informing my exploration (polyphony) rather than reign them into a single voice presented as ‘my own’ (monophony). The other factor is the ultimately practical aim of my research question, which asks how an art education curriculum may encourage empathy. This study aims to address that how by creating a theoretical space for developing practice which leverages research from multiple methodologies/disciplines to provide multiple avenues of engagement. For instance, while this study does not conclusively demonstrate an identity between the activation of kinesthetic mirror neurons (Gallese, 2003b) and Theodor Lipps’s (1903) “inner imitation” (p. 98), the inclusion and juxtaposition of those two concepts, hailing from different scholarly disciplines, affords educators two different frames for the development of practice, as well as the possibility for developing practice that engages with both perspectives. The question of whether an activity that aims to elicit affective empathy by explicitly activating mirror neurons is more, or less, effective than one that aims to do so by encouraging Lipps’s inner imitation could, as noted above, be addressed by a later experimental study.

Such a methodology may be seen as an eclectic approach to theoretical research, one that does not wholly engage with the essential truths asserted by different disciplines, or that simply
instrumentalizes them. My justification for this approach derives in part from the above-articulated conception of theoretical research as a method for generating new thought regarding practice, rather than a lens for interpreting practice according to a certain truth or system. More importantly, this approach derives from an acknowledgment of the dialogic relationship between teacher and student. The ‘practical eclecticism’ of appropriating and implementing, through pedagogy, several diverse theoretical and methodological approaches is not an instrumentalizing trivialization of those approaches. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that the teacher is, ultimately, responsible to the student moreso than s/he is to the theorist. The locus of ‘truth’ or ‘meaning’ – or for determining ‘truth’ or ‘meaning’ – in teaching is found in the student’s response to pedagogy, not in that pedagogy’s rigorous or rigid application of a ‘truth’ or sense of ‘meaning’ asserted within a specific theoretical framework. An ‘eclectic’ approach to theory allows the teacher to be sensitive and responsive to the student’s experience, and to be flexible and supple enough to prune or reshape practice – even rigorously theorized practice – if need be.

**Review of the Proposed Study**

In the following chapter of this study, I review the literature regarding the development of empathy in early childhood, and propose a schema of empathy derived from the intersections between the texts. Afterward, I take that schema and examine its relationship to artmaking, discussing its relation to empathy’s early role as an aesthetic concept and theory linking empathy to perception and imagination. Following this, I frame the art-empathy relation within the context of art education, and examine suggestions for practice and projects from extant general education empathy curricula that may lend themselves to an art education context. I conclude with suggestions for further research and a discussion of the potential relevance of this research for the field.
Ultimately, the goal for this study is the development of theoretical connections between empathy-development in art practice and in early childhood, and the generation of a theoretical framework for the discussion and encouragement of empathy by art educators. For further research, a curriculum derived from this study could be tested in a (quasi-) experimental way. Pre- and post- tests derived from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Konrath et al., 2011) and/or the Basic Empathy Scale (Albiero, Matricardi, Speltri, & Toso, 2009) could be administered before and after a planned intervention. This intervention would be the completion of a unit of the developed curriculum in a kindergarten classroom. Students from another classroom could also be tested, as a control group.

I am also interested in exploring dialogic and empathetic potential in other artforms beyond the figurative painting and sculpture focused on in the literature. New media such as interactive digital artwork, web-based art, and video art are areas I have explored in my personal teaching and artistic practice, and which may have unexplored empathetic potential for young learners. Additional empathetic guidelines regarding new media forms could be a fruitful extension of the recommendations developed in this study.

**Conclusions**

In this study I hope to illuminate and explore a new area of the relationship between art education and the development of empathy. The recommendations for practice that result from this research may provide interested early childhood teachers with a way to engender empathetic feeling and thought through artmaking, complementing extant examples that focus on secondary and adult education (e.g. Graham, 2009).

This research will also help me come to a fuller understanding of the way(s) art education can foster empathy in students. Perhaps study in the arts can consciously refine affective
empathetic projection in the same way it does affective metaphoric projection (Efland, 2004). A more fully-formed understanding of this relationship could inform further refinement of practical classroom applications, adapting the resultant curricular principles for other age groups.

The arts seem particularly well-placed to address the increasing cultural need for intersubjectivity and place-taking in the face of an educational climate predicated on individual achievement on high-stakes tests (Jeffers, 2009a). Likewise, kindergarten-aged learners are in a particular transitional space socio-emotionally and artistically, where the ability of the arts to engender empathetic feeling and thinking could be instructive. If it is indeed possible for a child to cultivate her/his experience of otherness through the creation and appreciation of art, this could encourage even greater appreciation of both the arts and of other people in that child’s life.
Chapter 2 - A Model for Empathy in Early Childhood

Overview of the Model

The model of empathy in early childhood I have developed to frame this exploration draws largely on developmental psychologist Martin Hoffman’s developmental model of empathy, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the relationship of the child to the other, and neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese’s concept of an interpersonal “shared manifold” (2003a, p. 525) between subjects which is cultivated by kinesthetic mirror neurons.

Within the field of art education, Carol Jeffers (2009a) has juxtaposed Merleau-Ponty and Gallese within the historical context of aesthetic empathy when developing her university-level art instruction. Jeffers made use of the touchpoints between the thinkers’ conceptions of intersubjectivity (primarily the emphasis on an embodied response to the perception of the other) to frame her class aims, then leveraged the variety of disparate methodological approaches (e.g. Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical phenomenological approach, Gallese’s epistemic neuroscientific approach) to generate ideas for projects and pedagogical strategies. Gallese (2003b) himself invoked Merleau-Ponty when presenting his “shared manifold hypothesis.” Gallese used Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the role gesture and posture play in apprehending the other’s intention to extend his own epistemically-derived model of motor-mimickry to a hypothetical model where kinesthetic mirror neurons may facilitate the sharing of affect.

Broadly speaking, the defining characteristics of this model are the dual affective and cognitive components of the experience of empathy (Hoffman, 2000), and the bidirectional,
dialogic nature of the experience of empathy, incorporating both “introjection” and “projection” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 134).

Summary of Empathy’s Cognitive and Affective Components

Hoffman (1979b) defines three components of empathy: affective arousal, cognitive-transformational, and motivational. The first two components are concerned with the experience of empathy, while the third deals with empathy’s capacity to induce prosocial action, and is outside the focus of this study. Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow (1990) identify the affective and cognitive components as core elements of empathy that persist across various definitions and conceptions of the term. The cognitive component “involves apprehending or understanding the other person’s experience,” while the affective component involves “a strict or near match of another’s emotions” (p. 108).

While these two components are distinct, it is their interaction that produces the experience of empathy (Barnett, 1990; Eisenberg & Strayer (1990); Feshbach, 1975, 1983; Gruen & Mendelsohn, 1986; Hoffman, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990), and to examine one to the exclusion of the other would fail to produce a useful model. “[E]mpathy cannot be confined to role taking, or congruent or sympathetic emotions. All these psychological components can be present in an empathic reaction. There is no reason to leave one factor out, if that particular factor can contribute to the way a person responds to the perceived feelings (need or pain) of others” (Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003, p. 179). An exploration of solely empathy’s affective dimension, in which empathy was “confined to…congruent or sympathetic emotions,” would neglect the role cognition plays in all but the most rudimentary kinds of empathy, limiting the discussion to the immediate and unacknowledged experience of the other’s affect which characterizes the indistinction between
self and other in infancy (Hoffman, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Conversely, a study of only empathy’s cognitive dimension, where it is “confined to role-taking,” would neglect the sharing of affect that is essential to empathy, and which may be its primary distinguishing factor from related concepts like sympathy (Fabes, Eisenberg, & Miller, 1990; Feshbach, 1975; Gruen & Mendelsohn, 1986; Hoffman, 1975, 1979b, 2000; Jeffers, 2009a; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). Consequently, this study, and the model of empathy I am developing for it, incorporates both the affective and cognitive dimensions of empathy rather than focusing on one or the other.

Affective empathy exists from infancy, and remains fairly constant throughout childhood and life (Hoffman, 1979a). This “vicarious affective component…is given increasingly complex meaning as the child progresses” through stages of cognitive development, and the child develops an increasingly sophisticated cognitive awareness of other people (Hoffman, 1979c, p. 962). Infants who lack a strong distinction between self and other, for instance, may be empathetically aroused, experiencing another’s distress, but would be unable to cognitively locate that distress in the other. Conversely, an older child is aware that this arousal is due to a stimulus experienced by someone else, and that they themselves aren’t directly experiencing distress. “Thus, how people experience empathy depends on the level at which they cognize others” (Hoffman, 1979b, p. 5).

Hoffman (2000) took this model, in which a consistent affective empathic experience is parsed and framed by increasingly sophisticated cognitive processes, and outlined a developmental model of empathy drawing on the Piagetian stages of cognitive development (with ages and stages adjusted to reflect contemporary research). Hoffman’s stages include:
(a) **reactive newborn cry**, in which infants reflexively imitate the distress states of other infants;  
(b) **egocentric empathic distress**, in which children respond to another’s distress as though they themselves were in distress;  
(c) **quasi-egocentric empathic distress**, in which children realize the distress is the other’s, not their own, but confuse the other’s inner state with their own;  
(d) **veridical empathic distress**, in which children come closer to feeling what the other is actually feeling because they now realize that the other has inner states independent of their own;  
and  
(e) **empathy for another’s experience beyond the immediate situation**, in which children can frame another’s distress within a larger timeframe (e.g. chronic misfortune), or empathize with remote people or communities.

Hoffman (2000) also articulated that, starting with stage (c) in his model, as cognition becomes more refined, the child begins to experience what he calls *sympathetic* as well as *empathetic* stress. He distinguished between the two, describing empathic distress as “a parallel response – a more or less exact replication of the victim's actual feelings of distress,” while sympathetic distress is “a more reciprocal feeling of concern and a desire to help the victim” (Hoffman, 1979b, p. 9). Sometimes, Hoffman’s use of these terms floats, and all cognitively mature empathetic experiences are characterized as sympathetic (or all are characterized as empathetic), but the above distinction reflects to some degree similar distinctions posited by other theorists navigating the distinction between sympathy and empathy, particularly cognitive empathy. Generally, empathy is characterized as a congruent response to another’s emotional state or condition and the apprehension or understanding of the other’s condition through that response, while sympathy is characterized as feelings of sorrow or concern for others (Eisenberg & Miller, 1990; Fabes et al., 1990; Gruen & Mendelsohn, 1986; Hoffman, 1975, 1979b, 2000; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). While sympathetic concern is contingent on the cognitive
awareness of the other that facilitates more mature forms of empathy (Hoffman, 1975, 1979b, 2000), and may even stem from empathetic experience (Hoffman, 1975, 1979b, 2000; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1990), it is not identical to cognitive empathy, which is invariably induced by a congruous empathetic affect response, which serves to locate and frame that response, and which doesn’t necessarily induce concern or an inclination to help.

The distinction between the affective and cognitive dimensions of empathy not only helps in modeling the processes undergirding the experience of empathy, but also affords a model of how that process may develop over the child’s lifetime, and – crucially, for this project – how that process functions specifically in early childhood. The affective and cognitive components are examined in more depth later in this chapter.

**Summary of the Dialogic Nature of the Model**

In his discussion of dialogue, Martin Buber (1947/1965) criticized “the not very significant term ‘empathy’” as an “exclusion of one’s own concreteness, the extinguishing of the actual situation of life, the absorption in pure aestheticism of the reality in which one participates” (p. 115). Buber was criticizing a conception of empathy which articulated the phenomenon as a kind of one-way projection of the subject into the object, a conception which, to him, denied the independent reality of the other’s felt experience, and ceded the subject’s position as a separate entity with perception and experience independent of the object’s (“exclu[ding] one’s own concreteness”). This articulation of empathy has its antecedents in German aesthetic conceptions of the term, which saw it as a kind of one-way projection of the subject into the object. Robert Vischer (1873/1994), among the first, if not the first, to delineate

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6 “[T]he actual situation of life” for Buber necessitating an acknowledgement of the lived reality of both subjects, without “forfeiting any of the felt reality” (p. 115) of either.
the distinct concept of empathy (as “einfühlung”)\(^7\), described it as “project[ing] my own life into the lifeless form, just as I quite justifiably do with another living person. Only ostensibly do I keep my own identity…I am mysteriously transplanted and magically transformed into this Other” (p. 104). In *Abstraction and Empathy*, Wilhelm Worringer (1908/1963) commented that this type of “aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self-enjoyment” (p. 14), emphasizing the solipsistic nature of such a conception of empathy. Theodor Lipps’s (1909) treatment of empathy, which connected the term more overtly to psychology (Depew, 2005; Jeffers, 2009a), pushed this further, asserting that in “empathy there exists only one ego [Ich] for me; namely this felt or objectified own ego, which is projected into an external object” (Lipps, 1909, p. 231)\(^8\), positing a model of empathy which had no space for the ego or experience of the perceived other.

Merleau-Ponty (1956/2003) took issue with this conception of empathy, writing:

> This perception of the other, which means that I grasp the body as lived, does not consist in transferring onto the body of the other what I otherwise know of my soul. *Einfühlung* is a corporeal operation. The hand of the other that I shake is to be understood on the

\(^7\) While most sources encountered in this study (Depew, 2005; Gallese, 2003b; Ikonomou & Malgrave, 1994; Jeffers, 2010; Nowak, 2011; Prigman, 1995) credit Vischer with coining the term *einfühlung* in 1873, some scholars credit Hermann Lotze with coining it in his *Geschichte der Aesthetik in Deutschland* in 1868 (Depew, 2005) or in *Mikrokosmus* in 1858 (White, 2013). A search of electronic versions of the Lotze texts did not turn up the term. Other scholars (Curtis, 2012; Nowak, 2011) credit Herder (1774) for delineating the concept earlier through his use of the verb form *sich einfühlen* within the context of interpreting texts by “feeling into” the historic situation of the author.

The concept also has earlier antecedents under different names. Hume’s (1739) treatment of *sympathy* is similar to the treatment of empathy in this study: a “contagious” (p. 605) affective state that is modulated by being intellectually “conceiv’d to belong to another person” (p. 319). Similar ideas go as far back as Aristotle’s *pity* or *eleos*, which some thinkers (Boal, 1974; Brecht, 1977; Dwyer, 2005; Kearney, 2007; Nissan Cassinis, & Morelli, 2008; Stocker, 2002), within the context of theatrical performance, have linked to empathy/einfühlung.

I chose to background this exploration with the context of German aesthetic thought on empathy beginning with Vischer and Lipps in part because this is when the term began to focus on the visual arts (Nowak, 2011), rather than theater or textual interpretation, and because the *einfühlung* tradition is frequently, often casually, invoked in art education literature discussing empathy (e.g. Bresler, 2013; Hickman, 2013; Jeffers 2009a, 2010; Lanzoni, 2009; Smith, Gair, McGee, Valdez, Kirk, 2011; Swanger, 1993; White, 2013) and warrants closer scrutiny.

\(^8\) *In der vollen positiven Einfühlung existiert für mich zunächst nur ein einziges Ich; nämlich dies eingefühle oder objektivierte, in ein äußeres Objekt projizierte eigene Ich* (Lipps, 1909, p. 231).
mode of the touching-touched hand. I come to sense someone at the end of this hand: to perceive the other is to perceive not only that I shake hands, but that he shakes my hand. *Einfühlung*, a quasi-corporal operation, is at first the positing of an esthesiological [e.g. sensing] subject. I do not project on the body of the other an “I think,” but I apperceive the body as perceiving before apperceiving it as thinking (Merleau-Ponty, 1956/2003, p. 76).

Merleau-Ponty’s conception of empathy was not a simple one-way mental (“I think”) projection onto the body of the other, but a “corporeal operation” in which that projection was preceded by an internalization-by-perception of the other’s bodily state.

While he was not specifically responding to the one-way conception of empathy in his discussion of the child’s relation to the other, Merleau-Ponty (1964) did explicitly call out and contradict the assertion of classical psychology⁹ that “the psyche, or the psychic, is what is given to only one person...I cannot reach other lives, other thought processes, since by hypothesis they are open only to inspection by a single individual: the one who owns them… I seize the other’s psyche only indirectly, mediated by its bodily appearances.” (p. 114). His interest in overturning the notion of the bounded subject who only experiences others through a sort of analogical projection of self-experience makes his model useful in extending the conception of empathy (particularly as it relates to art and aesthetics) beyond the level of “objectified self-enjoyment”

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⁹ Merleau-Ponty frequently criticized “classical psychology” as a broad entity. Though he didn’t identify particular thinkers in his criticism of “classical psychology,” Merleau-Ponty used that epithet to broadly identify ideas from pre-gestalt psychology such as rigid Cartesian distinctions between subject and object or mind and body (Barclay, 2000; Nilsen, 2008; Westling, 2012; Rochat & Zahavi, 2011), or faculty theories of mind that enumerate various distinct “functions of cognition” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 99) such as perception, intelligence, or imagination. Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) discussion of the child’s relation to the other asserted that “classical psychology” uncritically held a presupposition that there exists a “psyche...which is accessible only to myself and cannot be seen from outside” (p. 166), and that this prejudice hampered the ability of “classical psychology” to address self-other relations.
(Worringer, 1908/1963, p.14). Merleau-Ponty (1964) advocated renouncing the prejudices of classical psychology, asserting that

[w]e must abandon the fundamental prejudice according to which the psyche is that which is accessible only to myself and cannot be seen from outside. My “psyche” is not a series of “states of consciousness” that are rigorously closed in on themselves and inaccessible to anyone but me. My consciousness is turned primarily toward the world, turned toward things; it is above all a relation to the world. The other’s consciousness as well is chiefly a certain way of comporting himself toward the world. (p. 117)

Merleau-Ponty (1964) described the classical psychological conception as a system of four terms: my “psyche,” the “introceptive image” of my own body generated by cenesthesia\(^\text{10}\), the “visual body” of the other, and the hypothetical “psyche” of the other (p. 115). Per Merleau-Ponty (1964), perception of the other within classical psychology consequently hinges on the self analogizing between her/his own body-image and the image of the other’s body to deduce the other’s inaccessible “psyche.” This conception becomes problematic when accounting for the observed experience the infant has of the other, since the infant typically has “minimal visual experience of his body” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2010, p. 247)\(^\text{11}\) to analogize to the other.

Merleau-Ponty (1964, 2001/2010) proposed replacing the concept of the interior and inaccessible psyche with outwardly visible behavior and replacing the “utterly private sensations” (1964, p. 117) of cenesthesia with a postural schema that incorporates the outward relation of the body’s position and gesture to its environment. to produce a system where the self and other are two

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\(^{10}\) Merleau-Ponty (1964) defines cenesthesia as the mass of sensations that allow the subject to understand the present state of her/his own body, and its various parts, organs, and functions. “Thus my body for me, and your body for you, could be reached, and be knowable, by means of a cenesthetic sense” (p. 114) within the classical psychological conception of self as articulated by Merleau-Ponty.

\(^{11}\) This text, *Child Psychology and Pedagogy: The Sorbonne Lectures*, was first collected in 2001, and translated into English in 2010. It collects Merleau-Ponty’s lectures from 1949-1952.
embodied consciousnesses (or “conducts” (1964, p. 118)), visible to each other, “a system in two
terms: my behavior and the other’s behavior that constitute a totality” (2001/2010, p. 247).

Early aesthetic models of empathy (Vischer, 1873/1994, Worringer, 1908/1963)
emphasized a one-way, monologic conception of empathy. Merleau-Ponty (1964, 2001/2010),
however, described the relation to the other as a two-way phenomenon, appropriating the
psychoanalytic terms projection, in which “we think the other, due to our personal experiences,”
and introjection, in which “we project in us what comes from outside” (2001/2010, p. 259). In
the schema I outline in this chapter, I map this model of introjection and projection onto
Hoffman’s two-part model of empathy, where the sensory experience of the object is affectively
transmitted into the subject and then projected cognitively by the subject back onto the object. I
will now explore in more detail these affective and cognitive dimensions of the experience of
empathy.

The Affective Dimension of Empathy

When Maxine Greene (1995) described the ability of a work of art to elicit empathy, she
said that, “there are images and figures that speak directly to our indignation, to some dimension
of ourselves where we connect with others. They open our eyes, they stir our flesh, they may
even move us to try to repair our world” (p. 143). This “stirring of the flesh” – the immediate,
pre-cognitive, bodily response to our perception of the other – is a fundamental component of the
experience of empathy.

In describing their model of empathy, Vreeke and Van der Mark (2003) asserted the
primacy of the affective experience of empathy. “[T]he first and most basic forms of
empathy cannot be based on cognitions. Rather, they are built on non-cognitive ways of
responding, which occur in a relational context. Indeed, young children react to signs of pain and
the like well before they have a cognitive understanding of these states” (p. 181). These affective reactions form the foundation for empathetic experience.

Approaching the concept from a neuroscientific perspective, Vittorio Gallese (2003a) described empathy as the capacity to establish “an affective meaningful interpersonal link,” which enables understanding of not just emotional states, but of physical experiences in the other “such as pain, touch, or tickling” (p. 519). These vicarious experiences are “automatically understood by the observer without the necessity of any intervening complex cognitive mediation” (Gallese, 2003a, p. 519). This is due to the functioning of kinesthetic mirror neurons, which instantaneously fire upon observing the action of the other, simulating it internally\(^\text{12}\), meaning that, “the same neural structures that are active during the experience of sensations and emotions are also active when the same sensations and emotions are to be detected in others” (p. 524). The process, as described by Gallese, is pre-cognitive, an “implicit, automatic, and unconscious process of embodied simulation [, that] enables the observer to use his/her own resources to penetrate the world of the other without the need of explicitly theorizing about it” (Gallese, 2003b, p. 174). A number of researchers have connected mirror neurons’ motor

\(^{12}\) Synthesizing MRI imaging and other experimental data, Carr, Iacoboni, Dubeau, Mazziotta, and Lenzi (2003), mapped, on an especially granular level, how this process may occur in the brain: “(i) The superior temporal cortex codes an early visual description of the action and sends this information to posterior parietal mirror neurons (this privileged flow of information from superior temporal to posterior parietal is supported by the robust anatomical connections between superior temporal and posterior parietal cortex). (ii) The posterior parietal cortex codes the precise kinesthetic aspect of the movement and sends this information to inferior frontal mirror neurons … (iii) The inferior frontal cortex codes the goal of the action (both neurophysiological and imaging data support this role for inferior frontal mirror neurons). (iv) Efferent copies of motor plans are sent from parietal and frontal mirror areas back to the superior temporal cortex, such that a matching mechanism between the visual description of the observed action and the predicted sensory consequences of the planned imitative action can occur. (v) Once the visual description of the observed action and the predicted sensory consequences of the planned imitative action are matched, imitation can be initiated” (p. 5497).

Also, Carr et al.’s (2003) imaging studies noted the amygdala, “a critical structure in emotional behaviors and in the recognition of facial emotional expressions of others” (p. 5501) is stimulated during this process, especially so when the subject is visibly imitating the object’s expression, indicating a connection between the motor representation part of the brain and the limbic emotional processing areas (areas which are physically connected by a structure called the insula, which may relay information between the two). This may indicate how affective empathy can elicit an emotional as well as kinesthetic response.
simulation with Lipps’s inner imitation in empathy (Anders, Heinzle, Weiskopf, Ethofer, & Haynes, 2011; Carr, et al., 2003; Jeffers, 2009a; Molnar-Szakacs, 2011; Preston & de Waal, 2002), and Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of perception, gesture, and the postural schema (Gallese, 2003b; Jeffers, 2009a; Preston & de Waal, 2002). The idea of the other’s conduct being apprehended as a motor representation or simulation, a cluster of “motor plans” (Carr et al., 2003, p. 5497), stimulated by the some of the same motor neurons that activate when I exhibit a conduct with my own body echoes Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) discussion of postural schemata, where rather than analogizing between a visual self-image and the image of the other, both the other and myself are apprehended as “conducts” (p. 118) which can be directly related. In both cases, the conduct is apprehended through perception, but is not itself a visual image, affording a cross-modal mapping that allows, for example, an infant to map the observed state of the other onto their own, despite not having a visual self-image (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Thus, visual perception is able to elicit kinesthetic affect.

Shamay-Tsoory, Aharon-Peretz, and Perry (2009) conducted a study that highlighted the connection mirror neurons may have specifically to affective empathy. Using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, the researchers evaluated patients with lesions in the inferior frontal gyrus

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13 Corresponding with Carr et al.’s (2003) “motor plans” (p. 5497), Merleau-Ponty (1964) describes the schema aroused by perception as “a preparation of a motor activity” (p. 146).

14 This “cross-modal mapping” (Gallese, 2003a, p. 518), the ability for visual stimuli to elicit tactile or kinesthetic sensations without having to analogize to a prior visual model/experience was highlighted by Gallese in his discussion of an experiment wherein infants were able to identify by sight pacifiers they had previously mouthed while blindfolded. Vischer (1873/1984, p. 94), in his own way, articulated the connection between these two modalities in his discussion of empathy when he observed that “[t]heir functions are of a kindred nature: touching is a ‘cruder scanning at close range’; seeing is a ‘more subtle touching at a distance’” (p. 94).

Merleau-Ponty (1964) described this synesthetic ability as a component of the child’s affective experience of the other, as the child does not distinguish readily between what s/he is experiencing and what s/he is seeing: “What is true of his own body, for the child is also true of the other’s body. The child himself feels that he is in the other’s body, just as he feels himself to be in his visual image” (p. 134). Merleau-Ponty (1948/1964) also connected artistic practice to this multi-modality in his essay on Cezanne, “Cezanne’s Doubts,” noting that “Cezanne does not try to use color to suggest the tactile sensations which would give shape and depth. These distinctions between touch and sight are unknown in primordial perception…The lived object is not rediscovered or constructed on the basis of the contributions of the senses; rather, it presents itself to us from the start as the center from which these contributions radiate. We see the depth, the smoothness, the softness, the hardness of objects” (p. 15).
(IFG), which contains the mirror neuron system, and other patients with lesions in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC), which handles theory of mind and perspective-taking (e.g. components of cognitive empathy). Their findings supported their hypothesis, in that the patients with IFG damage exhibited “extremely impaired” affective empathy, while patients with vmPFC damage exhibited a “consistent and selective deficit in cognitive empathy” (p. 623).

Hoffman (1978b) also characterized the affective dimension of empathy as “largely involuntary,” and asserted that “[t]he reason why it is hard to avoid empathizing is that very simple, almost primitive psychological mechanisms usually underlie it” (Hoffman, 1978b, p. 2). Empathy is observable in young children and even in infants, long before they have a viable role-taking capability (Hoffman, 1979a). Hoffman (1975) noted a study in which two-day-old infants responded with their own crying to the sounds of another infant’s cry, yet did not respond as strongly to other “noxious” stimuli such as “loud nonhuman sounds including computer-simulated infant cries” (p. 614). Vreeke and Van de Mark (2003) likewise found in their studies that newborns react more strongly to the cries of peers than to other sources of distress, such as the taped sound of their own cries, a computer simulation of a cry, or a recording of a chimp crying. Merleau-Ponty (1964) also mentioned the phenomenon of “a contagion of cries” (p. 124) in a nursery as evidence of an automatic, pre-cognitive experience of the other. Hoffman (1975) noted that, “despite its egoistic components,” this kind of empathic distress “shows that we may involuntarily and forcefully experience emotional states pertinent to another person’s situation rather than to our own” (p. 614).

Transitivism – “a confusion at the core of a situation that is common to us both” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 120)

Due to this involuntary affective mechanism, for most of the first year of life, distress cues from others elicit a global empathic distress response in the infant (Hoffman, 1975).
“Consequently, he must often be unclear as to who is experiencing any distress that he witnesses, and he may at times be expected to behave as though what happened to the other person was happening to him” (p. 614). (This distress is “global,” in Hoffman’s terms, because it is not explicitly bound to a specific person). Merleau-Ponty (1964) called this “indistinction between me and the other” (p. 120) transitivism, and placed it at the foundation of all social awareness. He described this state as one of “pre-communication, wherein the other’s intentions somehow play across my body while my intentions play across his” (p.119). Without any conscious communication, and prior to any clear cognitive comprehension on the part of the subject, the other’s conduct presents her/his “motor intentions” (p. 118) which are apprehended by the subject (and likewise, the subject is the object of the same apprehension on the part of the other). Consequently, Merleau-Ponty (1964) argued, the common notion of egocentrism in early childhood is actually characterized by a lack of ego, and an excessive permeability with the other, a kind of de-centered egocentrism:

[E]gocentrism is not at all the attitude of a me that expressly grasps itself (as the term ‘egocentrism’ might lead us to believe). Rather, it is the attitude of a me which is unaware of itself and lives as easily in others as it does in itself – but which, being unaware of others in their own separateness as well, in truth is no more conscious of them than of itself” (p. 119).

This conception of egocentrism doesn’t see the infant as an entity turned in on itself and alien to the experience of others, an entity which only comes to understand others as its cognitive capacity develops, allowing her/him to intellectually comprehend others’ perspectives and motivations. Rather, this conception of egocentrism posits the child as an entity that is fundamentally turned toward and enveloped in the experience of the other, and whose cognitive
development (as discussed in the next section of this chapter) is actually instrumental in articulating the *separation* between self and other. Gallese (2003a) likewise mentioned how the infant, before it becomes a conscious subject, creates “a primitive ‘self-other space’, a paradoxical form of intersubjectivity without subjects. The infant shares this ‘we-centric’ space with the other individuals inhabiting his world” (p. 518).

During the first year of life, when transitivism is most prevalent, Hoffman (2000) noted that infants transition from a passive response elicited by affective arousal – the “newborn reactive cry” period – to more proactive attempts at self-soothing behavior designed to reduce their own stress. However, while the child responds more actively toward the end of their first year, the responses of the child are identical for both empathic and personal distress, indicating there is still a measure of confusion between the experience of the self and the other (Hoffman, 2000). Hoffman characterized this period as one of “egocentric empathic distress” (p. 6).

**Mechanisms of Affective Empathy**

While transitivism is a phenomenon that functions in an immediate, involuntary way, it is not necessarily an elementary, irreducible phenomenon. Hoffman (1979b) identified a number of more specific modes of affective arousal, and an awareness of these mechanisms is useful for the coming chapters examining how artmaking and art instruction may encourage or induce experiences of empathy in students.

Hoffman (1979b) cited *newborn reactive cry* as the earliest and most rudimentary mechanism of affect arousal. It is the cry of an infant in response to the contagious cry of another, and is “vigorous, intense, and hard to distinguish from the spontaneous cry of an infant when he is in actual pain” (p. 3).
Hoffman (1979b) also noted *conditioning* as a mode of affect arousal, which “results when one observes distress cues from another person at the same time that one is having a direct experience of distress” (p. 3). Such conditioning may occur, for instance, when a parent’s affective state is translated into their physical handling of the infant.

*Mimicry* is another mode of affect arousal wherein the observer automatically imitates the affective state of the other, creating “kinesthetic cues within the observer that contribute (through afferent feedback) to the observer’s understanding and feeling the same emotion.” (Hoffman, 1979b, p. 4). This mimicry can also occur as an internal motor simulation of the other (Gallese, 2003a, Merleau-Ponty 1964). Vreeke and Van der Mark (2003) discussed an experiment in which they observed a 22-month-old reach the conclusion “Mummy hurt” (p. 192) after physically imitating a parent who was simulating an injury.

**Kinesthetic Affect**

The mechanism of motor mimicry is an indication of the role kinesthetic neurons (Gallese 2003a) and bodily awareness (Merleau-Ponty 1964) play in the affective experience of empathy. Merleau-Ponty (1964) emphasized that the other was experienced as a *conduct*, rather than a *psyche*, invoking Henri Wallon’s description of one’s experience of the other as “a ‘postural impregnation’ of my own body by the conducts I witness” (p. 118).

There is an “inward formulation of gestures,” in which observing another’s affect “arouse[s] in me the preparation of a motor activity related to it” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 146). Hoffman (1979a) likewise asserted that “[e]mpathic affect provides inner, kinesthetic cues that inform the observer about the affective experience of the model” (p. 5). Gallese (2003a) characterized these cues as the firing of kinesthetic mirror neurons, wherein observing a physical act or posture activates the same neurons as performing that act or posture, and “[a]ction
observation automatically triggers [interior] action simulation” (p. 523). Per Gallese (2003a), this embodied simulation forms the basis for all levels of interpersonal interaction, and “enables the constitution of a shared and common background of implicit certitudes about ourselves and, simultaneously, about others” (p. 521). The projection of these “certitudes” onto the other is a function of the cognitive component of empathy, which I examine in the following section.

In summary, empathy’s affective dimension is fundamental to the experience of empathy, existing from the child’s very earliest developmental stages in the form of transitivism (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Affective empathy is an automatic, immediate process by which the state of the other is apprehended by perception as a motor conduct/state (Carr et al., 2003; Gallese, 2003a; Merleau-Ponty, 1964) and inwardly simulated kinesthetically (Carr et al., 2003; Gallese, 2003a; Lipps, 1903; Vischer, 1973/1994), eliciting a congruent affective state in the perceiving subject (Fabes et al., 1990; Hoffman, 2000; Vreeke, 2003). This component of the experience of empathy functions in concert with a cognitive component (Feshbach, 1975; Hoffman, 2000; Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2009; Strayer & Roberts, 1989; Vreeke, 2003; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1990), which I will now examine.

The Cognitive Dimension of Empathy

The above-described affective dimension of empathy, in its pure, transitivist state fails to provide the full picture of the experience of empathy, particularly beyond infancy. As the child ages and develops a more complex cognition of the other, this cognition parses and directs her/his affective empathetic experience, allowing for a more sophisticated awareness of the other.

A major change may therefore be expected when the child begins to discriminate between the stimuli from his own body and those from without, acquiring a sense of the
other as separate from himself. When confronted with someone in pain, he now knows that it is the other and not he who is actually in distress (Hoffman, 1975, p. 614).

In the second year of life, the beginnings of representational thought and the use of symbols give children the ability to begin to imagine and infer others’ perspectives and feelings (Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). They better understand that the vicarious distress they experience is in the other, and not the self, as result of developing a conception of “person permanence” (Hoffman, 1975, p. 611), an awareness of the other’s existence as a separate physical entity, that precedes broader object permanence. They cease exhibiting “egocentric empathic distress” and begin to demonstrate “quasi-egocentric empathic distress” (Hoffman, 2000, p. 70). At this age, the child turns her/his self-soothing reactions outward, where previously they had been uniformly applied to the self during both vicarious and directly-experienced stress. For instance, Hoffman (1975) described an observation of an infant who had developed the habit of sucking his thumb and tugging on his own ear when distressed, but who, after 12 months, when his father would make a sad expression, would suck his own thumb and pull on his father’s ear. The child at this stage can locate the distress in the other, but cannot clearly distinguish between the self and the other’s inner states, administering to the other what the self finds comforting (Hoffman, 1979b).

By age three, the child becomes aware that other people’s feelings are independent of the child’s, and based on their own reaction to events (Hoffman, 1979b). Hoffman (2000) characterized this period as one of “veridical empathic distress” (p. 72), when children are cognitively able to refine their empathetic responses based on feedback from the other and the environment. Hoffman (1975) cited an instance of a 15-month-old child who, failing to comfort a
crying friend with his own teddy bear, went into another room and fetched the friend’s blanket (which had been out of his perceptual field) to comfort the friend.

“Veridical empathy is an important stage because, unlike the preceding stages which are short-lived and disappear as they give way to subsequent stages, this stage has all the basic elements of mature empathy and continues to grow and develop throughout life” (Hoffman, 2000, p. 72). Children can begin to engage in elementary role-taking at this stage, and the combination of role-playing’s imaginative social hypothesizing with the above-described epistemic refinement of social response provides the cognitive toolset with which children will scaffold their empathy throughout life. The transition to this stage comes at a critical point, when transitivism recedes dramatically and the child’s relation to self and other is radically changed.

**The Crisis at Three: The Mirror Stage**

The increased awareness of self and other that allows for the development of veridical empathy stems from the child’s development of a visual image of her/himself and her/his body, typically indicated by the child’s recognition of her/his mirror image (Merleau-Ponty, 1964).

The child’s awareness of others’ specular images in the mirror precedes the child’s awareness of her/his own specular image. “[H]e distinguishes much more quickly between the other’s specular image and the reality of the other’s body than he does in the case of his own body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 127). Upon seeing two images of, for instance, her/his father, the child can readily recognize that one image is seen in the world and the other in the mirror. “Of his own body, on the other hand, the mirror image is his only complete visual evidence” (p. 129). And due to transitivism, the child’s sensing body and observed specular body are not distinct. “It is more a matter of a second body in the mirror, a kind of identity at a distance, a ubiquity of the body” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2010, p. 255). The child eventually (possibly using
the specular image of the parent/other as a scaffold) becomes cognitively aware that she/he has an exterior aspect, and is visible to others as her/his image is in the mirror. “The other has a view of me. The relation with the other has the value of a real structure; it is a system of relations at the interior of my experience” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2010, p. 255). The child cognitively displaces the mirror image from the virtual, visual space it occupies, onto the child’s own physical, sensate self (Merleau-Ponty, 1964).

Through the acquisition of the specular image the child notices that he is visible, for himself and for others. The passage from the introceptive me to the visual me, from the introceptive me to the “specular I” (as Lacan still says), is the passage from one form or state of personality to another (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 136). This displacement, this seeing oneself from a perspective outside the self, is critical in the formation of what psychoanalysis calls the ego and superego. “The ego, the I, cannot truly emerge at the age of three years without doubling itself with an ego in the eyes of the other” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 153). The awareness that there is an external me, “a constructed me, that is visible at a distance, an imaginary me” foments the super-ego (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 137), manifested both as the judgmental gaze of the other and the ego-ideal image of the self cultivated to appease that gaze.

This sharp distinction between the self and other shatters the permeable transitivity of earlier years and radically reshapes the child’s relation to others. This “crisis” understandably precipitates a number of characteristics around age three, including an increased desire to do things independently or “alone,” an increased self-consciousness, and an annoyance at being watched (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2010, p. 259).
But despite the radical change in relation to the other precipitated by this cognitive realization, the transitivism of affective empathy is not completely dissolved. “The crisis at three years pushes syncretism farther away rather than suppressing it altogether” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 154). Affective empathy, and to some degree transitivism, remains throughout life (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). In his discussion of the “shared manifold” fostered by kinesthetic mirror neurons, Gallese (2003a) noted that, “Since the very beginning of our life we…inhabit a shared multidimensional interpersonal space, which, I posit, also constitutes a substantial part of our social semantic space during adulthood” (p. 519)\(^{15}\). This “indistinction between me and the other,” wrote Merleau-Ponty (1964), reappears “in certain situations that for the adult are limiting situations but are quite important in his life” (p. 154). An example of such a limiting, but important, situation, per Merleau-Ponty, is love, which “is inevitably to enter into an undivided situation with another” (p. 155), a situation where comforting, identity-confirming categories such as “This is mine, this is yours” (p. 155) are suspended, and where both participants’ autonomy and certainty as subjects are rendered more ambiguous. While it is no longer the totality of the child’s experience of the other, transitivism remains an important engine of empathy into later childhood and adulthood.

**Cognitive Empathy After Age Three**

\(^{15}\) In articulating this “multidimensional interpersonal space,” (p. 519), Gallese (2003a) invoked developmental psychologist Andrew Meltzoff’s concept of “a ‘supramodal act space’, unconstrained by any particular mode of interaction, visual or motor” (p. 518), and also emphasized that this “space” was “functionally characterized by automatic, unconscious embodied simulation routines” (p. 517). The infant, inhabiting this social/psychological space, is consequently able to physically imitate emotional expressions perceived in others, despite not having visual access to its own face, or is able to engage in imitative reactive crying (Hoffman, 2000), without a conscious awareness of the situation inducing the distress. Like Merleau-Ponty, Gallese argued that this “space,” while present and powerful in infancy, remains to an extent throughout later childhood and adulthood.
After age three, children’s increasingly concrete awareness of the space between self and other, and their imaginative\(^{16}\) and epistemic cognitive tools for navigating that space, contribute to a continued refinement of veridical empathy. In the preschool years, children can express more minutely articulated emotions such as missing one’s parents, rather than simply happiness, anger, and sadness. They also begin to realize that the same event can produce different feelings in different people. They are aware of the desires of other people, and can use this awareness to predict others’ reactions to a situation (Hoffman, 2000, p. 73).

By age five or six, a few years’ refinement of her/his veridical empathy, the child has developed a more complete picture of the difference between self and other, and the emotional and experiential independence of the other. Hoffmann (1973) discussed a study by Burns and Cavey (1957) in which three-to-six-year-old children were shown pictures where the expression of a character was incongruent with the situation (e.g. a boy frowning at his birthday party). Five- and six-year olds were able to correctly identify the emotion of the figure, while the three- and four-year-olds typically did not perceive the incongruity and judged the pictures in terms of how they themselves would feel in the situation. These results indicate that, by kindergarten age, children are more likely to recognize the difference in emotional states between self and other than they were at the toddler stage.

This more refined interpretation of emotional stimuli is facilitated by an increase in the cognitive capacity for place-taking at this age, a development illustrated in a study by Selman (1971) where “subjects were given a simple concept-sorting task and asked to predict what choices would be made on a similar task by another child from whom one of the test items had

\(^{16}\) Rather than the use of the term as a synonym for “creative” or “inventive,” I employ “imaginative” (and related terms like “imagination” and “imagine”) in a more strictly denotative way relating specifically to the creation of mental imagery. A child “imaginatively” engages in place-taking, for instance, in Piaget’s three mountains exercise hen s/he consciously mentally constructs for her/himself an image of what the person on the other side of the table sees when looking at the three mountains.
been hidden. Nearly all six-year-old subjects could perform the task, while younger subjects did poorly” (Hoffman, 1973, p. 18). This increased cognitive complexity also affords the six-year-old an elementary metacognitive awareness of her/his empathetic response. Hoffman (2000) discussed Strayer’s 1993 study in which subjects, after watching filmed vignettes of children in distressing situations (e.g. child unjustly punished by parent; disabled child learning to climb stairs with a cane; child forcibly separated from his family), were asked if they felt anything and why they felt that way. Most seven-year-olds and some five-year-olds said that they felt sad because of the feelings or perspective of the child in the film, while most of the five-year-olds attributed their own feelings to the events depicted, rather than the emotions of the protagonist. Hoffman (2000) posited that “[t]hese findings suggest that before 6 or 7 years, children may respond with veridical empathic distress – they feel what is appropriate to the other’s situation – but they do not realize that their distressed feeling was caused by the other’s situation, that they were empathizing” (p. 74).

By late childhood and early adolescence, increased capacity for abstract thought leads to an “emerging conception of self and other as continuous persons with separate histories and identities,” and a consequent awareness that “others have feelings beyond the immediate situation” (Hoffman, 1979b, p. 8). Children’s affective experience of empathic distress may be heightened or tempered by its placement within a larger social and temporal context. An incidence of a chronic distress may elicit greater empathy with the sufferer’s situation, or an awareness that another’s happiness is the result of their benefitting from an unfair or inequitable situation may limit one’s empathizing with their joy. Children can eventually be empathically aroused by the affective situations of entire groups or classes of abstractly-conceived others (e.g. geographically distant populations of people with whom they have never interacted), which may
provide the foundation for the adolescent’s developing political consciousness (Hoffman, 1979b; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

This level of empathy has antecedents at younger ages. Research indicates that the child typically views their gender identity as stable and consistent by ages five and six, and ethnic identity as stable by ages six and seven (Ruble & Martin, 1998), which suggests that between ages five and eight the child is forming the conception of persons as entities which are consistent over time and which have a history, identity, and life beyond the present situation (Hoffman, 2000). At this younger age, however, the child is less likely to factor this broader life condition into their empathetic response, and more likely to center their attention on the more salient personal and situational cues of the other’s immediate situation (Hoffman, 2000). Gnepp and Gould (1985) conducted a study wherein children from kindergarten to college age were provided with a scenario that would elicit an emotion, as well as a contextual narrative that might change that emotion (e.g. it is the student’s turn to feed the class gerbil, however the child has been bitten by the gerbil in the past). The kindergarten students based their estimations largely on the immediate situation, while older students increasingly framed their emotional inferences in a broader context. Including an explicit emotional prompt in the question (“Why did Pat feel scared?” rather than “How did Pat feel?”) significantly increased the kindergartener’s inclusion of contextual information, and indicated that this cognitive empathetic strategy can be scaffolded toward during early childhood.

**Mechanisms of Cognitive Empathy**

In addition to the role of cognition’s general development over time, and the role of this development in the increasing sophistication of cognitive empathy, there are also some specific modes or mechanisms of cognitive empathy mentioned in the literature.
Hoffman (1979b) described *symbolic association* (or *mediated association*) as instances where the stimulus for affective response is neither physical nor expressive, but a symbolic indication of another’s feelings. “For example, one can respond empathically to someone by reading a letter from him, or hearing someone else describe what has happened to him” (p. 5). While the parsing of the stimulus is an undeniably cognitive and interpretive process, it induces an affective empathic response in the subject. This, consequently, is an indication of how cognition can *induce* an affective, empathic response, how something typically immediate can be mediated. Gallese (2003a) located this function in the imagination’s ability to animate kinesthetic mirror neurons in the same way as actual visual stimuli. He cited a study in which a motor action was presented in full to one population, and was presented, with its “final critical part” (p. 522) hidden, to another population. In the latter case, in the absence of an actual visual stimulus, the implication and subsequent *imagining* of the unseen action still activated more than half of the same motor neurons. Hoffman (2000) also noted the imagination’s ability to elicit empathetic response:

(a) Cognitive development enables humans to form images, represent people and events, and imagine themselves in another’s place; and (b) because represented people and events can evoke affect (Fiske, 1982; Hoffman, 1985), victims need not be present for empathy to be aroused in observers. Empathy can thus be aroused when observers imagine victims: when they read about other’s misfortunes, when they discuss or argue about economic or political issues, or even when they make Kohlbergian judgments about hypothetical moral dilemmas. (Hoffman, 2000, p. 91)

The creation of mental imagery, as a function of cognition, has the ability to induce empathy, and is in fact critical in some of the more sophisticated forms of empathy described above, such
as empathy with large or remote populations. Just as a perceived image can induce the affect response that forms the core of this study’s conception of empathy, a mental image can do likewise.

The imagination allows for another cognitive mode of empathizing identified by Hoffman (1979b), role-taking. Role-taking involves a deliberate cognitive act of imagining oneself in another’s place. “More specifically, the research suggests that empathic affect is especially likely to be generated when we try to imagine how we would feel if the stimuli impinging on the other person were impinging on us; rather than, for example, trying to imagine directly how the other person feels” (Hoffman, 1979b, p. 5). By imaginatively putting oneself in the other’s place, one not only considers intellectually the context and motivation of their actions, but also may induce through the creation of mental imagery (or in the case of physical role-play, through motor mimicry) affective responses congruent with the object of empathy’s affective state.

**Cognition’s Regulatory Role**

In addition to structuring and extending empathetic experience, Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow (1990) discussed cognition’s role in regulating affective empathy in situations where “young children of depressed caregivers may experience too much empathy and too many feelings of responsibility” (p.119). Children in such situations may vicariously experience symptoms of depression such as helplessness repeatedly in early life “as a consequence of empathic overinvolvement” (p. 121), which could ultimately hamper social interactions, conflict resolution, and the ability to develop more complex empathetic cognition later in life. If the child is “somehow able to ‘regulate’ those feelings, [s/he] might succeed in responding prosocially” (Vreeke & Van der Mark, 2003, p. 188). If the child is overwhelmed by a strong shared affect
and succumbs to it (essentially engaging in a more mature form of “newborn reactive cry”) or turns away to stem it, her/his affective empathy with the other could actually hinder her/his relation to the other or harm her/his own emotional development. However, if the child is able to identify the other’s condition as distinct from her/his own, and locate that trauma within the other’s experience, if s/he is able to modulate her/his affective empathy with cognitive self-other understanding, then the empathetic experience will have provided a more veridical understanding of her/his own and the other’s condition.

Similarly, jealousy, an emotional state that can hamper socialization, “is essentially confusion between self and other” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2010, p. 256) and has its roots in that same transitivism that produces affective empathetic experience. The mimicry of the other that allows us to internalize the other’s emotional and affective states also allows us to internalize their desires, and this now-shared desire manifests as jealousy. Overcoming this adverse outcome of identification with the other requires a conscious, cognitive “de-centering” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 110), a movement of the child mentally out of their own situation and into the larger social situation. Merleau-Ponty (1964) cited the example of a child jealous of a newborn sibling, who must de-center himself from the situation of youngest child he has occupied and “relativize the notions of the youngest and the eldest,” (p. 111) reframing his social position in relation to his older and younger siblings rather than only to himself.

Acknowledging this regulatory role of cognition will be useful in the following chapters discussing art, education, and the encouragement of empathy. An awareness of the potentially adverse outcomes of affective identification with the other, and the ways cognitive framing of that affective arousal can mitigate those outcomes, may help shape the way art instructors engage with the affective and cognitive dimensions of empathy in their students. Both the affective and
cognitive dimensions of empathy detailed above inform the schema of empathy I am developing in my exploration.

**A Schema of the Experience of Empathy in Early Childhood**

The model of empathetic experience I propose acknowledges Hoffman’s articulation of the affective and cognitive dimensions of empathy, as well as Merleau-Ponty’s conception of transitivism and the two-way *introjection* and *projection* that characterize the relation to the other, and the way these concepts are illuminated by neuroscientific and psychological studies discussed above. Figure 1, below, is a visual representation of this schema to which I will refer as I describe it.

![Diagram of this study’s schema of empathy](image)

**Figure 1 – Diagram of this study’s schema of empathy**

An experience of empathy in early childhood begins with an affective experience (labeled *a*, in the above figure) on the part of the other. The affective experience manifests as a behavior which is communicated to the self as a visual stimulus (*b*). This visual stimulus activates the kinesthetic mirror neurons producing an embodied simulation (Gallese, 2003a) of the other’s affective experience in the subject’s interior postural schema (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). This results in an immediate, automatic affective/kinesthetic experience of the other’s state in the self (*c*).
This completes the function of the affective component of empathy, undergirded by a latent transitivism that has existed from infancy (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). This affective experience (c) is interpreted by cognition (d), and in kindergarten-aged, post-mirror-stage childhood, this interpretation includes the projection of this experience back onto the other (e). At this age, there is no confusion as to who is experiencing the original affective state and who is experiencing it via empathy.

As cognition (d) is the aspect of the model most tied to the child’s growth and development (Hoffman, 1975), it is important to specify how the cognitive component of empathy functions during ages five and six, the ages this study is focusing on. By this point in life, the child has completed the “crisis” at the mirror stage, and is aware of the difference between self and other (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). She/he is generally aware that the vicarious affect experienced through empathy is located in the object and not her/himself. The child has been in the veridical stage of empathetic awareness since about age three, and has had two years to refine her/his veridical empathy cognitively through social interaction. Consequently, the child is better able to acknowledge an individual emotional reaction that differs from her/his own reaction to a similar situation, and is less likely to muddle her/his own affective reaction with that of the other (Hoffman, 1973, 2000). She/he, however, is not yet consistently able to locate her/his empathic distress in the other and distinguish it from her/his own emotional reaction to a stimulus – something she/he is scaffolding toward and will be more consistent in doing by age six or seven (Strayer, 1993). Children at this age are also working towards more abstract cognition of later childhood that affords empathy beyond the immediately observed situation. They are aware that certain traits such as gender and species are (generally) consistent over time, and are developing the conception that they and others each have a unique identity and history over time (Hoffman,
2000), but are not yet able to bring this more abstract background knowledge to bear on immediate emotional situations (Gnepp & Gould, 1985). With prompting, however, children at this age can make the connections necessary to frame their empathic response within a broader context (Gnepp & Gould, 1985).

Empathy involves on one hand, affectively, the “fundamental correspondence between perception and motility” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 146), and on the other, cognitively, the “imagination [which] is what, above all, makes empathy possible” (Greene, 1995, p. 6). How can empathy’s relationship with perception and imaginative cognition illustrate connections between artmaking, art instruction and empathy? This is what I explore in the following chapters.
Chapter 3 – Art and Empathy

Introduction

The model of empathy developed and employed in this study has two components: the affective experience of the other’s state and the cognitive parsing and projection of that state back onto the other. Both of these dimensions are rooted in the subject’s lived perceptual experience: the affective arousal is incited by the perceived experience of the object, and the cognitive projection is imaginatively mapped onto the perceived situation of the object. In this chapter, I argue that art’s working relation to perception and imagination can help facilitate the sensitivities that allow one to be aware of and responsive to the experience of the other. To frame this discussion, I will begin with a reflection on the historic relationship between empathy and aesthetics. While my schema of empathy is not identical to the aesthetic empathy described by 19th-century aestheticians, and has more in common with later, psychological, uses of the term, I do feel my model acknowledges the aesthetic roots of the term, and it is useful to examine empathy’s migration from a mostly aesthetic concept to a mostly interpersonal one.

A Brief History of Empathy as an Aesthetic Concept

The concept of empathy, and possibly its very denotation as a concept distinct from sympathy, has an intimate connection with the discussion of aesthetics, particularly German aesthetics of the late 19th century, where empathy was characterized as a one-way *in-feeling* (*einfühlung*) or projection of the subject’s bodily experience into an object. Logician and aesthetician Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1856/1885) articulated in his *Mikrokosmos* that “there is no shape so coy\(^{17}\) that our fancy cannot sympathetically [*mitleben*] enter into it” (p. 584), and this

\(^{17}\) The word translated here as *coy*, the German *spröde* can also be translated as *brittle*, or of a woman, *demure*, highlighting a problematic gendered dimension of the aesthetic language which describes empathy as a one-way infiltration of the object by the subject. This is an entailment which I feel is mitigated by the more dialogic two-way model of empathy described in the previous chapter.
phenomenon was later encapsulated in the term *einfühlung*, coined by Robert Vischer\(^{18}\) (1873/1994) in his “On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics.”

This identification between empathetic and aesthetic projection did not go unquestioned, and the relation between the two concepts was problematized by later thinkers. Wilhelm Worringer (1908/1963), in his *Empathy and Abstraction*, described Vischer’s one-way empathetic projection as a model in which “aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self-enjoyment” (p. 14), and criticized Vischer’s model as being “Europo-centric” (p. 99). Worringer described two models of aesthetic experience, one characterized by *empathy* and related to artwork containing life-like forms, and the other characterized by *abstraction* and related to indigenous and modern artforms through which the viewer escaped the world of natural forms, rather than embracing and being subsumed in it.

The loosening of the relation between aesthetic experience and the concept of empathy was perhaps further facilitated by the increased prominence of those artforms characterized by Worringer as abstract, which encouraged other modes of engagement, as well as by the increased use of the term *einfühlung* in the domains of psychology and social science, which made other people, rather than material forms, the object of empathy (Depew, 2005). “Originally the paradigmatic cases of empathy were inanimate objects, including ‘expressive’ works of art. Once psychotherapy and ethics captured the term, however, persons became paradigmatic” (Depew, 2005, p. 102). Empathy underwent a shift in meaning, from acknowledging that the feelings we feel about others are actually *our own* projected feelings, to referring to our ability to identify with others by getting in contact with *their* feelings, and in making this shift empathy became less associated with aesthetics (Depew, 2005).

\(^{18}\) See note 7 on p. 23 for a discussion of other possible attributions for the first use of *einfühlung*. 
By the early 20th century in the English-speaking world, the word *empathy* (coined by Edward Titchener in 1909 as a translation of *einfühlung*) was being used in translations of Freud, while the aesthetic writings of the Earl of Listowel (1952) retained the original German word, describing Vischer et al. as “the Einfühlung School” (p. 26), perhaps indicating that the psychological concept of *empathy* was detaching itself from the aesthetic concept of *einfühlung* (Depew, 2005).

By the second half of the 20th century, particularly in Germany, there was greater skepticism regarding the connection between aesthetics and the cultivation of meaningful interpersonal relation. Habermas (1983), in his *Modernity – An Incomplete Project*, commented on the relationship between the emergence of “terroristic activities and…tendencies to aestheticize politics” (p. 12), linking aesthetics with a rigid dogmatism or “reified everyday praxis” (p. 11). Habermas presented aesthetic values as constructed impositions upon lived experience from without, rather than values grounded in lived sensory and social experience. Within the world of fine art in particular, Habermas asserted that the various movements “attempt[ing] to blow up the autarkical [e.g. enclosed, self-sufficient] sphere of art and to force a reconciliation of art and life…those attempts to level art and life, fiction and praxis, appearance and reality to one plane; have proved themselves to be sort of nonsense experiments (p. 11),” which highlight, rather than dissolve, the “irreconcilable nature of the aesthetic and the social worlds (p. 10).” However, Habermas also noted that the cure for a rigid, ‘aestheticized’ way of living was “by creating unconstrained interaction of the cognitive with the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive elements” (p. 12), indicating a role for aesthetic sensitivity and expression in cultivating a supple, non-dogmatic social reality. He elaborated one manner in which aesthetic experience could accomplish this:
One way that an aesthetic experience which is not framed around the experts’ critical judgments of taste can have its significance altered: as soon as such an experience is used to illuminate a life-historical situation and is related to life problems, it enters into a language game which is no longer that of the aesthetic critic. The aesthetic experience then not only renews the interpretation of our needs in whose light we perceive the world. It permeates as well our cognitive significations and our normative expectations and changes the manner in which all these moments refer to one another (Habermas, 1983, p. 13).

The aesthetic experience, when grounded in lived experience, and when allowing the unconstrained interaction of the cognitive, affective, and expressive domains, can take a person beyond her/his own subjective sphere (“our needs in whose light we perceive the world”), and fundamentally destabilize her/his way of encountering the world and the “normative expectations” that frame it. As Dewey (1934) noted, when art is directly related to one’s experience, “[i]nstead of fleeing from experience to a metaphysical realm, the material of experiences is so rendered that it becomes the pregnant matter of a new experience…the sense we now have for essential characteristics of persons and objects is very largely the result of art” (p. 294). The aesthetic need not be an imposition of the abstract or ideal upon experience, but may derive directly from the lived affective experience of the self and other and inform one’s cognitive conceptions of oneself and other people.

In this chapter, I discuss how a model of empathy which extends beyond a one-way aesthetic conception, and which acknowledges the affective and cognitive dimensions of the relation to the other, relates to the experience of art and artmaking. I also explore how experiences with art might diminish those habituated modes of thinking which impede empathy.
I first outline two primary *rigidities*, perceptual and psychological rigidity, and how they are related to each other, before discussing how perceptual rigidity impedes affective empathy, and how aesthetic experience could possibly mitigate perceptual rigidity. Afterward, I examine how psychological rigidity can hamper cognitive empathy, and how imaginative cognition could help counteract *this* rigidity.

**The Link Between Perceptual Rigidity and Psychological Rigidity**

In his discussion of the connection between visual perception and one’s relation toward the other, Merleau-Ponty (1964, 2001/2010) identified the phenomena of *perceptual rigidity* and *psychological rigidity*, and examined the correspondence between the two. Psychological rigidity is characterized as

the attitude of the subject who replies to any question with black-and-white answers; who gives replies that are curt and lacking in any shading; who also is generally ill disposed, when examining an object or a person, to recognize in them any clashing traits; and who continually tries, in his remarks, to arrive at a simple, categorical, and summary view (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 101).

Per Merleau-Ponty (1964), rigid subjects tend to be, on closer examination, much more conflicted internally than their professed attitudes indicate. When questioned about family, for instance, they tend to respond using categorical affirmations without nuance or ambiguity – their family is either ideal, or abhorrent. These observations tend to focus on the inessential and external, avoiding more detailed examination or understanding of others or their internal states. However, blanket affirmations typically mask a “lively aggression” toward their family (p. 102). This rigidity is not congenital, but learned, acquired through their social relations with family.
The parents of rigid subjects are typically authoritarian. “More often than not, such persons are traditionalists” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 101).

Perceptual rigidity is, likewise, an aversion to ambiguity, but with respect to visual imagery. When presented with an ambiguous image, perceptually rigid subjects tend to discern and cleave to a singular interpretation that is clear, without nuance, and often conditioned by stereotype (Merleau-Ponty, 1964).

In discussing the nature of perceptual and psychological rigidity Merleau-Ponty (1964) cited Melanie Klein’s distinction between ambiguity and ambivalence as a key concept. Ambivalence is the state of the rigid subject, and “consists in having two alternative images of the same object, the same person, without making any effort to connect them or to notice that in reality they relate to the same object and the same person” (p. 103). Conversely, ambiguity allows for complexity and contradiction, is characterized as a “phenomenon of maturity” (p. 103), and can admit, for instance, that the same being can be at once kind and generous as well as annoying and imperfect. A tolerance for ambiguity on the part of the subject, an ability to respond to a seemingly self-contradictory sensation or idea without reducing or splintering it into stereotyped categories, directly opposes the perceptual and psychological rigidities described above.

Psychological rigidity, with its attendant ambivalence, can shape the subject’s perception of others, resulting in perceptual rigidity (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Merleau-Ponty (1964) invoked Freudian terms to describe how psychological rigidity shapes the perception of the other, noting that rigidity functions as a reaction formation, producing a defense mechanism wherein the subject projects the denied part of themselves onto the other. This process also may explain the tendency of the rigid subject to employ stereotypes or to adhere to traditional concepts. Merleau-
Ponty (1964) noted that “[f]or example, men who, by virtue of the established myths…do not want to be weak and sensitive and want to be self-sufficient, decisive, and energetic, project on women exactly those personality traits they do not themselves want to have” (p. 104). Consequently, a rigid male subject may fail to elicit a veridical affective empathetic response to a woman’s experience, due to perceiving in the woman sensations and emotions derived from this defensive projection, rather than from the actual immediate experience of the woman. While it seems clear that psychological rigidity has a relation to social perception, what is perhaps surprising is the relation it has to more immediate visual perception, as evidenced in Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of a study in perception conducted by Else Frenkel-Brunswik.

Frenkel-Brunswik’s (1949) study involved 1500 American schoolchildren between 11 and 16 years old, 120 of whom were identified as especially psychologically rigid. Their rigidity was determined by an interview early in the study wherein the subjects were asked to evaluate phrases such as “Teachers should tell children what to do and not try to find out what the children want,” “Girls should learn only things that are useful around the house,” and “There is only one right way to do anything” (Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949, p. 123). The students were then subjected to several perception tests. In one case, students were shown a series of cards wherein an image of a dog was gradually transformed into an image of a cat. In students who had scored high on the psychological rigidity assessment “[t]here was greater reluctance to give up the original object about which one had felt relatively certain and a tendency not to see what did not harmonize with the first set as well as a shying away from transitional solutions” (Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949, p. 128). Other similar tests, with cards depicting gradual changes in hue, numerals changing into other numerals, and numerals “emerging from indistinctness” (p. 129), had the same results, as did a visual-spatial problem-solving task involving finding a shorter path.
on a map after a longer route was first established. Evidence repeatedly indicated that the presence of psychological rigidity tended to correspond with the presence of perceptual rigidity.

This study does not, however, imply a cause-effect link between perceptual rigidity/suppleness\(^\text{19}\) and psychological rigidity/suppleness. Merleau-Ponty (2001/2010) remarked on the results of Frenkel-Brunswik’s study that

[i]n reality, the question of causality is devoid of sense. How can we say if our manner of living socially shapes our perceptions or the other way around? It would be necessary to isolate the two phenomena, which is impossible. Mme Frenkel-Brunswik has only searched for close correlations that exist between the two phenomena; she showed that they are two moments of a single whole: the individual’s situation in a certain historical environment (p. 244).

While the subject’s perception is connected to the subject’s relation to the other, there is no unidirectional causal connection between the two. Consequently, this study is not an examination of how to improve artistic perception by encouraging prosocial behavior, or vice-versa. Rather, I address both perceptual and psychological rigidity, how they hamper the affective and cognitive dimensions of empathy, respectively, and how experiences with art (and in the next chapter how art education) may address these rigidities and provide the affective and cognitive suppleness to facilitate the experience of empathy as defined in this study.

Dewey (1934) distinguished between the terms *aesthetic* and *artistic* is his discussion of art and experience, defining the former as referring to the act of perception and enjoyment, and the latter as referring to the act of imaginative production. This dual conception of the artistic

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\(^{19}\) I characterize the opposite of perceptual and psychological *rigidity* as *suppleness*, a term which I feel expresses both the *flexibility* and *sensitivity* that characterize the sort of non-prescriptive relation to the other necessitated by my affective-cognitive schema of empathy. Sensitivity is necessary to perceive and take in the other’s experience, and flexibility is necessary to parse ambiguous experiences and formulate a cognitive response that is germane to the particular immediate situation and not simply an instance of an internalized preconception or habit.
experience, along with Greene’s (1995) assertion that art education combats rigidity through “the stimulation of imagination and perception” (p. 138) provides the frame for this chapter’s exploration of art’s interaction with the two domains of empathy in my schema. Aesthetic perception will be discussed in relation to empathy’s affective dimension and perceptual rigidity, while imaginative production will be discussed in relation to the cognitive dimension of empathy and psychological rigidity.

**Aesthetics, Perception and Affective Empathy**

Dewey (1934) asserted that aesthetic experience provides a challenge to systematic thought, to modes of being where “[t]he inertia of habit overrides adaptation of the meaning of the here and now” (p. 272). Rather than serving as a retreat from lived experience and awareness or responsiveness to others, aesthetic sensitivity can ground the subject in lived experience and mitigate habits or preconceptions that color perception and characterize rigidity.

Within the context of this study’s framework for empathy, the affective dimension – the perception and vicarious experience of the state of the other – is contingent on the subject’s sensitive perception of the other, and this affective experience forms the basis for the more complex cognitive forms of empathy. This lucid perception is related to the aesthetic experience (Dewey, 1934), and a cultivation of this sensitivity can function to reduce perceptual rigidity.

As Dewey (1934) noted, “the esthetic is no intruder in experience from without, whether by way of idle luxury or transcendent ideality, but … it is the clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience” (p. 46). Attention to the aesthetic need not entail a retreat to an internal Rococo flower garden or rarefied field of perfect Platonic forms – on the contrary, it entails a heightened sensitivity to one’s affective experience and a consequent heightened awareness of the affective experience of the other. This
sensitivity toward, and perception of, the experience of the other, encourages the affect arousal that comprises the affective dimension of this study’s model of empathy. While the affective, kinesthetic experience of the other’s state is involuntary and immediately triggered by perception of the other’s state, if the subject, as a consequence of her/his perceptual rigidity, *does not perceive* the other’s state then this affect arousal may not be triggered. In this section I explore the ways aesthetic experience and perception could address the problem of perceptual rigidity.

**Aesthetic Suppleness and Perceptual Rigidity**

The experience of art can present us with new aesthetic sensations that destabilize our habits of perception and increase aesthetic sensitivity. Dewey (1934) noted that “the excursions of art create new sensitivities that in time absorb what was alien and naturalize it within direct experience” (p. 282). These experiences can be as overt as a film detailing the challenges faced by a person with a physical handicap, as subtle as an unconventional gesture articulating an intermediate emotion in a figure, or as abstract as a striking and unusual color juxtaposition. In its own way, each affords an opportunity to broaden one’s affective palette, and erode those internalized systems which have “superimposed some preconceived idea upon experience instead of encouraging or even allowing esthetic experience to tell its own tale” (Dewey, 1934, p. 275). By mitigating the effect of such rigid systems, aesthetic experience may help make the subject more sensitive to immediate affective experiences, including those perceived in the object which elicit an affective empathetic response.

Figures 2, 3, and 4, below articulate how the concept of rigidity maps onto the schema of empathy outlined in the previous chapter. In Figure 2, the subject, outfitted with a perceiving eye (with apologies to Philip Guston), has its perception either expanded or atrophied by diverse or anemic aesthetic experiences, respectively.
Figure 2 – The broadening of perception through abundant aesthetic experience

In Figure 3, the subject with supple perception is able to take in a fuller picture of the affective experience of the other, and this introjection produces a veridical affect reaction that is projected back on the object. In Figure 4, the subject with rigid perception has a reduced, less veridical, affect reaction to the other’s experience. This anemic reaction is supplemented or supplanted by habituated thought patterns, which then color the cognitive projection made onto the object.

Transitivism and the Experience of the Image

More specifically germane to the visual arts and to my schema of empathy is Merleau-Ponty’s (1964, 2001/2010) discussion of the mirror image’s role in the “third-year crisis” (1964, p. 153) and the ongoing role images play with respect to the subject’s transitivism (or affective
empathy, in my schema). Before the mirror stage occurs, the child identifies with the mirror image in the same way s/he identifies with others, through the “syncretic sociability” of transitivism (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2010, p. 253), an undifferentiated I that permeates both subject and object, and muddles any distinction between the two. This “gives the specular image the value not of a simple reflection, of an ‘image’ in the proper sense, but rather of a ‘double’ of oneself – this belief never totally disappears” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 138). As transitivism is retained and provides the affective foundation for later complex cognitive modes of empathy throughout life, this experience of the image as a kind of incarnation persists and is found in other images (such as a person’s shadow, a photograph, or a created image) encountered later in life (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2010). If an image can elicit the same kind of affective feeling into that the experience of the other does, then perhaps the aesthetic experience of the image can foster the affective experience of empathy. And perhaps affording opportunities to encounter diverse and ambiguous imagery can mitigate rigidity and cultivate more subtle and sensitive perception, allowing for a more refined and responsive affective empathy.

This experience of the image, because it is a function of transitivism, is an affective, unreflective experience, contrasting with the reflective, cognitive consideration of the image where it is reduced to an appearance with which the subject has no relation (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). This affective consideration “which we use in immediate life when we do not reflect…gives us the image as something which solicits our belief…[T]he image in the mirror, even for the adult, when considered in direct unreflective experience, is not simply a physical phenomenon: it is mysteriously inhabited by me; it is something of myself” (p. 132). The sensitive immediate perception – the aesthetic perception – of the image reactivates the syncretic sociability of transitivism, the affective component of empathy.
It is because this experience of the image is affective that it retains the ability to elicit transitivity throughout life. If the understanding of the image as an image which occurs during the crisis at three were purely intellectual, it would manifest as a categorical proposition that would be applied to all images encountered by the child for the rest of her or his life (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). This is not the case, and “the work of ‘reduction [of the image to just an image],’ even when done by the child in respect to the image in the mirror, never ends with a general result, such as a concept. The child must do the work all over again in respect to other analogous phenomena – shadows, for example” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 133). The affective nature of experience of the image allows it to retain its transitive quality to some extent even after the mirror stage, providing an opportunity for immediate, affective response rather than a rote, rigid cognitive reiteration of a finalized, categorizing “work of ‘reduction’” (p. 133) completed at an earlier date.

Merleau-Ponty (1964, 2001/2010) linked this haunted, inhabited quality of the image with the significance, and sometimes condemnation, of images in some cultures. For example, the tradition in Abrahamic religions where “one is forbidden to make images of men because this is similar to deliberately creating other human beings– and this is not man’s proper function” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 132). An obverse cultural response to the same phenomenon can be found in iconodulic cultures, such as Eastern Orthodoxy, where religious images are felt to evince the real presence of religious figures. Merleau-Ponty (1964) asserted that such beliefs could only be understood if images function as more than simply signs distinct from the depicted subject, but as an incarnation of the represented person. To illustrate how this experience of the image is not relegated only to cultures in which the phenomenon has religious significance attached to it, Merleau-Ponty noted that “[e]ven an adult will hesitate to step on an image or
photograph; if he does, it will be with aggressive intent. Thus not only is the consciousness of the image slow in developing and subject to relapses, but even for the adult the image is never a simple reflection of the model; it is, rather, its ‘quasi-presence’” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 132).

As infantile ‘decentered’ egocentrism invests the image with human value through transitivity, perhaps the human value that images retain into adulthood can elicit or reignite this kind of affective decentering and empathy, providing observers with the opportunity to feel themselves into a variety of objects in a variety of situations, cultivating the supple perceptiveness that facilitates empathic affect arousal.

**Perspective and Supple Perception in Works of Art**

Merleau-Ponty (2001/2010) discussed the inherently subjective nature of perspective in artwork, and the ability of perspective systems to shape perception of experience. Traditional Renaissance perspective, despite its intention of representing objective reality, is shown to be simply one possible subjective artistic perspective when juxtaposed with Greek, Byzantine, Medieval, or other imagery with other strategies for organizing visual experience (Merleau-Ponty neglected to mention myriad non-Western strategies of representation which also serve as a counterpoint to Renaissance perspective). The idea that a single perspective with a vanishing point can represent objective reality is shown to itself be a subjective position. “[P]erspective is not natural, it is biased. Many systems are possible... [however, o]nce acquired, this image of the world seems natural” (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2010, p. 438). Consequently, the quality and diversity of one’s aesthetic experience may contribute to the suppleness – or the rigidity – of one’s affective perception.

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20 In his essay on Cézanne, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” Merleau-Ponty (1948/1964) commented that “By remaining faithful to the phenomena in his investigations of perspective, Cezanne discovered what recent psychologists have come to formulate: the lived perspective, that which we actually perceive, is not a geometric or photographic one” (p. 14).
The young child who has not yet acquired the “natural” image of the world dictated by her/his visual culture is less perceptually rigid, and more responsive to alternative methods of perception and representation than in later childhood and adulthood. Merleau-Ponty (1964) commented on the capacity of the young child to interact with modern paintings when such images were still a fairly novel form of representation:

It is altogether startling to see certain children much more apt to understand this drawing or that painting by Picasso than the adults around them...To the extent that the child is a stranger to this cultural tradition and has not yet received the training that will integrate him within it, he recognizes with great freedom in a number of traits what the painter meant to show. If you like, the child’s thought processes are general from the start and at the same time are very individual. They are expressive thought processes that get to the essentials by means of a concrete corporeal recovery [reprise] of objects and conducts as given (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 150).

This understanding demonstrates a suppleness in perception that can be either strengthened or ossified by artistic experience. By engaging expressively with the work, the child is not troubled by the ambiguity of the presented space or the lack of a single dominant point of perspective. Even if the child has passed through the mirror stage, and possesses an “I,” s/he does not necessarily expect every image encountered to reflect the perspective of an “I,” and spatially ambiguous paintings may provide an opportunity for decentering, for feeling into one or many alternate perspectives. This way of seeing or making “could not be understood as simple breakdowns on the road to ‘visual realism’ and...instead, these processes testif[y] to the presence in the child of a relation with things and with the sensible very different from the one that is expressed in the perspective projection of drawing in the classic style” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964,
p.98). While this flexibility of perception is fairly endemic to young children and their artwork, it does not indicate a specific naïve developmental stage on the road to more concrete “objective” forms of representation. Just as transitivism remains a part of the experience of the other throughout life as more complex cognitive faculties are acquired, this flexible affect can remain a part of the child’s artistic experience and vocabulary even as the child accretes more varied and complex strategies of representation. Affording young students aesthetic experiences with a variety of strategies for representing perception and space may encourage the persistence of this suppleness of perception into later life.

Above, I have explored some of the ways in which aesthetic experiences with works of art may help encourage a perceptual suppleness that is conducive to affective empathy. These include the ways figurative images engage the transitivism that undergirds my schema of empathy, and the way ambiguous imagery – such as that containing multiple or unconventional perspectives – mitigates habituated modes of seeing that may preclude the sensitive perception of the other which induces affective empathy. In the following section of this chapter I shift my focus to the cognitive dimension of empathy, and its relation to the imaginative forms of cognition that shape strategies of representation.

**Imagination, Image-Making, and Cognitive Empathy**

If the cultivation of flexible, supple perception encourages affective empathy, it is the development of flexible, supple modes of imaginative cognition – including metaphor – which encourage the cognitive, projective dimension of empathy. Maxine Greene asserted that the imagination is, above all, what makes empathy possible. “Imagination may be a new way of decentering ourselves, of breaking out of the confinements of privatism and self-regard into a space where we can come face to face with others and call out, ‘Here we are’” (Greene, 1995,
Just as the cognitive dimension of empathy frames and extends the affective experience of empathy, Dewey (1934) averred that imaginative artistic engagement serves to “concentrate and enlarge an immediate experience” (p. 273). Artmaking, as “the impregnation of sensuous material with imaginative values” (p. 293), takes this imaginative extension of lived experience, and invests it back in the sensuous and social world, much in the same way that cognitive empathy takes an imaginative extension of empathetic affect arousal, and projects it back onto the object. With this conception of art as a parabola having both its origin and endpoint rooted in lived experience, it is unsurprising that Dewey (1934) saw Platonic aesthetics – where art is a tangent leading the viewer away from the physical to the essential – as “a ghostly metaphysics irrelevant to actual esthetic experience” (p. 293).

The role of imagination in the empathetic experience of the other is corroborated by Strayer and Roberts’s (1989) experimental study of the relation between imaginative thinking and empathy in 6-year-olds. The children in the study first completed a questionnaire assessing their own empathy. Their parents and teachers also completed two questionnaires, one reflecting their own level of empathy, and the other reflecting their perception of the child’s empathy. The children participated in activities to assess role-taking, structured and free imagination, ego resilience, verbal ability, and prosocial behaviors. The study found that the children’s performance on the structured imagination and creativity assessment, and their teachers’ assessment of their imaginative skills in class, corresponded with both empathy and role-taking, and that empathy and role-taking corresponded with each other (Strayer & Roberts, 1989).

With respect to rigidity, Fesmire (1999) noted that “[i]magination is the only means we have for transforming old habits in order to meet novel demands” (p. 541). If psychological rigidity is impairing the subject’s cognitive empathy by conforming to easy habits and prejudices
rather than responding to the immediate situation, imaginative thinking can help open up the cognitive space for new conceptions not beholden to pre-held notions. One manifestation of such un-habituated, imaginative cognition is the formulation of new metaphors in lieu of prevailing cultural clichés, an action that does not simply generate new turns of phrase, but constructs new ways of thinking about and organizing experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), including one’s vicarious experience of the other.

**Metaphor as Imaginative Cognition, and Empathy**

Johnson (1993) asserted that “metaphor lies at the heart of our imaginative moral rationality, without which we would be doomed to habitual acts” (Johnson, 1993, p. 33). Per Johnson, the conceptual frames in terms of which we understand concrete social situations typically involve systems of metaphor. For instance, what Johnson (1993) terms the “Social Accounting Metaphor” (p. 42) is often used to articulate – and to comprehend – the rights and duties one person has with respect to another, and an individual can be described as being indebted to another, or an individual can give someone credit for fulfilling a duty, etc. What is important to remember about Johnson’s (and George Lakoff’s) conception of metaphor is that it not only dictates figures of speech, but *also is the mechanism by which we structure our thinking* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors connect an abstract target domain to an experiential source domain, providing a conceptual frame for understanding the abstract (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Someone beholden to the social accounting metaphor will necessarily have a different way of thinking about interpersonal relations than someone who does not conceive of the obligation of one person to another as a sum on a balance sheet.

By changing our metaphoric frame and replacing one metaphorical system for another, we can change our ways of thinking about our world and experience (Johnson, 1993). And since
more complex forms of empathy require our cognitive faculties to frame and parse our affective experience (Hoffman, 2000), the metaphoric constructs that shape our cognition can affect our capacity to empathize. The ability to generate new metaphoric connections can stem psychological rigidity by providing the suppleness and flexibility to break away from pre-established metaphoric frames dictating our relationship to experience and to others. In his discussion of Lakoff and Johnson’s metaphoric model, Arthur Efland (2004) placed this ability to imaginatively examine and construct new metaphoric frames squarely in the arts:

Let me emphasize this point once more – that the arts are places where the constructions of the imagination can and should become the principle object of study, where it is necessary to understand that the visual image or verbal expression are not literal facts but embodiments of meanings to be taken in some other light. It is only in the arts where the imagination is encountered and explored in full consciousness – where it becomes the object of inquiry (Efland, 2004, p.769).

In much the same way that imaginative artmaking can facilitate the cognitive projection of the subject’s affective experience into an object\(^{21}\), this imaginative cognition can also foster new connections of the subject’s affective, experiential “source domains” onto abstract “target domains,” forming new metaphors and creating new models for framing experience (including the experience of the other).

### Imagination Inducing Affective Experience

Apart from forming metaphors that may facilitate cognitive empathy, imaginative cognition can also arouse empathetic experience by simulating an affective experience. Hoffman (1979b) discussed the concept of symbolic (or mediated) association, where affective response is triggered not by a direct sensory experience but by a cognitive image of an experience, typically\(^{21}\) See “Imagination and Role-Taking in Art,” below
elicited by some symbolic indication of another’s feelings (e.g. a sad letter from a friend). Were this a completely abstract relation to the object, without the affect arousal, this phenomenon would reflect sympathy, rather than empathy – but as indicated by Gallese’s (2003a) experimental work, mental imagery induces the same internal motor simulation as perceptual imagery, and that internal motor simulation is the neurological basis for the affective component of empathy in this study’s model.

Brent Wilson (1976) illustrated how this kinesthetic power of the cognitive image can be manifested in artmaking by citing examples from the autobiographical writings of author Julian Green:

[H]e became what he drew, so much so that he said he drew with such a “savage joy” that he bit his tongue ([Green,] 1967, p. 33). There can be little doubt that the expectation of excitement and emotional involvement stemming from the structural and meaning qualities of children’s drawings is a strong motive for their involvement (Wilson, p. 52).

In the descriptions cited by Wilson, image-making functions in a way similar to dramatic play, the child projecting her/himself into her/his image, circumventing social and physical limits to imaginatively explore – and elicit – new kinds of experience. Even when their work does not have narrative content, it is common to observe children empathetically grimacing, frowning, or gritting their teeth when fully invested in a drawing – as well as to observe similar reflexive facial expressions in adult portrait artists or illustrators as they work. Through the imaginative creation of mental and material imagery, artists can intentionally, cognitively, induce the typically involuntary affective experience of empathy.

**Imagination and Role-Taking in Art-Making**
Hoffman (2000) identified role-taking as a higher-order cognitive mode of empathy, in which the subject uses their imagination to place themselves in the object’s position and to experience the object’s affective state from within its own situation. Role-taking also facilitates empathizing with a person who is not physically present (Hoffman, 2000). The ability to imagine “expands the importance of empathic morality beyond the face-to-face encounters of children,” (p. 8) allowing a more complex empathizing with a wider population of people.

As discussed above, Julian Green’s accounts of “feeling into” (Wilson, 1976, p. 33) his childhood drawings and identifying with the content of them, functioned as a form of dramatic play, encouraging role-taking such that “he became what he drew” (p. 52). In my teaching experience, children’s dramatic play typically follows an (admittedly loose) narrative thread, and those artworks which reflect a similar sort of place-taking tend to be narrative in structure as well.

**Conclusion**

The experience of empathy as characterized in this study has two components: the affective experience of the other’s state and the cognitive parsing and projection of that state back onto the other. Both ends of this experience of empathy are rooted in the immediate, lived experience of the subject, as the affective arousal comes directly from the object’s lived experience, and the cognitive projection is mapped onto the perceived situation of the object. Consequently, rigidities of perception and thought that impede sensitive and subtle awareness of the other can hamper empathetic response, encouraging canned, prescriptive responses that don’t acknowledge the immediate situation or experience of the other.

Aesthetic experience can cultivate the kind of perceptual nuance which can preclude the perceptual rigidity that hinders affective empathy, and artistic experience can engender a
suppleness of thought which can loosen the psychological rigidity that hampers cognitive empathy. Art’s working relation to perception and imagination can help facilitate the sensitivities that allow one to be aware of and responsive to the experience of the other.

How can this relation be explored in the art education classroom? How have art educators implemented these connections in practice, and in what ways can they be further implemented?

In the next chapter, I explore art education’s relation to the experience and encouragement of empathy.
Chapter 4 – Art Education and Empathy

Art Education and Psychological and Perceptual Rigidity

Just as Dewey (1934) recognized the distinction between artistic and aesthetic experience, and lamented “the absence of a term designating the two processes taken together,” Maxine Greene (1995) hoped for a pedagogy that afforded both of those types of experience, with “one pedagogy feeding into the other: the pedagogy that empowers students to create informing the pedagogy that empowers them to attend (and, perhaps, to appreciate) and vice versa” (p. 138). When I discuss “art education” in this study, I likewise envision it as a pedagogy that includes aesthetic and artistic experiences. I frame art education’s relationship to empathy through its potential for “the stimulation of imagination and perception” (p. 138, emphasis added), its provision of aesthetic experiences broadening and sensitizing perception and fostering affective empathy, and its provision of artmaking experiences exercising those imaginative faculties which “above all, make empathy possible” (p. 3).

For Greene (1995), such a pedagogy entailed combatting the kind of habituated, standardized thought and perception characterized by Frenkel-Brunswik (1949) as rigid. Greene (1995) cited Arendt:

Provoked by the spectacle of the Nazi Adolf Eichmann, Arendt broached the same theme in a warning against “cliches, stock phrases, [and] adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct [which have] the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention that all events and facts make by virtue of their existence”...Instead, she was asking for a way of seeking clarity and authenticity in the face of thoughtlessness (p. 126).
By encouraging students toward a sensitive aesthetic perception and reflective imaginative cognition, art education can help address the problems of banal affect or clichéd thought that characterize perceptual and psychological rigidity. In relation specifically to this exploration, I posit that art education could, by mitigating these rigidities, afford a supple affective awareness of the condition of others and consequently a more veridical affective empathy, as well as a more vivid capacity for imaginative projection and consequently a more robust cognitive empathy.

**Perception and Affective Empathy in Art Education**

“Art,” Dewey (1934, p. 104) noted, “throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things.” In *Art as Experience*, he (1934) distinguished between *perception* and *recognition*. Perception is the seeing act as an aesthetic experience, which “involves the cooperation of motor elements” and “is emotionally pervaded throughout” (p. 53). Recognition, on the other hand, is “perception arrested,” in which “we fall back, as upon a stereotype, upon some previously formed scheme” (p. 52). For Dewey, the pursuit of aesthetic experience, and for Greene the aim of aesthetic education, was the displacement of rigid recognition by supple perception. This sentiment is echoed in Shklovsky’s (1917/1998) observation that art combats “habitualization” by “remov[ing] objects from the automatism of perception” and “impart[ing] the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known” (p. 18). Merleau-Ponty (1948/1964), in his discussion of Cézanne, noted that “[t]he painter who conceptualizes and seeks the expression first misses the mystery – renewed every time we look at someone – of a person’s appearing in nature” (p. 16), contrasting the artist who approaches their model aiming to *recognize* a preconceived expression with the artist – in this case Cézanne – whose supple *perception* acknowledges the immediate, “renewed” expression of the other in this particular
encounter. The cultivation of sensitive, immediate perception through the experience of art could be significant in fostering affective empathy. While I do not posit that aesthetic education can explicitly train students to have affective empathy – not being a cognitive function, the affective response cannot be overtly instructed, in my estimation – aesthetic experiences in education may engender the sensitivities that make affective empathy possible, and mitigate the rigidities that impede this dimension of empathy.

Addressing the affective dimension of empathy may be of particular importance when trying to encourage empathy in early childhood. Norma Feshbach (1975) conducted a study of first grade students which indicated that their cognitive awareness of others’ emotional states, which was generally high, did not correspond to high incidences of empathy with (i.e. vicarious experience of) those emotional states, concluding that “while the cognitive dimension of empathy is important, it is the affective component that gives the empathy construct its unique property” (p. 26). Simply understanding, or being instructed regarding, the state of the other will not induce the vicarious affect arousal characteristic of empathy. This conclusion is corroborated by Craig and Weinstein’s (1965) research in conditioning vicarious affect arousal (in admittedly older subjects). Craig and Weinstein observed that while there was no difference in vicarious affect between groups that knew an actor would be shocked and groups that did not know, there was a significantly higher incidence of vicarious affect arousal in groups that saw the actor get shocked more frequently. Image, experience, and observation aroused the subjects’ affect more.

Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of Cézanne also echoed Shklovsky’s notions of habituation and estrangement more overtly when he commented that “Cézanne’s painting suspends these habits of thought [taking as granted man-made objects and spaces] and reveals the base of inhuman nature upon which man has installed himself. This is why Cézanne's people are strange, as if viewed by a creature of another species” (p. 16). Per Merleau-Ponty, Cézanne’s artistic practice serves as an example of an artist using his practice to eschew enculturated modes of perceiving and conceiving in order to encounter, and portray, others in a supple, immediate, way.

With that said, one of the goals of this chapter is to articulate ways this theory may be applied in art education practice, and as a consequence some of the language used may seem instrumental or causal. When I do imply a cause-effect relation, especially with respect to affective empathy, I have tried to choose language which specifies that a given art encounter is affording or activating an experience rather than teaching a skill.
readily than language, cognition, or inference. Perhaps an art education that affords opportunities for meaningful aesthetic experiences and the cultivation of sensitive affective perception would consequently be more likely to elicit empathetic experiences, and encourage learners to be receptive toward affective empathetic experiences beyond the classroom.

**Exposure to Breadth and Subtlety of Emotional Affect in Art Education**

“What part can education play in deepening this keyboard of feeling?” asked Robert Bersson (1982, p. 38) “Art educators, with their long experience in fostering that subjective, intuitive mode of activity known as creativity, should be the first to accept the possibility of a pedagogy of sensuous aesthetic response.” And “deepening this keyboard of feeling,” should art educators accept the charge of providing students with a rich repertoire of affective and emotional experiences through art, is a pursuit that several researchers posit as a prerequisite for affective empathy.

Norma Feshbach (1975), for instance, noted that “the affective response to the experience of others is not instinctive but depends, at least in part, upon the child’s having previously experienced that affect” (p. 26). Fabes, Eisenberg, and Miller (1990) observed a correlation between parents who were restrictive of their child’s range of emotional expression and their children’s lower scores on scales of empathy. Martin Hoffman (1979b) observed that 18-month-olds who have seen adults cry are more likely to exhibit empathetic affect response to others, as are preschool students who cry frequently, proposing that “we should expect that if the child is allowed the normal run of distress experiences, instead of being shielded from them, this should extend his empathic range” (p. 12). Later, Hoffman (2000) articulated this notion within his larger theoretical framework of empathy, noting that prior experience with an emotion would facilitate the empathetic experience of that emotion through direct (affective) association,
mediated/symbolic association (affective, but induced by cognitive parsing of a symbolic trigger such as a sad letter), and role-taking (cognitive). “It follows that socialization that allows children to experience a variety of emotions rather than protecting them from these emotions (hothouse flower) will increase the likelihood of children’s being able to empathize with different emotions: It will expand their empathic range” (p. 288).

A child with a deeper “keyboard” of feeling would be more likely to acknowledge subtle or ambiguous affect, particularly if they have encountered/experienced it before, rather than simply recognize it (in the Deweyan sense of the term) as one of a handful of clichéd emotions drawn from an anemic repertoire (“happy” “sad” and “angry” seemed to be the mainstays on pre-printed materials during my preschool teaching experience). While affect response is involuntary, Hoffman (2000) articulated how an involuntary affect response contingent on perception can still be mitigated by perceptual rigidity or fostered by considered pedagogy: “if one pays attention to the victim one should respond automatically with empathic distress. Since paying attention is to an extent under voluntary control, it follows that socialization experiences that direct the child’s attention to the inner states of others should contribute to empathy development” (p. 289). While the affective empathic response is itself involuntary, that does not mean that every child is automatically aware of her/his peers’ emotions or perceives them, possibly precluding an affective response. One way that art educators may sensitize students to the affective experience of others may be to introduce them to a variety of affects and emotions through works of art and artistic responses to affecting images/experiences.

Feshbach, Feshbach, Fauvre, and Ballard-Campbell, (1983), in their Learning to Care curriculum, described a number of pedagogical activities that emphasize the development of sensitive affect response. Some of these projects are visual arts projects, and some are
discussions centered around imagery or performances. While not all of the art projects described by Feshbach et al. may have the formal, expressive, or conceptual rigor of many projects conceived by arts specialists, they still may serve as exemplars of ways artistic exploration could mitigate perceptual and psychological rigidity and foster empathy.

For example, with respect to developing a deep repertoire of emotional experiences, Feshbach et al. (1983) described a simple activity wherein students identify the affect of figures in photographs from their faces and posture. “If opinions differ, discuss why. For each photograph, the children should offer several alternatives as to what might have caused the character to feel the emotion pictured” (p. 12). Within the art classroom, discussions encouraging this kind of sensitivity could be part of any introductory presentation featuring a figurative artist. For instance, a lesson on black and white photography may begin with a discussion of a selection of Diane Arbus photographs where the subjects have particularly expressive, perhaps ambiguous, expressions or postures, providing an opportunity for students to empathize with figures from a different time, in different attire and from a variety of different social situations than the students themselves.

Admittedly, these sorts of seeing, labeling, and discussing activities have a significant cognitive component to them, as the affect response to the image is subjected to reflection and discussion in the classroom. As Hoffman (2000) noted, however, the involuntary affective empathic response to the other’s condition is contingent on the subject being attentive to and aware of the other’s condition. This attentiveness is “to an extent under voluntary control” (p. 289), and conscious discussion to raise this awareness can perhaps allow for greater sensitivity. The interactions between the affective and cognitive dimensions of empathy are not simple, and
the two are distinguished in my schema not to ensure that each is treated utterly separately, but to ensure that each receives an appropriate amount of attention.

Activities to cultivate sensitivity to more subtle emotional affect can be found in Feshbach et al.’s (1983) Learning to Care curriculum and Tonia Caselman’s (2007) Teaching Children Empathy. Both texts feature activities which focus on discerning different levels of emotional intensity, with Feshbach et al. (1983) describing a game where students draw from two decks of word cards to make a phrase such as “very / angry” or “a little / embarrassed,” and then describe a situation fitting that emotion, after which her/his peers attempt to guess the cards’ phrase. Caselman (2007) described a similar activity, where students must express the emotion bodily rather than describe a situation, escalating their expression from “a little [x]” to “extremely [x]”. There are several ways an early childhood art project could address similar fine gradations of feeling. One obvious project would be to add a shade of complexity to the typical “colors and emotions” lesson, moving beyond the simple recognition (in the Deweyan sense) of clichéd happy/sad/angry emotional states, and the appending of those states to the saturated primary tempera colors of the typical elementary-school paintbox. By incorporating tints of colors, adding white to lessen intensity, students could articulate, and in doing so try to perceive, more subtle gradations of emotion in their lived experience. After personally associating a color and emotion, students could then mix tints of that color to render scenes from their life (or someone else’s) where that feeling was at different levels of intensity.

There are several ways art teachers can provide young students with the opportunity to experience and empathize with a variety of affective states. Art history and art practice present a variety of expressive works and acts that can introduce students to a wider range, and a more
subtle gradation, of emotions than young students may encounter in their other media experiences.

**Exercising the Postural Schema in Art Education**

In addition to exposing students to a variety of emotional affects, aesthetic experience can also induce physical affective empathetic experiences. Building upon Gallese’s (2003a) work with mirror neurons, Freedberg and Gallese (2007) examined how static images can induce “the empathetic understanding of the emotions of represented others or, most strikingly…a sense of inward imitation of the observed actions of others in pictures and sculptures” (p. 197). Citing prior experimental research on internal motor simulations ignited by observed images and actions, Freedberg and Gallese extended those findings to the experience of art objects, suggesting how Michelangelo’s *Prisoners* can induce a “felt activation” (p. 197) in the viewer of the muscles tensed in the sculpture, or how Goya’s *Disasters of War* can elicit a physical response “in precisely those parts of the body that are threatened, pressured, constrained or destabilized” (p. 197) in the work. Freedberg and Gallese also drew upon research showing how images of manipulable objects induce an associated interior motor simulation, indicating that a work need not contain a figure to induce an embodied affect reaction, and that “even a still-life can be ‘animated’ by the embodied simulation it evokes in the observer’s brain” (p. 201). They then went further, citing prior research on the inner motor responses to marks and letters to suggest that non-representational work, such as the expressive splatters of Pollock and the sliced canvases of Fontana, could induce an inner motor simulation, empathetically experiencing the gesture of the artist.
Carol Jeffers (2010) drew a great deal upon Freedberg and Gallese in her discussions of her students’ experiences with works of art. Describing a student’s reported encounter with a Cézanne still life, Jeffers noted that

Molly’s still life was “really a moving life” as she experienced it through some remarkable motor simulations—those she embodied when imagining a hand reaching into the painting to grasp the signifying apple, Cézanne’s hand at work on the canvas, and her own hand working to copy his composition (p. 35).

Molly’s encounter with the Cézanne painting illustrates Freedberg and Gallese’s (2007) observations that both manipulable objects in the image, and the visible marks used to make it, can elicit a motor response in the viewer. While master studies are of debatable value, and not terribly appropriate for early childhood, Jeffers’s (2010) discussion of Molly’s recreation of the Cézanne illustrates how such studies may teach not through slavish recreation of the art object, but through recreation of the artist’s postural schema, as deduced from subtle perception of the art object. Jeffers (2009a) also discussed the involuntary mirrored facial expressions made by students when encountering pieces, such as Bill Viola’s video installation *Six Heads*, which prominently features expressive faces. This observation echoes Hoffman’s (2000) mention of the “special role” (p. 194) he felt visual media, including film and video, could play in cultivating empathy, as viewers/students “mimic the facial expressions of actors from other cultures and through feedback experience the actors’ emotions in various situations.” However, most of Jeffers’s (2009a, 2009b, 2010) discussion of the role empathy plays in her art classroom emphasized reported empathy *between students* discussing their responses to works of art, rather than the affective empathetic response induced in students *by* their experience of the artwork.
Sarah Alvarez (2010), the Director of Teacher Programs at the Art Institute of Chicago, was more overt in her discussion of the role embodied experiences with works of art play in the Art Institute’s *Art and the Workplace* program. The *Art and the Workplace* program was developed in 2005, under Alvarez’s oversight, at the request of the professional development staff of the University of Chicago Hospitals to design an art experience to help strengthen the emotional sensitivity, literacy, and resiliency of new nurses in training. Empathy is identified as a key aptitude in the *Art and the Workplace* program, and Alvarez (2010) noted that sensitivity to the expressive potential of pose and gesture, developed by using artwork to “tap into [students’] kinesthetic intelligence” (p. 273), was one means by which the program cultivates that aptitude. The *Art and the Workplace* program frequently, for instance, has activities where students adopt the pose or gesture of a figurative piece – and in the case of pieces with multiple figures, where multiple students pose in a tableau – and describe how they feel while recreating the scene/posture. By literally embodying the perceived expression and gesture of the figure(s) in the art object, students can map their postural schema (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) onto the figure’s, and induce an affective empathetic experience, a practice which, Alvarez (2010) argued, makes them more mindful of others’ nonverbal expressions of affect.

Feshbach et al. (1983) described a few activities that may provide these kinds of embodied, affective experiences. One activity described involves taking photographs of each student showing a facial expression and using these photos as a visual aid for recognizing emotions. Such an activity could be elaborated in myriad ways. Perhaps students could take an expressive photographic self-portrait in which they are bodily responding to an emotional prompt (e.g. “How would you feel if it was your birthday and no one came to your party?”). Or, to borrow from Alvarez’s (2010) activity with the *Art and the Workplace* program, perhaps students
could each “act out” a part in a photographic tableau recreating (or reinventing) an expressive art-historical image. A follow-up might involve students then planning and executing an original, contemporary scene which includes the same expression or emotion.

Caselman (2007) described an activity where students watch a segment of a film or video without sound, and attempt to recognize the affective state of the characters based solely on their posture and expression. A simple inversion of this activity could turn it into a productive arts exercise that challenges students to express emotional and affective states bodily without dialogue. Students could collaborate with the instructor to plan and shoot a “silent film,” requiring them to embody and express the feelings of the characters in the scenario without dialogue. If the students work in multiple smaller groups, a class screening could provide the opportunity for discussion and recognition of affective states in peers’ projects.

**Engaging Visual Culture and the “Exhaustion of Empathy”**

Visual culture education often emphasizes the cultivation of critical acuity (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Darts, 2004), being able to cognitively process contemporary popular culture and “recognize and cite images of Identity manipulation, Gender and Race prejudice, Seduction of several kinds and the use and abuse of Power” (Mattson, 2005, p. 85). However, there is also a rhetorical vein in the discourse of visual culture education that concerns itself with re-sensitization and the cultivation of affective sensitivity in the face of ubiquitous, overwhelming, often banal or stereotyped expressive forms prevalent in popular visual culture. “The result of this often painful sensory bombardment,” wrote Bersson (1982)

is a flight from the feelings and an embrace of the intellect. The hypertrophy of the intellect which results makes its presence felt in our most prominent models of aesthetic education and contributes, often against best intentions, to a deadening of our sensory
faculties. What is needed, Sontag argues, is not more analysis and interpretation, but ‘more seeing, more hearing, more feeling.’ The task of the art critic and aesthetic educator must be no less than ‘the recovery of the senses’ [Sontag, 1967, p. 14] (Bersson, 1982, p. 36).

Mark Mattson (2005) similarly expressed a need for visual culture education in a time when “It seems our culture is running at near the speed of light, too fast to pass judgment. Moral or aesthetic” (p. 80). Mattson warned against “becoming jaded” (p. 82) to the power of images due to an overabundance of stimuli, a condition of habituated perception I liken to perceptual rigidity.

Arthur and Joan Kleinman (1996), argued that the widespread political and commercial appropriation of images of suffering in contemporary visual culture has resulted in an “exhaustion of empathy” (p. 9), desensitizing the public to the very emotions the images are meant to elicit. This exhaustion is also characterized as compassion fatigue (Moeller, 1999), psychic numbing (Lifton, 1995), moral habituation (Zelizer, 2000), and states of denial (Cohen, 2001) by cultural critics who “tend to diagnose the precariousness of compassion as a recent dimension of a social order in which exposure to narratives and images of suffering has paradoxically generated new and dramatic forms of emotional distance” (Dean, 2003, p. 90). The exhaustion of empathy is also a phenomenon noticed, on an individual scale, in children who endure an overwhelming amount of empathic distress. Hoffman (1975) noted that in a situation where the child is empathizing with another’s distress, “beyond a certain point empathic distress may become so aversive that one’s attention is directed to the self, not the victim” (p. 963). Zahn-Waxler et al. (1990) noted that young children of depressed caregivers could experience too much empathy, and too many feelings of responsibility and helplessness, eventually
becoming habituated to such a state as a defense mechanism. Vreeke (2003), in describing an account from her study, illustrated an example of “negative control” (p. 196) wherein a 22-month-old child was alarmed by a cry of pain from her mother, and, “overwhelmed by the sight of so much pain…slowly back[ed] up, and fumble[d] her sweater” (p. 196), retreating from the emotion-provoking stimulus and trying to focus on a distracting manual activity.

While there is an emphasis on such habituation developing in the face of a surfeit of media images of trauma, I would argue that this kind of numbness can be inculcated for all varieties of affective experience. For instance, an overwhelming abundance of clichéd media depictions of joy may preclude sensitivity toward, and empathy with, less prescriptive (and perhaps more authentic) expressions of joy encountered in art and life.

Visual culture art education can help facilitate affective empathy by “sensitiz[ing] the perceptions of our students” (Mattson, 2005, p. 87) and combatting habituated modes of perceiving and feeling-into visual culture. Shklovsky (1917/1998) contended that art combats habituated perception, allowing the subject to “defamiliarize” (p. 18) the familiar. In addition to “awaken[ing] students to the complex forces behind the imagery and aesthetics of the familiar” (Darts, 2004, p. 316) on a critical and cognitive level, this defamiliarization can also sensitize students to both idiosyncrasy and artificiality in mediated affect, rather than leaving them to passively recognize (in the Deweyan sense) mediated affect. A visual culture education that acknowledges the affective dimension of the aesthetic experience of culture as well as the cognitive, critical dimension can mitigate perceptual rigidity and encourage the supple affective sensitivity that is prerequisite to the affective dimension of the experience of empathy.

While I was unable to find exemplars in the literature for early childhood projects that employ defamiliarization to sensitize students to artificiality in mediated affect, I can suggest an
outline for such an exploration. Students could draw from a bag containing images of pop-
culture products they are familiar with – toys, clothes, assorted food or drink items – extracted
from print or video advertisements for those products. The images of the products would be cut
out, separated from the context of the ad. Students could then create an image of themselves
using (or discarding, or reacting to) the object, perhaps including the selected object-image as a
collage element. Students would write a sentence or two describing what they feel when using
the object, using modifiers such as very, a little, etc. to articulate their emotions to a finer degree.
Afterward, students could look at the original advertisement, and the object in that context, and
the student, or the class, could talk about the difference between the student’s stated affective
response to the item, and the emotional reaction of the figures in the advertisement to the item.
Such an activity could make salient the disparity between students’ experience of material
culture and the way that experience is portrayed in advertising, perhaps helping them not to
simply recognize (and identify with) the prescriptive emotional states of figures in
advertisements, but to perceive the disparity between their own emotional response and the
defamiliarized visual culture depiction of the appropriate response.

While not as overtly affective or emotional, I have led activities with students that
encourage defamiliarization toward common elements of material culture in a way that may
engage cognitive empathy through imaginative projection. In an integrated unit connecting
imaginative artmaking to speculative science, I would present an object from my past that I felt
the students may not be familiar with (an old 5.25” floppy disk, an unusual old hand-crank
cheese grater with tripod legs, etc.) as an alien artifact, for which the students would have to
hypothesize uses. Eventually, the object’s intended use would be revealed, and we would discuss

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24 Possibly, the students could choose their pop culture object, but that would likely lead to students working with a
favorite object, which might result in a more exaggerated, self-conscious, affective/emotional response.
how an object that was a familiar, everyday object to me, could be completely alien to someone else. The students were then challenged to think of an everyday object from their life, and imagine they had left it behind on an expedition to an alien planet (earlier in the unit, each student had conceived of an alien world and its inhabitants), then create an image of what that planet’s inhabitant, ignorant of the “true” use of the object, might use it for after coming across it. This required students to imaginatively place themselves in the perspective of a subject with a knowledge set very different from their own, and required them to defamiliarize themselves from their prior experiences with the object. This is a fairly high level of abstract thought – I did this activity with elementary students, not kindergarteners – but it is possible that some younger students could be scaffolded toward such a project.

**Confronting Ambiguous Imagery**

As discussed in chapter 3, Merleau-Ponty (2001/2010) contended that the seemingly natural planimetric perspective present in much Western representational art only appears natural due to a rigid perceptual bias endemic to a specific culture. “A painting is the manifest trace of a certain cultural relationship to the world” (p. 438). In illustrating this point, he invoked other traditions of representation such as Greek and Medieval painting which had different strategies for organizing space (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2010), and, perhaps more relevant to discussing art education for young learners, pointed out how young children, who have not yet been inculcated with a rigid perceptual affinity for Renaissance perspective, are “much more apt to understand this drawing or that painting by Picasso than the adults around them...[they] recogniz[e] with great freedom in a number of traits what the painter meant to show” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 150).
Speaking from an art education perspective, Mattson (2005) problematized the allure that one-point-perspective’s semblance of unambiguous and ordered space presents to students of art:

It hypnotizes students new to perspective. Every rail and tie, streetlight and stripe on the road, every single building, tree, cloud, and bird turn and march with total devotion to that nexus of oblivion. The drawings are boring. There is no individuality, no quirk of thought, no life (p. 88).

Per Mattson, a too-rigid adherence to a seemingly unambiguous, realistic\(^{25}\) strategy of perception ultimately weakens students’ artwork and affective sensitivity, determining that “[t]heory driving the vision rather than informing it can be clumsy and overpower perception” (p. 88). Gude (2012) when presenting her “Portrait of a Place” project with Spiral Workshop, in which students recreated through collage a space from a vivid memory, advocated the use of non-traditional modes of perspective to better represent the ambiguous and subjective spaces in memories, and, invoking Sturken and Cartwright’s *Practices of Looking* (2009), cautioned against modes of representation that encourage students to form a rigid subject position. Meyer, Blackburn, and Innocenti (2012), also working with the Spiral Workshop, recommended against one-point perspective in their “School of Anxiety: Gothic Narrative” project in favor of less prescriptive articulations of experience. While these projects were both conducted with secondary students, Merleau-Ponty (1964) indicated that similar concerns may be relevant to younger learners whose “processes of expression could not be understood as simple breakdowns on the road to ‘visual realism’” and who exhibit “a relation with things and with the sensible very different from the one that is expressed in the perspective projection of drawing in the classic style” (p. 98). While, cognitively, very young students are typically not yet equipped to imaginatively produce images

\(^{25}\) Meyer, Blackburn, and Innocenti (2012), describing their “School of Anxiety: Gothic Narrative” project for the Spiral Workshop, pointedly mentioned how in the project, students were “[f]ree from the narrowing constraints of ‘realism’ (remember what gets left out in mono-perspective is also ‘real’)” (para 9).
using deliberate perspective strategies, their affective receptivity to varied modes of
representation (Merleau-Ponty, 2001/2010) indicates that aesthetic encounters with different
strategies for representing perception in art may discourage the formation later in life of a rigid
perceptual/aesthetic hierarchy prioritizing a culturally-determined strategy for representing
reality, as described above by Mattson (2005).

A student who is resistant to ambiguity in perceptual experience is more likely to exhibit
the perceptual and psychological rigidities (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) that can inhibit affective
empathetic sensitivity (recall the children in Frenkel-Brunswik’s (1949) study who were
reluctant to see the gradual change of image from cat to dog, and who were likely to score high
on measures of rigidity and ambivalence). Fortunately, as Merleau-Ponty (2001/2010) touched
upon above, modern and contemporary artistic practice provides students with a variety of
ambiguous modes of representation to experience, and young students, less likely to be
enculturated with ambivalence or rigidity toward unconventional modes of representation, may
be especially receptive to such work. Likewise, as evidenced by the Spiral Workshop projects
mentioned above, creative production in an art education environment can provide opportunities
for students to explore ambiguous modes of representation, and exercise the supple affect
conducive to affective empathy.

Feshbach et al. (1983) also include some activities in their Learning to Care curriculum
that may be relevant or adaptable to the art classroom. One activity uses common ambiguous
“optical illusion” images, such as a Rubin vase, a duck/rabbit, and a young/old woman. The
students are divided into two groups, one of which is told it will be shown, e.g. a picture of a
vase, while the other is told it will be shown a different picture, e.g. of two faces. The class then
regroups, and is shown the image again, the ensuing discussion exploring how both groups saw
the same image, but saw different things in it, and how one’s peers can have a different perspective. Other, similar, images are then discussed. This exercise could be extended to include works such as Surrealist paintings that embraced a similar overt ambiguity, but also works that are ambiguous in other ways, such as a Close portrait, which only resolves at a distance, or a Louise Bourgeois sculpture with indeterminate biomorphic forms. Such works engage with visual ambiguity with intent beyond producing an “optical illusion” and may prompt discussion on the aesthetic impact or artistic intent behind their strategies of representation, as well as the merits of affording different “correct” interpretations.

There are myriad ways that art education may refine perception and encourage the sensitivity of affect that affords affective empathy. Such strategies range from overt engagements with students’ lived emotional experiences and felt responses to works of art to less direct investigations which erode general perceptual rigidity through encounters with ambiguity. In addition to the affective dimension, art education may also encourage empathy’s cognitive component by cultivating forms of imaginative cognition.

**Imagination and Cognitive Empathy in Art Education**

Maxine Greene (1995), who asserted the link between empathy and imagination, also argued that education in the arts could foster such imaginative cognition, claiming that “we must acknowledge that imagination and the emotions, including taste and sensibility, can be, and ought to be, educated…a powerful way of educating them is through initiation into the artistic-aesthetic domains” (p. 140). Rather than a second-order recollection or reconstruction of prior perceptions, the imagination is an active, constructive conduct which operates “beneath the relation of the knowing subject to the known object” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 98), bridging the gap between the two. Actively imagining a situation can elicit an inner kinesthetic simulation in
the same way that perceiving one does (Gallese, 2003a), which could mean that imaginative production in the art classroom can help cultivate empathetic experiences in the way exposure to a variety of affective states through works of art can. The imagination is a primary means of organizing and understanding experience which can “do away with habitual separations of the subjective from the objective, the inside from the outside, [and] appearances from reality” (Greene, 1995, p. 140).

The cognitive dimension of empathy, which I relate specifically to imaginative cognition, is more closely linked to the child’s developmental stages and is more receptive to conventional, cognitively-tuned, modes of socialization and instruction (Hoffman, 2000), which may make it particularly worthy of consideration when determining how art education may educate students toward more empathetic experiences of art and of others. It is particularly relevant to art education if, as Efland (2004) asserted, “[i]t is only in the arts where the imagination is encountered and explored in full consciousness – where it becomes the object of inquiry” (p. 769).

**Imaginative Cognition, Metaphor, and Cognitive Empathy in Art Education**

Arthur Efland (2004) linked art education’s cultivation of imaginative cognition with its capacity for conceiving new metaphors and consequently new ways of framing and articulating experience. The model of metaphor he used is that of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), wherein metaphor is a mapping of an affective source domain onto a conceptual target domain. This conception of metaphor within art education is relevant to this study’s discussion of empathy for

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26 A linguistic example of this would be how the metaphor GOOD IS UP yields phrases such as “things are looking up” or “high quality” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 16). In this metaphor, the embodied experience of spatial orientation (UP) is mapped onto an immaterial concept (GOOD) and entails a corresponding BAD IS DOWN metaphor wherein one might say “things are going downhill,” etc. As discussed in chapter 3, however, it is important to stress that metaphors are not simply turns of phrase but are more fundamental cognitive constructs used to organize experience of the world.
two reasons. First, the cognitive phase of the experience of empathy, in which the bodily affect response to the other’s condition is cognitively mapped back onto the image or idea of the other, might be seen as a parallel function to – or even a subset of – metaphoric cognition, wherein a bodily affective experience is cognitively mapped into an abstract conceptual domain. Perhaps encouraging students to make metaphoric “cross-domain mappings” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 58) through artistic practice will also facilitate the type of mapping that plays a part in cognitive empathy.

The second reason why Efland’s (2004) discussion of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) model of metaphor in the context of art education is related to this study’s exploration of empathy is that Efland’s (2004) description of the creation of new metaphors – an imaginative task he argued art education is especially well-suited for – indicates that doing so may combat psychological rigidity. Per Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors are the mechanisms by which we structure our thought. Efland (2004) illustrated how metaphoric structures are pervasive in human language and cognition, beyond traditionally poetic or artistic disciplines, by illustrating how scientific language makes use of metaphors such as THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS (e.g. “Your theory has a solid foundation,” or “You’ll never construct a sound theory upon those assumptions alone.”). He posited that while most disciplines use their metaphors uncritically – often not recognizing the metaphoric underpinnings of their jargon – it is only in the arts where such metaphors, the products of imagination, are scrutinized as “the object of inquiry” (p. 769) and constructed anew. Per Efland, the arts classroom is especially well-suited to students engaging meaningfully with established metaphoric ways of structuring and interpreting experiences, and then constructing new metaphors and new ways of structuring experience. This ability to dismiss or reshape established, rigid ways of thinking may facilitate the kind of
cognitive suppleness that allows for a more thoughtful, imaginative, cognitive empathetic projection.

**Place-Taking via Image-Making**

It was imagination’s capacity for role-taking that Dewey cited when he commented that “[i]magination is the chief instrument of the good. It is more or less a commonplace to say that a person’s ideas and treatment of his fellows are dependent upon his power to put himself imaginatively in their place” (p. 348). Role-playing activities were identified by Feshbach (1975) as one of the most effective strategies for the instruction of empathy, and such activities comprise a significant portion of Feshbach et al.’s (1983) *Learning to Care* curriculum. Strayer and Roberts’s (1989) study likewise found a positive correlation between role-taking and capacity for empathy in young children. Hoffman (1979b) noted that “role-taking opportunities…help sharpen the child’s cognitive sense of the other and thus extend their empathic ability” (p. 13), also noting how imaginative role-taking in pretend play can vicariously provide emotional experiences beyond the child’s everyday lived experiences, affording, for instance, a child who has little experience responding to others’ distress an opportunity to “increase their empathic range” (Hoffman, 2000, p. 290).

This correlation between imaginative role-taking and the development of cognitive empathy assumes a greater significance in the light of accounts suggesting that the creation of images may function as a form of imaginative play. If conceiving images can activate the same interior motor simulation as seeing them (Gallese, 2003a), might creating images also spur an interior affective response? In the last chapter, I discussed Wilson’s (1976) recounting of the childhood artmaking experiences of author Julian Green, wherein “he became what he drew” (p. 52), an anecdote which evokes Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) treatment of the image which, even after
the mirror stage, remains “mysteriously inhabited by me; it is something of myself” (p. 132).

Annette Swann (2009), and Anne Haas Dyson (1990), both writing from the perspective of early childhood education, relate accounts of children’s artmaking functioning like dramatic play, with a bit more detail than Wilson/Green’s account.

Swann (2009) noted that “[w]hile art is considered a ‘constructive’ activity, with part-to-part relationships and separate from pretend play…children’s skill in collaborative play and narrative emerges alongside their drawing abilities” through “the imaginative verbal interaction between children and their drawings, their peers, and any available audience” (p. 231). She recounted a year-long engagement between an arts specialist and a constructivist preschool classroom wherein the students engaged in a long-term collaborative play and drawing activity. Starting with a discussion of cars and the role they play in the students’ lives, the project continued with students drawing roadways on butcher-paper, which they used in play with toy cars. An ongoing interaction between artmaking and dramatic play occurred, as the image was elaborated with drawings of buildings where play scenarios were set, and students verbally related the scenarios they were developing. The students’ play incorporated drawn figures as well as classroom toys such as dolls and animals, with both images and objects contributing to the shared dramatic play scenarios. While Swann’s account does not explicitly discuss instances of role-play, this project does help demonstrate how image-making may function alongside – or as a form of – dramatic play.

Dyson’s (1990) accounts of drawing-as-dramatic-play from a kindergarten classroom feature more explicit instances of role-taking. Dyson noted that “[d]rawing combined with talk can quite literally become a canvas for children’s shared dramas…the dialogue between children and their papers can include other people as children’s skill as collaborative story tellers and
players infuses their drawing” (p. 54). She then recounts a drawing/play session between two students named Nate and Chiel, which began with Nate drawing a figure jumping head-first off of a diving board and telling Chiel that there was no water in the pool. Chiel’s response was to feel above his head and exclaim “Oh! I have no head,” with Nate responding “WHAT?! I have no head! HELP ME!” (p. 54). Both students were invested in, and to extent acting out, the state of the figure in the image. The students continued to elaborate on the scenario, negotiating between the real and imagined world, and negotiating between each other as they seized and ceded control of the imagined situation. Ultimately, the content of the drama was spread between the image, the verbal exchange of the boys, and a text summary Nate dictated to his teacher afterward. “Although Nate and Chiel view[ed] themselves as drawing, they are engaged in the complex negotiations described by many observers of children’s dramatic play” (p. 55). The students’ artmaking functioned as a vehicle for role-taking and dramatic play, scaffolding it in a way similar to the way props, costumes, or toys might. If artmaking can incite the same kind of imaginative role-taking as dramatic play, perhaps the types of artmaking which function that way may engender empathy the way Hoffman (2000), Feshbach (1975), and Strayer and Roberts (1989) suggested role-play can.

Feshbach et al. (1983) described a number of activities, which encourage different types of perspective and role-taking. One activity, called “Short and Tall” (p. 11), asks students to participate at a variety of centers (e.g. looking at mirrors and framed pictures hung at different heights, watering a plant on a high shelf etc.), sometimes while walking on their knees, and sometimes while wearing platform stilts, and discuss how the experiences were different from different points of view. An arts-based extension which might encourage more literal perspective-taking would be to ask students to take photographs of the classroom from different
perspectives – how a mouse would see the room, how a fifth-grader would see the room, how a kindergartener would see the room. This would require students to, through the viewfinder, literally adopt the perspectives of different entities of different sizes. The activity could be followed up by students later identifying or categorizing the photos by perspective and discussion of how they identified each, and describe how seeing the room in these different ways feels. Does seeing the room from some perspectives make students feel more powerful or capable? More intimidated? Looking at the “mouse perspective” photos, what actions might be more challenging, or more easy, for the mouse than for the students? What might be more challenging/easy for the teacher than for the students? The images produced in the project, and the ensuing discussion, would scaffold place-taking and allow students to approach a familiar space from an unfamiliar perspective – a perspective held by other potential visitors to the classroom.

Feshbach et al. (1983) also described a perspective-taking activity called “Step-by-Step Perspective” (pp. 24-25), which is aimed at older students, and consists of two phases. In one phase, students sit in a circle around a table, and objects are placed one by one on it, which they draw to the best of their ability. After each object is drawn, the students’ drawings are compared and the differences in perspective – the placement and overlapping of the objects – are contrasted. The second phase is a essentially a variant on Piaget’s “3 mountain” egocentrism test, where students sit on either side of a table with a still life, and try to draw the objects in the way their partner across the table sees them. An adaptation of this project for a kindergartener class might see students creating a “visual inventory” of the items they can see on a table which has a large, obstructing object in the middle, drawing the objects that are in their view, but without having to place them in space. The student’s inventories could be compared and contrasted to see
what items were missing from each perspective. The second phase, requiring more overt perspective-taking, would see paired students on either side of the table charged with creating their partner’s inventory. To ensure success (and mitigate the pitfalls of an art exercise which has a “correct” answer), students could communicate verbally with their partner or walk around to their partner’s side of the table.

Caselman (2007) described an activity called “What Would it Be Like” (p. 44) where students are asked to imagine the feelings of a goldfish, a flower, a hospital, and a pair of pants. The wide variety of objects selected suggests that a similar broad selection of art objects could be subject to such a discussion – What would it be like to be one of Matisse’s goldfish? What would it be like to be a Beverly Pepper sculpture? This type of inquiry could invoke imaginative place-taking in the student’s emotional engagement with the artwork in a way that pat questions such as “How does this make you feel?” may not. While this discussion activity doesn’t immediately and obviously suggest an artmaking extension, an art activity could be planned around the same sort of place-taking. Perhaps after a discussion of Impressionism and Expressionism, students could create an expressionist painting of an impressionist painting, imagining what the inner feelings of the immediately, naturalistically rendered impressionist figure are, and (re-)depicting that figure’s inner affect using the gesture and color of expressionism.

**Narrative as a Scaffold for More Complex Cognitive Empathy**

The majority of examples of role-playing and place-taking through art described above have a narrative element to them. Per Johnson (1993), narrative enables one to explore the consequences of decisions and commitments over time, using fiction as a laboratory to explore both the character and sentiments of other people, as well as the different ways one’s actions might affect others. Narratives mirror lived experience in their structure in a way nonfiction does.
not, and consequently allows imaginary social situations to play out in a way that is more concrete than abstract. “The power of fictional narrative to develop our moral sensitivity, our ability to make subtle discriminations, and our empathy for others, is thus the result of the narrative structure of our lives” (Johnson, 1993, p. 197).

The ability of narrative structure to express a situation over time may make the narrative aspects of some artforms particularly useful as a scaffold in the empathetic development of kindergarten students. In Hoffman’s (2000) developmental model of empathy, five and six-year-olds are transitioning from the onset of veridical empathy at age three (when children are first able to both locate the source of their empathetic distress in the other, and recognize that the other’s feelings are independent of their own) toward more complex forms of cognitive empathy in at ages six, seven, and beyond, which acknowledge “self and other as continuous persons with separate histories and identities” (Hoffman, 1979b, p. 8). This cognitive stage is when children can frame their experience of empathy outside of the other’s immediate situation, and recognize, for instance, that an other’s distress is part of a chronic pattern, eliciting greater empathy, or that an other’s joy is the result of their benefitting from an inequitable situation, limiting empathy with that joy. Perhaps narrative artforms, where actions and emotions are placed in the context of a situation that changes over time, could help kindergarten students frame their empathetic experience of the other’s condition in a broader temporal (and narrative) context.

Hoffman (1973) described an activity used with 3-8-year-old children in a 1971 study by Helene Borke that measured children’s empathetic response to a narrative. Borke read the children stories in which the main character might be perceived as happy, sad, afraid, or angry, and then gave the students blank faces to fill in with the appropriate expression. While this activity, conceived as an assessment of children’s empathetic ability, is rather prescriptive, the
fundamental conceit of an artistic response to an empathy-inducing narrative could be fruitful.

Hoffman (2000) also described a narrative activity which he conducted in a study of his own. The children were read a story in which a child cheats and wins a swimming race by swimming only partway and back, but upon his return wins the prize and is congratulated by his classmates. The children, older elementary students, were asked to complete the story, including the protagonist’s emotions and what happened next. Some subjects were asked to complete the story, including the protagonist’s emotions or anyone else’s and what happened next, and individuals in this group were more likely to acknowledge the emotions of the unmentioned “real” winner/victim. An adaptation of such an activity for an early childhood art environment could involve reading the students an illustrated, truncated story with an unresolved emotional or ethical quandary, and then prompting the students to complete the story with text and images, perhaps in a comic-style sequential narrative. Feshbach et al. (1983) described a similar set of activities called “Problem Stories” (p. 20), where students act out multiple conclusions to an unfinished story using puppets they have made themselves.

**Place-Taking and Consideration of the Audience in Artmaking**

Laurel H. Campbell and Deana McDonagh (2009), coming from an art education and industrial design background respectively, collaborated on a course of study for undergraduate industrial design students that was premised upon cultivating empathy to facilitate more thoughtful design of products for use by diverse or underrepresented populations. Their intent was to convey to students that

> navigating through this material landscape can become a significant challenge to individuals as they age, or if they live with physical disabilities. Students were encouraged, through this project, to find meaning in their existing and created material
landscapes to express personal meaning to others and to develop empathy, compassion, and shared understanding (Campbell & McDonagh, 2009, p. 593).

After experiencing a museum exhibit of traditional Hispanic altars/shrines, wherein it was emphasized that “[e]mpathy was key for understanding why the displays, and their arrangement in a particular context, were so important to their creators” (p. 597), students created their own personal shrines, as shadowboxes featuring elements of their personal material landscape. Reflecting on the activity, Campbell and McDonagh realized that, to better achieve the stated aims of the course, the project should have involved making a shrine about/for another person, perhaps someone from a statistically underrepresented or marginalized group, which “would involve communication between the student and another person to discover what is of value to that person” (p. 604).

Even outside of design practice, where the objects being made are intended for practical use by a recipient, the act of artmaking often must acknowledge the audience who will eventually be receiving the work of art. Martin Buber (1947/1965) remarked that “all art is from its origin essentially of the nature of dialogue. All music calls to an ear not the musician’s own, all sculpture to an eye not the sculptor’s, architecture in addition calls to the step as it walks in the building” (p. 25). In addition to providing opportunities for students to imaginatively take the place of figures represented in works of art, or peers experiencing the world from different perspectives, artmaking provides the opportunity for students to put themselves imaginatively in the place of the audience eventually experiencing the work.

As with the above discussion of narrative artwork and empathy, empathizing with the eventual audience/recipient of a work may be particularly well-suited to the transitional developmental stage at which kindergarten students find themselves. As they are progressing
toward a more complex form of cognitive empathy which accounts for experience beyond the immediate situation (Hoffman, 2000), the exercise of putting themselves in the place of another person experiencing the finished work at another time may be an appropriate task.

Such tasks could involve making artwork for a specific person. Caselman (2007) described a project in which students are read a brief story “that evokes a variety of feelings” (p. 44) (Caselman suggests The Ugly Duckling as an example) and then asked to write a letter to the character expressing their empathy with the character’s situation. Rather than writing a letter, perhaps students could create a meaningful object that they feel the character would want in its situation, or illustrate a card containing their message to the character. Perhaps the narrative could be art-historical, a biography of an artist who has lived a challenging life, such as Vincent Van Gogh, Friedl Dicker-Brandeis, or Hollis Sigler.

Other strategies for encouraging students to be mindful of their eventual audience could include involving them in the planning and hanging of an exhibition of their work, or having students create a piece of artwork for someone in their life.

**Conclusion**

Art education, by providing students a space for sensitive aesthetic attention to art objects, people, and their environment, as well as a space for imaginative (re-)construction of bodily and emotional states, can afford young students experiences that may cultivate both affective and cognitive dimensions of empathy. Beyond artmaking that encourages personal expression or emotional literacy, the art classroom can foster empathy in a more fundamental way by cultivating supple affect and thought. It can also erode those perceptual and psychological rigidities that impede veridical experience of the other’s condition. While this chapter has included some provisional suggestions for activities alongside the theoretical threads,
a more finalized implementation plan or curriculum lies outside the aims of this study. Such a project, however, could be a fruitful direction for future study to take. In the following chapter, I will conclude the study by reflecting on the conclusions drawn in the previous chapters, and evaluating potential future avenues for continued research.
Chapter 5 – Concluding Thoughts

Over the course of this study my aim has been to develop a fruitful conception of the relationship between the experience of empathy and the practice of art education in early childhood. To this end, I developed a workable model of the experience of empathy, drawing upon Hoffman’s (2000) developmental model of empathy, with its cognitive and affective components, Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) concept of “transitivism” (p. 135) in early childhood and his discussion of the young child’s increasing awareness that their vicarious empathetic experience is located in the other, and Gallese’s (2003a) discussion of the “shared manifold” (p. 525) between subjects, bolstered by kinesthetic mirror neurons. The resulting model featured an affective dimension, which is an involuntary bodily response to the other’s condition, and which exists from infancy, and a cognitive dimension, which develops over time, and becomes increasingly capable of projecting that vicarious felt experience onto the understood situation of the other.

Relating this conception of the experience of empathy to the experience of making and observing artworks drew upon Dewey’s (1934) distinction between aesthetic and artistic experience, the former being characterized by sensitive perception and the latter by imaginative production. I connected this twofold conception of the experience of art (which Dewey lamented the lack of a single, synthesizing term to describe) to the twofold model of empathy employed in the study – the sensitive unmediated perception of the aesthetic operating similarly to the affective dimension, and the imaginative cognition of the artistic bearing similarity to the cognitive dimension of empathy. I further articulated this connection by discussing Frenkel-Brunswik’s (1949) experimental examination of the connection between psychological and perceptual rigidity. I showed that passive, rigid perception (what Dewey (1934) would describe
aesthetically as “mere recognition” (p. 53)) correlates with rigid conceptions of other people, and I suggested that perceptual rigidity may impede affective empathy and that psychological rigidity may likewise impede cognitive empathy.

The exploration of this concept of rigidity provided a space for discussing how art education in early childhood may encourage empathy by mitigating rigidities. Greene’s (1995) contention that art education stimulates perception and imagination indicated that art experiences in school could address both perceptual and psychological rigidity and encourage both the affective and cognitive dimensions of empathy. General education curricula by Feshbach et al. (1983) and Caselman (2007), as well as work by art educators such as Jeffers (2009a, 2009b, 2010) and Gude (2012) provide some exemplars of how art experiences in early childhood could cultivate both the sensitive affect that encourages students to be aware of others’ experiences and the imaginative cognition that allows them to fully contextualize that vicariously felt experience in a more complex, possibly more veridical, way.

This theoretical exploration could provide a platform for various avenues of future research, and some findings may have more immediate use in art education practice.  

Findings

The dual conception of empathy, as an experience with both an affective and cognitive component afford a theoretical space in which both affective sensitivity and imaginative cognition each contribute, in their own way, to the child’s developing experience of others. This twofold model may be a useful conceptual tool for art teachers who see in their practice a need for increased emotional literacy and awareness in their students, but who don’t want to cede the conceptual and cognitive dimensions of their subject in favor of a purely creative-self-expression.

27 Such as early childhood educators described by Whitted (2010), Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox (2000), and Arnold, McWilliams, & Arnold (1998), who cite “lack [of] some or all of the needed social and emotional competencies necessary for school success” (Whitted, 2010, p. 10) as a significant challenge.
approach. Developing higher-order cognition, such as forms of perspective-taking or abstraction of thoughts outside of the immediate situation, in artmaking can encourage modes of thinking that are useful for the higher-order modes of cognitive empathy that kindergarten-aged students are working toward (Hoffman, 2000). These art experiences, even without an explicit socio-emotional component, could function as a source domain for analogy and metaphor in discussions of empathy and interpersonal relation.

Just as the dual nature of empathy in this model can give instructors ways to foster empathy beyond exploring traditionally emotional and expressive artforms, the link between perceptual and psychological rigidity, and their mutual tamping-down of empathy, can give teachers an avenue to create space for empathetic experience by using art to thoughtfully question or dismantle habituated thinking. For instance, visual culture approaches to art education, can affectively sensitize students to sensations rendered banal by pop-cultural ubiquity, and cognitively critique the way pop-culture shapes the way we relate with and categorize other people. Modern and contemporary artforms, which often exhibit formal and/or conceptual ambiguity, can likewise be explored in the art classroom, capitalizing on that ambiguity to erode the rigid perceptions and conceptions that may hinder empathy, without necessarily explicitly addressing it. By defying students’ habituated perception and conventional categories of thought, by challenging students to engage with unconventional, and often unclear, new affective experiences, and by challenging students to formulate new categories, connections and metaphors, contemporary arts engagement can foster the supple affect and cognition that encourage affective and cognitive empathy. The model of empathy explored in this study affords space for art education practice to contribute to factors amenable to social feeling and cognition without relegating itself to Romantic or shallow “touchy-feely” exercises – or without restricting
itself to those thoughtful, effective self-expression exercises which, nonetheless don’t, by themselves, engage with the breadth of ideas and practices in contemporary art.

Suggestions for Further Research

Practical Application

While there are concepts explored in this study which could have relevance in art education practice, the theoretical nature of this investigation has produced a largely academic, conceptual body of knowledge that has not yet been practically applied, or epistemically scrutinized, in the classroom. One probable extension of this research would be the development of an early childhood curriculum based on the ideas and principles explored in this study, and the experimental testing of this curriculum’s efficacy in an art education classroom. Feshbach et al. (1983) produced their Learning to Care general education curriculum as a similar practical extension of prior research, developing practices and projects from their earlier experimental investigations, and then subjecting that developed practice to its own experimental study in the classroom to assess its efficacy and revise it if need be. The hypothetical art education curriculum could be an elaboration upon the activities discussed in chapter 4, and the hypothetical experiment could use pre- and post-tests for affective and cognitive empathetic experience by assessing children’s verbal and nonverbal responses to stories, pictures, or short films (as in experiments described by Hoffman (1973, 2000), Fabes et al. (1990), and Feshbach and Roe (1968)). Such tests could be derived from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Konrath et

28 In addition to fleshing out and making practicable the lessons generally outlined in this study, a comprehensive curriculum for applying this research should attend carefully to the language used by the teacher to discuss affective experience, going beyond surface inquiries such as “How does it make you feel?” Research could include extant social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula for this age group, which include suggestions for verbal scaffolding prompts, and illustrative vignettes of verbal exchanges encouraging or expressing empathy, such as the Strong Start Pre-K curriculum evaluated in Gunter, Caldarella, Korth and Young’s (2012) study, or the High Scope SEL curriculum (Epstein, 2012).
al., 2011) and/or the Basic Empathy Scale (Albiero, P, Matricardi, G., Speltri, D., & Toso, D., 2009).

**Extending the Theoretical Discussion to Include Prosocial Action**

While this study has focused on the **experience** of empathy and its relation to art education, using Martin Hoffman’s (1975, 1977, 1979b, 2000) affective/cognitive distinction to articulate that experience, Hoffman’s model of empathy also included a third component beyond the affective and cognitive: the **motivational**. Hoffman’s (1977) motivational component is concerned with “the relation between empathic distress and prosocial action” (p. 4), and further research on the subject of empathy and art education could extend to include an exploration of whether and how prosocial action precipitates from empathetic experience, and what role aesthetics and artmaking might play in generating these active responses.

This theoretical extension could also be a component of the practical/experimental extension described above. In addition to measuring students’ affective and cognitive empathy through verbal and nonverbal responses to various emotionally-charged stimuli, the pre- and post-tests examining the efficacy of a proposed curriculum could assess the students’ tendencies towards prosocial behavior before and after the intervention. This data could be collected by interview, as in similar studies by Strayer and Roberts (1989), or through observation and recording of students’ responses to (constructed or in-class) situations, like the detailed observations described by Vreeke (2003).

**Exploration of Specific Practices in Artmaking**

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29 Works cited elsewhere in this study that explore the potential causal relationship between empathy and prosocial action include Hoffman (1977, 2000), Strayer and Roberts (1989), Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow (1990), Feshbach (1975), and Vreeke and Van Der Mark (2003).
This study discussed art education generally, but more specific explorations could tease out finer connections between specific art practices and the cultivation of the kinds of thought and sensitivity conducive to experiences of empathy.

New media art education is a personal research interest of mine, and, as most of the literature I encountered drew upon traditional media forms (e.g. Merleau-Ponty’s (2001/2010) discussion of perspective in drawing and painting, Alvarez’s (2010) encounters with sculptures in the museum setting, or the art projects in Feshbach et al.’s(1983) and Caselman’s (2007) curricula), extending this inquiry into new media arts practice could address a gap in the literature. New media artist David Rokeby (1996) and interaction designer Chris Crawford (2003) have both characterized the audience’s participation with interactive artwork in terms of dialogue, Crawford going so far as to delineate the essential aesthetic components of interactive art metaphorically as listening, speaking, and thinking. Rather than an interaction between a person and object, interactive artwork in some ways embodies an asynchronous interaction between audience and artist – Crawford (2003) asserted that “[t]he person using your software is interacting with you, not the computer” (p. 114). Just as Campbell and McDonagh (2009) noted the role of empathy in designing objects to be used by others, perhaps there are empathetic ramifications to the kind of mindfulness artists must have when creating work that the audience will interact with.

In addition to focusing on traditional media, much of the literature I encountered focused on figurative imagery, both in the types of eliciting materials used in experiments such as photos and filmstrips (e.g. Fabes et al. (1990); Goldstein & Winner, 2012; Hoffman, 2000), and the artwork engaged with by students (e.g. Alvarez, 2010; Jeffers, 2010; Robinson, 2007). Non-objective work, and its potential relation to empathy within art education, was not explicitly
discussed in my exploration of the literature. Figurative artwork presents itself as an obvious focus for discussions of empathy, as the viewer readily reads emotions from the figures’ postural schemata. Worringer (1908/1963), with his dialectic between empathy and abstraction, asserted categorically that abstract artwork indicated a movement away from aesthetic empathy. However, a closer examination and problematization of these assumptions may be fruitful, especially in light of Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) and Frenkel-Brunswik’s (1949) discussions of ambiguous imagery and its opposition to perceptual rigidity, and Freedberg and Gallese’s (2007) discussion of gestural traces in non-objective artwork eliciting kinesthetic affective responses.

**Conclusion**

In an increasingly connected, and consequently increasingly diverse, global culture (Campbell & McDonagh, 2009; Jeffers, 2009b), encouraging empathy through the supple and versatile thinking and feeling found in the arts may facilitate interpersonal understanding and shared experience across cultural boundaries that typically impede empathy (Feshbach, 1975; Hoffman, 1979c). Beyond the benefit of increased interpersonal understanding, an awareness of empathy and how it works may foster other kinds of insight. Per Gallese (2003a), understanding one’s relation to the other, and the nature of that relation, not only “capture[s] an essential trait of the human mind – its social character – but also, and even more importantly, …provide[s] a greater opportunity to understand how the individual mind develops and works” (p. 517). Acknowledging that the human mind doesn’t exist or grow in a “solipsistic, monadic” (p. 517) way, an understanding of how one person shares another’s experience through empathy may help not just in encouraging empathy in students, but in understanding how each individual student learns and develops through this faculty. Dewey (1908/1996) remarked that empathy is “the tool, par excellence, for resolving a complex situation” (p. 130). Perhaps seeking ways to encourage
empathy in students will equip them not only to be more sensitive to the affective states of others, but also to grasp, and participate in, more complex social situations with greater acuity.

In experimental studies, empathy has also been shown to have a negative correlation with aggression and disruptive disorders in students (Feshbach, 1975; Strayer & Roberts, 1989). In light of early childhood educators’ reporting of socio-emotional deficits as one of their greatest challenges (Whitted, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox, 2000; Arnold, McWilliams, & Arnold, 1998), looking specifically at ways to foster more complex interpersonal awareness in this age group, with its particular cognitive and social skillset, could address a pressing need. “Ill-equipped with the skills to deal with children’s disruptive, aggressive, oppositional, and noncompliant behavior, educators often respond to these children with punitive disciplinary measures that further perpetuate the problem” (Whitted, 2010, p. 10). Perhaps providing theoretical equipment of increased instruction and awareness of empathy would not only allow teachers to better “deal with” the strongly felt emotions of some students, but may help students better understand their peers, and their own emotions, and address and reduce the sort of aggression that is deleterious to the school and social experience of both teachers and students.

These potential points of relevance and application are still in the realm of “may” and “perhaps” – it was beyond the focus of this study to address the question of instrumental application of this theory and its effects in the classroom. But for art educators whose teaching experience, or encounters with other literature in the field, have left them convinced of, or interested in, the value of encouraging empathy in students, this theoretical framework could serve as a foundation for the development of practice.
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