



Curriculum, Aesthetics, and Social Justice: From the Common to the Exceptional

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Abstract: The unique capacity of aesthetic methods to provoke a variety of consequential educational outcomes has attracted considerable scholarship. Less developed, however, is an exploration of teacher perspectives and implementation of six aesthetic themes of teaching: connections, risk, imagination, sensory, perceptual, active engagement (CRISPA). Using an educational criticism and connoisseurship inquiry method, we asked two questions: 1) What are the intentions and practices of a high school teacher as he teaches English? 2) What are the intentions and practices of the same teacher as he teaches English incorporating CRISPA? We present an analysis that spotlights uncovered themes observed from applying CRISPA to teaching literature. We discuss the connection between CRISPA and the complementary curriculum; the capacity of CRISPA to enhance curriculum development and implementation; and add to literature that links aesthetics to social justice pedagogy. We include implications for educators seeking to enhance their practices.

Keywords: *curriculum, aesthetics, social justice, complementary curriculum*

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Introduction

In moments where the objectives of education are convoluted by standardization, corporate interests, and political polarization, it is essential that researchers and practitioners challenge high-stakes and high-stress environments with pedagogical practices that honor educators' present realities and promote deep engagement and learning. Aesthetic approaches to education have been supported by a number of influential scholars who emphasized perceptive, creative, and sensorial aspects as vehicles for engaged learning experiences for both teachers and students (Barone, 2000;

Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1972, 2005, 2017; Girod & Wong, 2002; Greene, 1988, 1995, 2001; Huebner, 1962; Meng & Uhrmacher, 2017; Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2018; Sinclair, 2009; Uhrmacher, 2009; Uhrmacher et al., 2016). Less developed, however, is an exploration of the impact of aesthetically derived pedagogical approaches and their relationship to teacher beliefs and practices, particularly at the secondary level. One such pedagogical approach is a perceptual mode of teaching, which emphasizes the use of the senses as both a source of knowledge and more pragmatically as an aesthetically informed heuristic for lesson planning and teaching (Uhrmacher et al., 2013). Our study is concerned with the aesthetic themes—a research-based method of enacting a perceptual orientation to teaching (Uhrmacher, 2009). We employed educational criticism and connoisseurship (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017), an arts-based approach grounded within the interpretive paradigm to explore and understand the impact of the intentional incorporation of six aesthetic themes on the curricular and instructional experiences of a high school English teacher. Our research was designed to address the present gap in the extant literature regarding aesthetically-informed methods of teaching—specifically, how this pedagogical approach influences teacher beliefs and practices. To achieve these objectives, we asked two questions: 1) What are the intentions and practices of a secondary teacher as he teaches English, and 2) What are the intentions and practices of a teacher as he teaches English using the aesthetic themes? In this essay, we analyze and synthesize the role of six aesthetic themes in supporting a high school teacher’s personal beliefs and his intentions for his students. We conclude by outlining implications for educators and the larger field.

Approaches to Education

Analyses of modes of teaching have historically focused on behavioristic (Hunter, 2004; Taba, 1962; Taba, 1962; Hunter, 2004; Tyler, 1949), or more recently, constructivist (Bruner, 1966, 1977; Marzano et al., 2001; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) frameworks. Rooted largely in John Dewey’s (1934) ideas about art and experiences, aesthetic approaches to education have been theorized and implemented to invite innovative alternatives to traditional frameworks. Dewey (1934) distinguishes ordinary experience from aesthetic experience, emphasizing incoherence, indistinction, and distraction in the former and unity, satisfaction, and completeness in the latter. More contemporary scholars have applied Dewey’s ideas to aesthetic approaches in the classroom. For example, Eisner (1994) expands on Dewey’s emphasis of sensory stimulus, defending that “one of the major aims of education is the development of multiple forms of literacy,” which are fostered through, “a variety of forms of representation that humans use to represent the contents of their consciousness” (p. X). Maxine Greene (2001) describes aesthetic experience as “concerned about perception, sensation, imagination, and how they relate to knowing, understanding, and feeling about the world” (p. 5). Conrad et al. (2015) portray aesthetic experience as “being fully present and riveted in the moment, when one’s senses are heightened, and when one might describe his or her experience as having been ‘consummated’ or fully complete” (p. 5). Aesthetic approaches to education include the role of perception, imagination, and creativity—often via artistic means—in developing, implementing, and experiencing aesthetic curriculum and instruction for teachers and their students.

Several studies have specifically explored aesthetic teaching practices including the perceptual (Uhrmacher et al., 2013), and deep aesthetic engagement (Uhrmacher et al., 2016). Other scholarship has applied qualities of aesthetic education within specific content areas such as science and math. As one example, Mark Girod and David Wong (2002) explored aesthetic experience in a fourth-grade science classroom, emphasizing qualities of anticipation and

imagination. Nathalie Sinclair's (2009) work called for a conception of aesthetic awareness in mathematics as a "connective force" (p. 45), arguing that "school mathematics offers few opportunities for the kind of mathematical inquiry described by Dewey" (p. 52). Mark Faust (2001) conjoined literary theory with aesthetic education and argued that the experience of reading can be considered an 'in-the-moment' aesthetic process that has the potential for personal transformation for the reader. This scholarship, to which the present study aligns, provides evidence that aesthetic approaches to education can exist across a variety of conceptual and practical contexts. The impact of aesthetically designed curricula within the pragmatic realm of the secondary classroom, however, remains an area for further exploration.

The Aesthetic Themes of Education: CRISPA

Uhrmacher (2009) conceptualized a pragmatic approach to engaged learning distilled from both John Dewey's (1934) theories on art and aesthetic experience and from empirical research with teaching artists and educators at the Aesthetic Education Institute of Colorado. From this research, Uhrmacher delineated six aesthetic themes, known by the acronym CRISPA, that educators and others may draw on to cultivate aesthetically engaged learning experiences: connections, risk-taking, imagination, sensory experience, perceptivity, and active engagement. Uhrmacher maintained that although teachers seeking aesthetically engaged learning experiences for their students should strive to incorporate as many of the themes as possible, the core themes of connections, sensory experience, and active engagement are foundational. The first core theme, connections, is characterized by relationships between a person and their environment (Uhrmacher, 2009). How people actively engage with ideas, literature, media, or other materials in a learning environment (Conrad et al., 2015) can manifest through intellectual, emotional, sensorial, communicative (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1991), or social connections (Conrad et al., 2015). Teachers who can facilitate these various types of interactions encourage genuine and elongated engagement in the classroom.

The second foundational element, sensory experience, refers to the use of one's senses to experience an object or place. A sensory-rich learning environment fosters aesthetic experiences by inviting students to interact with and investigate subtle qualities in objects and places (Conrad et al., 2015). Active engagement, the third foundational element, necessitates student agency and active participation in the learning process (Conrad et al., 2015). Teachers who collaborate with students and integrate physical activity, choices, and/or personal meaning can cultivate a learning environment abundant in meaningful learning experiences.

Conrad et al. (2015) describe the concept of imagination in CRISPA as concerned with the manipulation of qualities or ideas:

Imagination may be intuitive, in which a person has a sudden insight; fanciful, in which a person combines unexpected elements such as with a dancing tree; interactive, in which a person works with materials to yield a product; or mimetic, in which a person mirrors or mimics the creative work of another. (p. 5)

Risk-taking refers to opportunities for students to engage in novelty—"a venture into the unknown" (Uhrmacher, 2009, p. 624). Research focused on risk-taking suggests that these experiences may increase students' cognitive development, as well as their creativity, self-motivation, and student interest in subject matter, such as science (Uhrmacher & Bunn, 2011).

The next component, perceptivity, relates to sensory experiences in that a student develops a more nuanced understanding of an object's particular qualities or context through their senses.

This involves closely examining subtle qualities that may normally go unnoticed in order to see or re-see for the sake of learning something new (Conrad et al., 2015). Creating an environment that invites students to remain open to new possibilities and “re-seeing” increases the potential for meaningful and aesthetically engaged learning experiences.

In contemporary literature, scholars examining the aesthetic themes have theoretically and practically associated this approach with curriculum disruption (Conrad et al., 2015), ecological educational experience (Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2018), perceptual lesson planning (Uhrmacher, et al., 2013), and a tool to analyze Chinese pedagogical methods such as Chan teaching (Meng & Uhrmacher, 2014, 2017). Emphasizing that aesthetic experiences are fundamentally sensorial, connective, and engaging, and that incorporating the aesthetic themes can engender enlivened classroom experiences, Uhrmacher (2009) noted several potential outcomes of aesthetically engaged learning: an increase in student satisfaction and joy, long-term memory, perceptual knowledge, and personal creativity and meaning-making.

This study aims to extend previous research on aesthetically oriented modes of teaching through an analysis of a teacher’s pedagogical choices and actions, both with and without the incorporation of aesthetic themes, in his lesson planning and classroom teaching.

Methods

Our study pursued two questions:

- 1) What are the intentions and practices of a secondary teacher as he teaches English?
- 2) What are the intentions and practices of a teacher as he teaches English using the aesthetic themes?

To answer our research questions, we employed educational criticism and connoisseurship (Eisner, 2017), an empirical, qualitative approach derived from the interpretive paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Similar to other qualitative approaches, educational connoisseurship and criticism seeks to discern and express the nuanced meanings of the educational situation through thick description (Geertz, 1973) and critical analysis of patterns derived from multiple lines of evidence, including in-depth observation, interviews, and artifacts. Although connoisseurship implies a certain degree of skilled knowledge, in this particular sense, it also speaks to the ability of the researcher, or critic, to seek and attend to the often subtle and unexpected qualities of the educational environment, including curriculum, pedagogy, and/or structure. While connoisseurship denotes the appreciation of qualities, criticism aims to disclose those qualities in a public form (Eisner, 2017). Widely aligned with aesthetics and the arts (Conrad et al., 2015), the structure of educational criticism and connoisseurship is organized according to four interrelated elements: description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics. The goal of description is to portray a vivid account that will “enable readers to get a feel for the place or process and, where possible and appropriate, for the experience of those who occupy the situation” (Eisner, 2017, p. 89). Interpretation involves explicating description by illuminating meaning, exploring consequences, and providing a discussion of the reasons for educational events. In short, description and interpretation within an educational criticism work simultaneously to enable vicarious participation (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Evaluation accounts for the major function of educational connoisseurship and criticism—to improve the process of education (Eisner, 2002)—by providing a vital link between interpretation and appraising the educational significance of the

specific educational context being studied (Eisner, 2017). Thematics allows for the generalization of findings that may extend beyond immediate settings and participants:

Educational critics provide the reader with an understanding of the major themes that run through the educational matters being studied. In turn, these themes provide the reader with ideas or guides for anticipating what may be found in other places. (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 3)

Taken together, the dimensions of description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics enable the educational critic to “focus on the perception of qualities, interpreting their significance, and appraising their value, all toward educational ends. In short, the educational critic helps others see and understand what may otherwise go unnoticed” (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 22).

Theoretical Framework

We paired the methods from educational criticism and connoisseurship with the theoretical lens of the instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 25). The instructional arc delineates three aspects of the curriculum: the intended (the planned for and anticipated); the operational (what actually happens), and the received (what students “take away” or experience). The instructional arc informed the entirety of the study from inception to analysis.

Site of Study and Participants

Participants included Mr. Marlin, a thirty-one-year-old White male high school English teacher, and his seventeen 12th-grade students from his Advanced Placement¹ (AP) English Literature course at an urban, independent high school in the western United States. In addition to observing Mr. Marlin’s students, we collected survey data from eight students and conducted an in-depth, semi-structured interview with one student. However, these data are limited and are beyond the scope of this particular article. Mr. Marlin was selected to participate in this study due to his prior training and experience using the aesthetic themes. In particular, we were interested in the intended and operational (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 25) aspects of the curriculum—what is planned by the teacher as well as what is actually enacted in the classroom. Informed consent was secured from all participants. Our role as researchers was informed by several perspectives. Although both researchers had prior familiarity with the aesthetic themes, we were not acquainted with the teacher participant prior to the study. Further, our perspectives as public and private school educators with over 15 years of combined teaching experience were managed to the extent possible so as not to interfere with the objectives of the study. Finally, we engaged our reflexivity throughout data collection and analysis through written personal introspections and several mutual debriefing sessions (Finlay, 2002).

Research Design

We investigated Mr. Marlin’s intended and operational curricula over four weeks through three data sources: interviews, in-person classroom observations, and artifacts. We began by

¹ The Advanced Placement Program offers 37 high school courses across 22 subject areas, which are standardized by an end-of-year exam. The exam is scored on a scale of 1–5 with many US colleges and universities awarding course credit for scores above 3 and often acknowledging students who have done AP coursework as having pursued greater academic challenges (Schneider, 2009).

interviewing Mr. Marlin before he taught a unit—a novel study of *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck—seeking to reveal answers to our first research question regarding his intentions and practices. During this initial interview, we asked the following questions:

What are your intentions for your students?

What personal beliefs, if any, play a role in these intentions?

Do your personal beliefs affect your practice? If so, in what ways?

Do you make your intentions clear to your students? If so, how do they respond?

To answer our second research question, we intensively observed Mr. Marlin teach the AP English curriculum for approximately four weeks, both in tandem and separately, using the same observation protocol. This protocol (see Appendix) was specifically designed to capture the various elements of the aesthetic themes, the quality and form of the content being taught, the incentives employed by Mr. Marlin, and the quality and form of student engagement. During the first two-week observation period, Mr. Marlin taught a traditional AP English Literature curriculum, and during the second period, he intentionally incorporated the aesthetic themes into his lesson planning and teaching. We conducted a concluding interview with Mr. Marlin where we asked him to reflect on his experiences both with and without the intentional incorporation of the aesthetic themes through the following questions:

Please tell me about your experience planning and teaching using the aesthetic themes (CRISPA).

In what ways, if any, did CRISPA influence your intentions and practices?

What metaphor would capture your CRISPA-influenced vs. non-CRISPA-influenced lesson planning?

We collected observational and survey data from eight students and interview data from one of those eight students in an effort to investigate the received curriculum, however those data are addressed in a separate article.

Consistent with a qualitative paradigm, observational and interview data were iteratively analyzed for emergent themes throughout the process of data collection and analysis. Consistent with educational criticism and connoisseurship methods for analysis, data were initially annotated (an arts-based perspective analogous to ‘coded;’ see Uhrmacher et al., 2017) for emergent themes independently by each researcher and subsequently in tandem for consensus. Our overall strategy was to analyze these data holistically, with an eye toward emergent relationships grounded in the data that perceptively illuminated relevant features within this particular context (Uhrmacher, Moroye, & Flinders, 2017). These emergent relationships and subtle qualities were advanced toward thematic categories and frameworks which served to inform our interpretations and evaluations. Additionally, we employed member-reflecting (Tracy, 2010) during our concluding interview with Mr. Marlin, which is defined as “sharing and dialoguing with participants about the study’s findings and providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation, and even collaboration” (p. 844).

Findings

The primary objective of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of one teacher’s intentions and practices with a specific interest in the potential impact of six aesthetic themes (CRISPA) on his curriculum and instruction. Three salient findings emerged from our interpretive analysis of Mr. Marlin’s intentions and practices, both as he taught using a more traditional

pedagogical approach and also by implementing CRISPA. First, Mr. Marlin possesses profound beliefs in developing his students' orientations towards social justice and he views literature as the vehicle through which he can accomplish this. Second, due to these personal beliefs, professional tensions exist as Mr. Marlin encounters obligations to teach through more traditional methods that do not explicitly emphasize social justice. Third, incorporating the CRISPA elements appears to enhance the pedagogical expression of Mr. Marlin's embedded social justice beliefs. In the following section, we contextualize these findings by narrating descriptive vignettes of Mr. Marlin's beliefs and classroom practices. We then synthesize how incorporating the six aesthetic themes enhanced Mr. Marlin's curricular and pedagogical strategies. We conclude with the contributions of our research to the larger field, including key points of departure for educators who desire to explicitly surface more meaningful aspects of their own beliefs and classroom practices through the incorporation of the aesthetic themes.

Prioritizing Social Justice

If you're going to read literature, it should have a purpose toward ends that you believe in, and justice and social justice are ends that I want to bring about to my students. I think the big question of the course is what power does literature have? What can it do for us in our lives that is relevant to helping us think about the world today? (Mr. Marlin)

As part of the specific design for this inquiry, Mr. Marlin adopted two different pedagogical approaches: a traditional program guided by the a priori objectives of the AP Literature curriculum and a more aesthetically centered approach informed by the six elements of CRISPA. Our interview and observational data of the different approaches revealed evidence of a seemingly inextricable intent to infuse themes of social justice into the AP format. In terms of the intentional curriculum, the quote at the beginning of this section demonstrates Mr. Marlin's priority of embedding social justice themes into his literature curriculum to help his students "think about the world today." He makes content choices that differ from his colleagues with the "purpose toward ends" that he believes in, contending later that conventional AP English curriculum often fails to emphasize "bigger more important questions" which has the potential to damage students' sense of satisfaction by "dissecting every line and word and phrase." He chose literary works as "vehicles" that can both address structural inequalities and create opportunities for students to "apply [them] to their own lives."

While Mr. Marlin emphasizes social justice themes in his intentional curriculum, he concurrently acknowledges the importance of preparing the students to succeed on the AP exam and expressed sincere intentions to do so. He spoke about different techniques he would employ, many of which he learned by attending a national AP "boot camp" for AP Literature teachers. He included SPOTTTS literary analysis, poetry analysis, and even a review of previously submitted AP essays in his lesson plans. These lessons, along with his participation in the extensive training, demonstrate an intention and commitment to guide the students to succeed on the AP exam.

Beyond the intentional curriculum, Mr. Marlin's operational curriculum—what we observed in the classroom—aligned with his intentions to prepare students for successful performance on the end-of-year AP exam. However, Mr. Marlin found ways to simultaneously prioritize themes of social justice as he implemented his daily lessons. The scenario below portrays Mr. Marlin's multitasking style, where he ensures that the students are engaging in an analysis of literary symbolism, while also attending to his social justice priorities.

“How do these characters interact with the world?” Mr. Marlin asks the class as he paces alongside the brick walls in the back of the room. “What does this say about Steinbeck’s view of women?” The space fills with examples, anecdotes, and brave statements shared between peers regarding the depiction of women in the text. One student imitates her grandmother; shaking her index finger, “...it’s like we need two strong men around here!” A male classmate shares his perception with a different group, “The man here is incredibly stereotypical, don’t you think?”

“What is the symbolism of the chrysanthemums?” Mr. Marlin poses after bringing the discussion back to the whole group. Youthful voices embark on a short, fluid discussion of femininity, societal expectations, and gender roles. What does this story and our novel say about Steinbeck? Was he a feminist? Conservative? How do you know? Mr. Marlin looks at the clock and abruptly shifts to reminding the class about upcoming assignments while the students rustle with their belongings and head out the door.

Mr. Marlin made curricular choices and actions, such as reading *Chrysanthemums*—a short story by Steinbeck with deep symbolism regarding femininity and a woman’s identity—to explore the literary concept of symbolism. Hence, while students “dissected” the text, they also engaged with social justice topics.

Personal Tensions and Professional Diversions

Mr. Marlin’s creed imbues his intentional and operational curricula with social justice, although not without a sense of conflict. Although he is acutely sensitive to the fact that he must prepare his students for the AP exam in the Spring, he worries about the more lasting implications of their learning experiences: Mr. Marlin elucidates conflicts around his implementation of the AP curricula and reveals that infusing justice themes into his lessons offers a way to navigate and resolve these tensions. “It’s a conflict that I’ve not had to negotiate previously... Do we talk about choices that authors make with respect to syntax or symbolism? Yeah, but they’re secondary, I would argue, significantly, to the larger themes that we’re trying to get at.” The following vignette depicts his seamless negotiation of AP needs and social justice priorities in his operational curriculum.

‘What is the role of the individual in confronting injustice?’ is written in maroon on the long whiteboard that stretches the entire width of the room. Seventeen students sit at long wooden tables arranged in a large rectangle, heads peeking over the top of their Macbooks, their spiral notebooks open, hands furiously writing. Mr. Marlin darts toward the board and draws three vertical lines down the front, separating it into sections. He calls for volunteers. One group of students congregates near the whiteboard while a second group moves to the hall to work on two additional whiteboards that are screwed into the burnt green wall.

Temporarily distanced from the sensitive ears of Mr. Marlin, a tall, brown-haired boy quips sarcastically: “The injustice was that this book was 450 pages.” A few students giggle but refocus quickly. With dry-erase markers in hand, students quickly begin answering the question by drawing out their ideas on the role of the individual in confronting injustice. One student draws stick figures with dialogue bubbles while another watches. Another group is carefully drawing arrows connecting large boxes. After fifteen minutes, students are reconvened in the

classroom and Mr. Marlin asks them to reflect on and share their drawings with the rest of the class.

“The role of the individual is to create power for the masses,” a girl responds astutely, pointing to the drawing in front of her. “One thing I noticed in all of our drawings is that they’re showing action, and I think that’s something we need more of,” gestures a boy with shaggy black hair. A tall boy in a grey hoodie resolutely declares, “I don’t think at this time we can have any faith in our elected leaders. It’s up to US.” Another girl chimes in: “I personally have faith that our government is founded on principles we all can believe in. If we come together and protest or write letters, we can create change.”

Mr. Marlin deftly moves to turn on the projector where “The Phalanx Theory” is showing on a slide. He elaborates on notions of groupthink as a student interjects her thoughts on the Women’s March and other rallies happening across the nation. “How do we see this play out in *The Grapes of Wrath*?” Mr. Marlin asks. “Here’s a counter to the Phalanx Theory,” he says, intensely darting behind the rectangular tables as he distributes excerpted copies of Steinbeck’s *The Vigilante*.

The scene depicts the class in action, using different modes of expression (drawing, writing, talking) to communicate their ideas regarding a theme from their novel study. The students are able to connect the novel to their lives and the current context, and then they artistically link those connections back to another piece of writing. Their abilities to analyze the texts in profound ways is evident, all the while they are grappling with large themes pervading the world around them.

After observations were completed, Mr. Marlin confirmed his belief in the centrality of social justice in the curriculum. He describes his responsibility to teach through a lens of social justice in order to “...help students understand their place in the world and their privilege in the world and how it relates to their identity— race, wealth, and gender.” Beyond pedagogical choices, it appears that Mr. Marlin possesses a sense of moral and social obligation that resides at the core of his perspective about what is needed to make the world a better place. The conflict he experiences may never be completely resolved, but by diverging from the AP curriculum just enough, Mr. Marlin tries to meet the expectations of the students, who want to pass the AP exam, while simultaneously developing knowledge and skills around large issues of justice that they are bound to encounter long after the national exam in the spring.

Apples and Cherries: The Fruit of Aesthetics

During our investigation of Mr. Marlin’s intended and operational curricula, we observed his acute beliefs in social justice come alive. Unexpectedly, we witnessed an intensified manifestation of these beliefs when he deliberately incorporated CRISPA into his lessons, as compared to when he was teaching with a more didactic and heavily prescribed AP curriculum. The vignette below depicts an intricate entanglement of CRISPA and social justice within the operational curriculum:

Students trickle into the classroom on a glorious fall morning, sunshine gleaming through the south-facing windows, illuminating the time-worn grains of the heavy wooden tables. “Did you get a haircut Marl?” asks a tall dark-haired girl after noticing the recent trimming. “Is that CRISPA?” she teases. Mr. Marlin and the

other students break out in laughter in response to her cleverness. He composes himself and instructs the class. “Please write the five senses in your notebooks and then circle one of them.” The students write swiftly in their spiral notebooks.

Mr. Marlin takes four bright green apples and one equally vibrant green pear out of a brown paper sack and places them on the rectangular table in front of him. He asks the students who circled taste and smell to close their eyes. “If you chose sight, describe what you see with as much detail as you can.” The students with their eyes closed suppress giggles as they explore the items with the sense they selected. Mr. Marlin asks students to describe their experiences through the sense they have chosen. “What did you see? Who got to eat? What did you hear?” He jots their comments on the whiteboard and then directs them to open their books to page 340 of *Grapes of Wrath*.

“So... we’ve just continued this scene,” Mr. Marlin says. “I want you to look at all the sensory detail Steinbeck provides. Which senses are coming to life? How do authors create meaning?” Two boys sitting side-by-side identify “the scent of decay” and eagerly take note of it. A few minutes pass before Mr. Marlin asks, “Do we have any examples?” A student directs us to a passage describing fruit and furthers the classroom dialogue regarding the power of sensory details to foreshadow an underlying feeling of despair that all of the fruits are going to rot. The class calmly transitions into a daily routine of following along as one student summarizes the previous night’s reading assignment. As part of the task, the student is expected to send Mr. Marlin some sort of connection they made to that chapter.

The students demonstrate creativity with this task, often presenting newspaper articles, historical pictures, or popular songs. This morning an image of beautifully ripe, red cherries is projected on the whiteboard as the student narrates the report of farmers dumping out over 30 million pounds of ripe cherries. Surprised, the students begin debating the rationale of these actions and attempt to make sense of the situation, which Mr. Marlin seamlessly connects with another digital article. This one reports how a popular clothing brand instructed employees to tear holes in and throw out clothing that was not sold. “Why would anyone do this?” Mr. Marlin asks.

The discussion on literary uses of senses effortlessly transforms into a heated examination of the morality of wasting products for profit. “It’s just greedy,” remarks one student. “They’re just protecting their company,” replies another. “Would you have given away the cherries?” Mr. Marlin poses to the class. An array of fervent standpoints zooms around the room, ranging from a business owner mindset to an altruistic stance of giving to those in need regardless of profits.

In this example, Mr. Marlin leverages the six aesthetic themes of CRISPA— connections, risk, sensory experience, perceptivity, active engagement, and imagination— to propel his students to think differently about objects they are familiar with in order to flavor the recognizable with a sense of freshness. First, he orchestrates a sensory experience with the apples and pear that enables students to attend to more subtle qualities of the familiar fruits and enhance their perception of these familiar fruits in a new way. Next, he connects these experiences directly to the text, prompting students to invoke their imaginations to engender new meanings from Steinbeck’s intentions. Finally, Mr. Marlin creates conditions for active engagement by encouraging his

students as they delve into an ethics-centered debate of industrial food and material waste practices.

By inviting students to use their senses to understand literary content, Mr. Marlin creates aesthetically derived conditions that enable them to explore critical perspectives in ways they had not considered previously. Mr. Marlin later admitted that he was a bit nervous about this lesson, as he had never incorporated this particular experience for his students. Likewise, the students also appeared skeptical in the beginning, suggesting that both the teacher and the students took risks in engaging in this experience. The lesson concluded with meaningful conversations that represented students' complex contemplations surrounding sensory experiences, literature, and ethical industrial practices. CRISPA afforded Mr. Marlin the opportunity to create a dynamic learning experience that successfully attended to more traditional AP Literature objectives while also amplifying his belief in the importance of teaching for social justice.

The final assignment for the class is a further example of the intensified expression of his commitment to social justice. Designed with the CRISPA elements in mind, Mr. Marlin asked the students to represent their learnings and takeaways from the novel study through any mode they wish. This kind of freedom on a task that is more commonly assigned as an essay involves students being able to connect with the text on a level of their choosing; take risks to express their learning (considering the unconventional format); apply their imaginative capacities to work with mediums other than essay-writing; engage their senses through artistic expression; spark nuanced thoughts through creative expression; and actively engage with the text in a new way.

Mr. Marlin's complementary social justice curriculum manifested itself throughout his intentional and operational curricula—what he planned to teach and what he actually taught. Interview data illustrate his profound beliefs around social justice and concomitantly illuminate tensions Mr. Marlin experiences when emphasizing the AP curriculum rather than prioritizing themes of social justice. Additionally, we witnessed a dance between the AP curriculum, themes of social justice, and CRISPA as Mr. Marlin waltzed through the mechanics of AP objectives while seamlessly twisting and spinning in lessons on justice and aesthetic experiences using CRISPA to choreograph the traditional and personal priorities of his curricular ballroom.

Discussion

In this study, we ventured into the nuances of a teacher's practice to expand what is known about six aesthetic themes of education and their potential to enhance the meaningfulness and vibrancy of teaching and learning. Our analysis provides us with three prominent points of discussion. First, in support of previous research on the complementary curriculum (Moroye, 2009), teacher beliefs play a significant role in what and how they teach. Second, for educators teaching a heavily prescribed curriculum such as AP, CRISPA offers an alternative way to not only adhere to the former with fidelity, but to elevate the curriculum for themselves and their students. Third, our data aligns with scholarship connecting aesthetic modes with various objectives in social justice education, and bolsters potentiality to foster empathy and critical thinking through CRISPA. We elaborate on each of these points below.

Complementary Curriculum

Moroye (2009) delineates the concept of the complementary curriculum as the manifestation of an educator's deeply held convictions, representing "the kind of experiences teachers provide for students, as well as in the 'pedagogical premises and practices' that result from the teacher's beliefs" (p. 791). The complementary curriculum directly and indirectly

influences the way teachers approach their practice, often revealing aspects central to their identity. Drawing from the work of Parker Palmer (2007), who argues that integrity is integral to a teacher's selfhood and, therefore resides at the core of a teacher's greatness, Moroye (2009) notes that the complementary curriculum can be viewed as the "manifestation of a teacher's wholeness or completeness of his or her integrity" (p. 805).

As previously described and illustrated through the vignettes in our Findings section, we observed the expression of Mr. Marlin's complementary social justice curriculum across his intentional and operational curricula as well as augmented representations when realized through the six themes of CRISPA. Social justice is integral to Mr. Marlin's identity and beliefs and this complementary social justice curriculum is explicitly woven into his pedagogical choices, both in his selection of literature, prose, poetry, and other texts as well as in the choices he makes in structuring learning experiences for his students. Commenting on another teacher's literature selection, he states, "it's not my comfort level and I don't think that it gets at some of the different, bigger themes that I'm hoping to get at." He reiterates the need for his teaching to connect students with relevant issues related to justice, ethics, and morals.

In addition to curricular and instructional manifestations, Mr. Marlin's complementary social justice curriculum further materializes through his relationships and classroom management style. Two principal elements in the social justice literature involve fostering an environment for the development of liberatory thinking and actions (Carlisle et al., 2006) and building relationships of trust and reciprocity by listening to concerns and taking them seriously as part of a social justice agenda (Gorski, 2013). In Mr. Marlin's classroom, this takes the form of an open seating chart, no hall passes, loud and improvised large-group discussions, and grade contracts. As students arrive, they sit with friends and continue conversations until he makes a request for class to begin. We observed several students get up and leave the classroom and then return a short time later, all without any conversation or acknowledgment between teacher and student. Mr. Marlin creates grade contracts with each student, where each course begins with students signing an agreement for the grade they want based on predetermined measures of attendance, participation, and work quality. The students then receive a grade based on how well they fulfilled their contract.

These pedagogical choices highlight Mr. Marlin's commitment to socially-just learning experiences, which align and complement his intended and operational curricula. Moroye (2009) found that when teacher beliefs reside within ecological perspectives, they will naturally bring those unique perspectives to bear on the curriculum, in both subtle and overt ways, regardless of the content focus of the class. Moroye contends that the complementary curriculum may also be applied to other teacher beliefs and perspectives, including the arts or social and emotional learning. Understanding one's own complementary curriculum and applying it to their practice may offer educators a way to teach more authentically across curricular obligations.

CRISPA as a Curricular Amplification

A second discussion point from our analysis revolves around the opportunity CRISPA may provide to educators who seek to enhance their curriculum. Our data suggest that CRISPA offered Mr. Marlin a mechanism through which he was able to enrich his intentional, operational, and complementary curricula.

The intentional curriculum is what a teacher plans to do, therefore lesson planning can help reveal the intentional curriculum. A previous study of the impact of CRISPA on lesson planning found that CRISPA provided teachers with a means to "rethink the aims and processes of lesson planning itself... a transformational tool that shifts lesson planning from writing down a linear

sequence of state-approved lessons, to a process that inspires teachers in their teaching (Conrad et al., 2015, p. 14). When we asked Mr. Marlin to compare his two different approaches to lesson planning, both with and without CRISPA, he explained:

The non-CRISPA teaching—getting definitions of various poetry and writing in a prescriptive way for the AP and things along those lines—the skills that are needed—it almost feels like a really simple rhythmic song, just like clapping. We just have to do this, and we just have to stay on pace and beat. As long as we hit all of the right notes, then it may not sound amazing, but it's gonna sound good enough to get by. Teaching with CRISPA is like Jazz music... you never know where it's gonna go. There are so many different possibilities with it. It's an ensemble, there's lots of different sounds, and plays, and unexpected turns and it's not objective-based, there's these—you know the Eisner idea of expressive outcomes—it can have such an important influence and it can change mood, it can bring people to—I really like jazz music, so maybe that's why I am thinking about it that way, but it's not boring, it activates and makes you want to hear more.

His analogy demonstrates that applying CRISPA to lesson planning (e.g., the intentional curriculum) has the potential to transform the process, supporting Conrad et al.'s (2015) assertion of CRISPA as a transformational tool within the intentional curriculum.

CRISPA also had an aggrandizing impact on Mr. Marlin's operational curriculum. Greene (1980) explains the holistic nature of aesthetic education as, “integral to the development of persons—to their cognitive, perceptual, emotional, and imaginative development. We see it as part of the human effort (and so often forgotten today) to seek greater coherence in the world” (p. 7). In this sense, she promotes aesthetic modes as a means to attend to a multitude of learning objectives. In our vignette, *Apples and Cherries: The Fruit of Aesthetics*, we witness a sensory experience providing the means to explore, fruit, literature, and justice simultaneously in what developed into a critical analysis of real-world social issues. We observed Mr. Marlin's efforts to “seek coherence” in his intentional and operational curricula by not only infusing social justice, but by enhancing social justice ideals through the six themes of CRISPA.

Further, we defend that Mr. Marlin's integration of CRISPA not only enhanced his operational curricula, but simultaneously brought to life his complementary curricula. As witnessed in the same example, Mr. Marlin used CRISPA to intertwine AP and social justice.

This discussion is aimed toward educators who teach a prescriptive curriculum such as AP, with a resource that could exhilarate the more rigid program without diminishing the learning outcomes. We expand on this notion in the subsequent section.

Aesthetics and Social Justice

While we maintain that CRISPA has the potential to amplify the articulation of various curricula, our research supports previous literature that underscores the specific capacity of aesthetic methods to catalyze learning in social justice education.

Sleeter (2014) synthesizes recent social justice education literature, extracting from it four common dimensions. Social justice education: 1) situates families and communities within an analysis of structural inequities; 2) develops relationships of reciprocity from student to community; 3) teaches to high expectations by building on students' backgrounds; and 4) develops and implements an inclusive curriculum that integrates marginalized perspectives and addresses themes of inequity and power (Sleeter, 2014).

Maxine Greene (1980) advocated for aesthetic education experiences that urge for the development of “more active sensibility and awareness in our students” (p. 8). Her extensive scholarship demonstrates that aesthetic methods can empower students to know and understand enough to make sound choices through critical judgments, imaginative projections, and transformative actions. These fundamental skills provide pathways for students to develop empathy and compassion through “the capacity to see through another’s eyes, to grasp the world as it works and sounds and feels from the vantage point of another” (Greene, 1995, p. 102).

Young (2019) draws from the work of Greene (1995) and other curricular giants (see Tom Barone, 2000; Wolfgang Iser, 1978; Pinar et al., 1995) and her own experiences to argue that aesthetic curriculum methods evoke the senses. She defends:

...that by evoking the senses learners are also evoking the imagination, which in turn evokes an empathetic emotion toward others. By empathizing with others, learners may move toward social change or at least begin to conceptualize a theory and practice of social change because the senses enable learners to experience (even if only briefly) a different perspective and begin to act on their empathy. (p. 46)

Other research examined urban English Language Arts teachers and found that integration of aesthetic theories and methods of education in the curriculum provided opportunities for teachers to explore critical perspectives and issues of social justice and democracy within a neoliberal, test-based accountability educational system (Costigan, 2013). This literature suggests that aesthetic approaches to education can facilitate social justice education goals as put forth by Sleeter (2014).

Our data corroborate the work of Greene (1995), Costigan (2013), and Young (2019) as we observed Mr. Marlin’s deep-seated beliefs in teaching for social justice reflect the four dimensions of social justice education that Sleeter (2014) outlines. For example, he expressed his sense of responsibility to teach through this lens in order to “...help students understand their place in the world and their privilege in the world and how it relates to their identity—race, wealth, and gender.” It became clear that Mr. Marlin’s beliefs in social justice materialize in his intentional curriculum. He explained,

[*The Grapes of Wrath*] has these chapters that are just narrative... they’re highlighting symbols or motifs. Those sorts of things are what I’ll want to highlight. Additionally, some big essential questions. This is a book that’s really about justice and how does an individual judge right from wrong?

The cross-sections of social justice and aesthetics in Mr. Marlin’s curricular choices and actions are evident and we propose that expanding teacher capacities to connect social justice themes through aesthetic learning experiences may provide teachers with guidance to foster the skills and knowledge endorsed by both lines of study.

Implications

We defend that our research has implications that extend across various contexts and stakeholders in education. First, gaining a deeper understanding of one’s complementary curriculum can elucidate the relationship between beliefs and practices (Moroye, 2009). This awareness paired with the intentional implementation of CRISPA can allow teachers to better integrate their complementary curriculum to connect their selfhood to their teaching. While we don’t have evidence that CRISPA is a conduit for any or all complementary curricula, teachers

wishing to coalesce their complementary curriculum (whether that be social justice, spirituality, peace education, tolerance, environmentalism/conservation, etc.) into their daily pedagogical practice should consider CRISPA as a viable prospect. For instance, a science teacher with a complementary spirituality curriculum could integrate audio clips of different heartbeats during an anatomy lesson and ask students to engage with different mediums as they explain what they learn about the heart from hearing it. A math teacher with a complementary tolerance curriculum could apply Native American basket-weaving techniques to their geometry lessons and encourage students to empathize with teachings from different cultures through mathematics. In this way, the aesthetic themes can invigorate a teacher's complementary curriculum to encourage more meaningful teaching and learning.

In a similar vein, our data aligns with the scholarship that links the power of aesthetic modes to meet various objectives in social justice education and reinforces the potentiality to foster empathy and critical thinking through CRISPA. As Barone (2000) notes: "success in leading students out from where they are requires that the teacher offer stories or suggest other aesthetic projects that first speak to students in their present locations" (p. 130). Just as Mr. Marlin demonstrated, educators can use personal, political, and historical stories, along with aesthetically designed assignments and projects to connect with students' own narratives to lead them "out from where they are" and create the conditions to foster empathy.

Finally, as part of the current high-stakes environment, teachers frequently use (or are forced to use) curriculum giants such as Common Core and AP to inform and/or dictate their teaching. Regardless of one's stance on these standardized approaches, there are data suggesting that many teachers value the arts and wish to incorporate alternative, arts-based pedagogical practices (Gulla, 2009; Pinhasi-Vittorio & Vernola, 2013). Aesthetics, and CRISPA specifically, offer a vehicle to enhance lesson planning, learning experiences, and a teacher's deeply held beliefs. Overall, CRISPA is not presented here as an alternative to the varying curricula the teachers engage with, but rather a mechanism through which they can expand, heighten, and enliven the curricular experience from beginning to end.

Future Research

This study offers further evidence and ideas about aesthetic modes of teaching; however, it looks very specifically at one teacher and one classroom. Further research should involve formal and informal educational contexts across regions, demographics, and content areas. A second area to investigate involves the third component of the instructional arc: the received curriculum or what the students experience. While we collected data on student perspectives and experiences with CRISPA, that analysis goes beyond the scope of this particular article. Future research must investigate youth perspectives and the impact of CRISPA, and other perceptual modes of teaching on P-16 students. Finally, a deeper dive into aesthetic modes and social justice pedagogy could offer educators tangible tools to creatively foster empathy and attend to real world issues, regardless of their course content.

Conclusion

Research on pedagogical practices that emphasize the human experience is more needed than ever. Much of the contemporary research effort contributes to the high-stakes system that prioritizes large sample sizes and (over)generalizations to further prescriptive practices. These meta investigations largely fail to encapsulate the vehicles available for teachers that humanize and inspire teaching and learning that "activates and makes you want to hear more."

By intentionally incorporating CRISPA, teachers may explicitly connect how their deeply held beliefs—their complementary curriculum—are infused into their pedagogy. Thus, we maintain that teacher identity and integrity may be enhanced through implementing CRISPA. Additionally, for teachers who take seriously the important work of educating for justice, CRISPA provides teachers a means to not only facilitate such priorities but also as an entry point to overlay prescriptive curriculum with personal beliefs and values to invigorate the lesson planning experience. Last, while we seek to preserve the fidelity of Moroye's (2009) original definition of the complementary curriculum, we also wish to provide shading that might illuminate another contour of the term. We offer a concomitant way to conceptualize the complementary curriculum as not only an expression of a teacher's embedded beliefs, also as an empowering force that ripens deeply held passions brought to bear in the classroom.

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Appendix

Observation Protocol

Date:

Classroom:

School Site:

Duration:

<p>Dimensions of Educational Connoisseurship & Criticism</p> <p>Description</p> <p>Interpretation</p> <p>Evaluation</p> <p>Thematics</p>	<p>Open Observations (e.g., wide-angle, multi-sensory, single-sensory, episodic, lens-specific, visual²)</p>
<p>Instructional Arc</p> <p>Intended</p> <p>Operational</p> <p>Received</p>	
<p>CRISPA: Aesthetic Themes</p> <p>Connections</p> <p>Risk-taking</p> <p>Imagination</p> <p>Sensory Experience</p> <p>Perceptivity</p> <p>Active Engagement</p>	<p>Quality of the Content</p> <p>Quality and Forms of Student Engagement</p> <p>Forms of Representation</p> <p>Incentives Employed</p>

² Adapted from Uhrmacher, P. B., Moroye, C. M., & Flinders, D. J. (2017).

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