

A Justification for Arts Education: Creating Practical Knowledge

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During this time of cost-cutting and the back-to-basics movement, arts educators must provide persuasive arguments for the inclusion of arts education in the educational curriculum. A criticism typically levied against arts education is that the arts do not involve, except perhaps peripherally, the acquisition of knowledge, frequently considered an important educational aim. I will argue that the acquisition, or the creation, of knowledge plays a fundamental role in arts education. This line of argument will require an examination of different forms of knowledge; particularly, practical as opposed to theoretical knowledge. I will argue a case for practical knowledge and then demonstrate how both the creation and appreciation of works of art involve the creation of practical knowledge. I will conclude by examining the implications of the creation of practical knowledge in the arts for both justifying arts education and for providing guidelines for the content and methods of arts education programs.

PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

The first question to be addressed concerns the meaning and possibility of "practical knowledge." Aristotle spoke of "practical wisdom" which he described as a "reasoned state."¹ From this "practical reasoning" Anscombe derived the notion of practical knowledge. "When we ordinarily speak of practical knowledge we have in mind a certain sort of general capacity in a particular field; but if we hear of a capacity, it is reasonable to ask what constitutes an exercise of it."² Ryle, in the distinction he makes between "knowing that" and "knowing how" suggests that knowing how involves not only performing an operation correctly or successfully, but also applying criteria in performing critically. However, Ryle is quick to point out that when such a performance is referred to as an action exhibiting intelligence, one must be careful not to reassimilate "knowing how" to "knowing that."

"Intelligent" cannot be defined in terms of "intellectual" or "know *how*" in terms of "knowing *that*"; "thinking what I am doing" does not connote "both thinking what to do and doing it." When I do something intelligently, i.e., thinking what I am doing, I am doing one thing and not two. My performance has a special procedure or manner, not special antecedents.³

Ryle proposes that it is not the parentage but the procedure which makes a performance intelligent. It is Ryle's emphasis on the overt procedure as the criterion for assessing one's ability to "know how" that has illicit criticism and we turn now to David Carr's examination of Ryle's behaviourist approach to "knowing how."

Carr makes an important point when he notes that "we can and do meaningfully attribute 'knowing how' to people who cannot themselves do the particular things in question. It seems...that the teaching of practical knowledge depends on this possibility."⁴ Carr gives the examples of a near-retirement aged physical education teacher who continues to teach his students things that he is no longer able to do or the teachers who find themselves instructing students who possess far greater ability

than they have in activities which they themselves are only able to perform poorly, if at all. These examples demonstrate that being able to do the activity in question is not a necessary condition for “knowing how” to do these activities. Being able to do the activity is also not a sufficient condition for one to be described as “knowing how” to do an activity. Carr gives the example of someone picking up darts for the first time and scoring a bullseye on the first throw. This “beginner’s luck” situation issues in the notion of intentionality which is a critical component of practical knowledge.

In analyzing what we mean by intention, Stuart Hampshire proposes that:

What I do, in the sense of try to do, I necessarily know that I do, in that use of “know”...in which “knowing” does not necessarily imply “being able to state correctly.” Others do not necessarily know what I am trying to do...They have only seen or heard, or otherwise perceived or inferred, what I am trying to do. I have never perceived or inferred what I am trying to do; I have always and unavoidably known.⁵

Two concepts are in need of further examination—the ability to “state” and the ability to “state *correctly*.” The “knowing how” situation does not always lend itself to easily stating what is happening in verbal terms. However, this is not to imply that “knowing how” is devoid of conceptual content. Saul Ross elaborates on the employment of concepts in practical thinking.

An agent executing an intentional action is conscious of what he is doing, and although he may not be able to express the concepts verbally, he employs them in the judgments he renders and the decisions he makes. The thoughts that guide and direct his actions are conceptual in nature even if they cannot be stated propositionally; these practical concepts are manifested in intentional actions.⁶

Ross gives an illuminating example to demonstrate how judgements made during an intentional action are not always brought to consciousness. He points out that when we walk under normal circumstances, we are not consciously aware of the decisions we make regarding our action. However, if we attempt to walk on a slippery incline, all of our attention is directed to the placement of each step, “each decision is made explicitly and we are fully conscious of ‘thinking out’ each step along the way.”⁷

Thus, although it is not always easy to verbalize what we know when we “know how”, the preceding example illustrates that we can, upon reflection, “state” what we know how to do. The notion of “state *correctly*” raises another issue altogether—that of truth conditions. The traditional view of knowledge requires that to know *x*, one must have a justified, true belief that *x* is so. Is there a parallel to such conditions regarding practical knowledge? Hampshire would answer in the negative. “This scheme of deliberate action, and of the form of explanation appropriate to it, can scarcely be appraised as either true or false; for it is not clear what could be the basis of assessment, or what kind of evidence could be decisive.”⁸ Carr takes up the challenge of providing a basis of assessment for practical knowledge situations. He proposes three conditions (similar to the justified, true belief conditions of propositional knowledge). That is, for one to know how to do *x*, one must 1) entertain *x*ing as a purpose, 2) be acquainted with a set of practical procedures for successful *x*ing, and 3) exhibit recognizable success at *x*ing.⁹

Entertaining *xing* as a purpose involves the notion of intentionality discussed earlier and Carr suggests that “[o]ur familiar understanding of exercises of knowing how is that they are the expressions of deliberate purposes...just as our ordinary understanding of knowing that acknowledges that what is known is also usually believed.”¹⁰ The condition of being acquainted with a set of practical procedures for successful *xing* is analogous to providing a justification for a propositional knowledge claim. To substantiate this claim, Carr advocates Aristotle’s notion of practical inference: It is *A*’s purpose to *x*; *A* understands that *ying* is a satisfactory way to *x*; *A ys*.

Such a form of inference offers us a way to demonstrate just how simple or basic actions from which complicated skills are built—relate to one another as means to ends. In general, then, there is no more reason to deny that relations of a logical kind may hold between the characterisations of the individual actions that are parts of the complicated patterns of activity that are exercises of knowing how, than there is to deny that such relations also hold between the descriptions of the judgements that offer logical or evidential support for a given bit of knowing that.¹¹

Being acquainted with a set of practical procedures for successful *xing* is one condition for “knowing how” but the final condition involves exhibiting recognizable success at *xing*. This condition would be analogous to the truth condition of a propositional knowledge claim. Although Carr does admit that what one knows how to do is not a proposition but an action and thus can be neither true nor false, he adopts Anthony Kenny’s argument that since practical reasoning is more closely related to imperative than to indicative reasoning, the concept of satisfactoriness rather than truth should be regarded as the validating principle.¹²

Whereas in standard theoretical inference, the main concern is that from a set of true judgements a true conclusion should be validly inferred, what is sought through practical inferences are effective or satisfactory ways to adapt the world to often complex human purposes; the rules of practical inference govern reasoning that is concerned with making truth rather than discovering it.¹³

To understand the relationship between “knowing how” and making “truth” (rather than discovering it) is significant for justifying practical knowledge in the educational curriculum. There does not seem to be any logical reason why discovering truth should have a priority over making truth. Adapting the world to human purposes would appear to be as important as adapting ourselves to the world (in the case of discovering truth). Students should have the opportunity to attain practical knowledge (to make truth) and this can only be accomplished through practical reasoning.

Learning to perform a given complex task or coming to know how to do it is essentially a matter of learning to reason practically and teaching someone how to execute a particular purpose is similarly a matter of instructing him in practical reasoning by means of practical directives; of acquainting him with rational procedures and showing him how particular ends are logically related to specific means.¹⁴

Denying students an opportunity to make “truth” through practical reasoning would leave a significant void in their education. Thus, if we can demonstrate that practical knowledge is created through creating and appreciating art, we have a strong justification for the inclusion of the arts in the educational curriculum.

PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE IN CREATING AND APPRECIATING ART

Although Carr proposed his practical knowledge argument within the context of physical education, I will argue that it is also applicable to the area of arts education. I will first consider how practical knowledge is achieved in *creating* works of art and then I will consider how practical knowledge is created in, as ironic as it may sound, *appreciating* works of art.

To demonstrate the practical knowledge involved in creating works of art, it would be fruitful to apply Carr's conditions for assessing practical knowledge situations to a situation which involves the creation of a work of art. For example, to say that someone has practical knowledge of creative dance, he/she must 1) entertain expressing some idea, feeling or sensory impression through movement as a purpose, 2) be acquainted with a set of practical procedures for successfully expressing some idea, feeling or sensory impression through movement, and 3) exhibit recognizable success at expressing some idea, feeling or sensory impression through movement.

The first condition of entertaining the expression of some idea, feeling or sensory impression through movement as a purpose requires an examination of what is meant by expression as well as the role intention plays in this expression. I would argue that creative dance always involves expression. This thesis requires a clarification of what we mean by "expression." To suggest that the creative dancer expresses a thought or feeling through movement could be taken to mean that the dancer: 1) *has* that thought or feeling, 2) *conveys*, through the medium of movement, a thought or feeling, or 3) *evokes* in the audience a particular thought or feeling.

I would argue that what happens in art is expression in the second sense. That is, the creative dancer takes a thought or feeling and gives form to it, utilizing elements of movement to reach this end. This process does not require that the dancer has to be *having* the particular feeling being expressed. Rather, he/she has objectified that feeling, thereby making the expression something independent from him/herself. The audience, upon perceiving the dance piece, may "feel" the feeling being expressed but they may not. I will argue later that one way for a dancer to realize success at expressing some thought or feeling occurs when the audience "feels" what the dancer has tried to express.

The question may be raised as to whether creative dance *always* expresses a thought or a feeling. In fact, formalists would suggest that a dance performance concerns itself purely with the dancers' movements, nothing else. This conception of dance can be contested. It may not always be *particular* feelings which are expressed through dance, but when dancers are moving for the sake of movement, thoughts pertaining to the joy of pure movement would be the content being expressed. Thus, creative dance can be perceived as always involving the expression of thoughts or feelings through movement.

The question of the purposefulness of the expression involved in creative dance must now be addressed. That is, what role does intention play in creative dance? I would argue that in dance, as in other art forms, the artist has some intention of achieving a certain expression. However, the end product is not fully formed prior

to the artist manipulating the medium—in the case of dance, the medium of movement. The situation of having an unclear intention involves what Vernon Howard refers to as the paradox of creativity, “that the artist both knows and does not know what he is up to.”¹⁵ This paradox is evident in the writings of Collingwood who suggests that works of art “are made deliberately and responsibly, by people who know what they are doing, even though they do not know in advance what is going to come of it.”¹⁶ Although Collingwood may be right in suggesting that artists do not have a complete knowledge of what is going to come of their work, artists must know when they have arrived at a result which is satisfactory. Maitland reiterates that the artist must know where he/she is heading. “Otherwise, he would be unable to make aesthetically discriminating or relevant choices or to correct his mistakes.”¹⁷ To know when a resulting work is satisfactory requires a knowledge of the standards of the discipline within which the artist is working. A knowledge of standards requires a knowledge of the procedures for successfully expressing oneself in one’s particular discipline and these procedures are what Carr refers to as the second condition of “knowing how.”

Regarding the second condition of “knowing how” to perform creative dance, that is, being acquainted with a set of practical procedures for successfully expressing some idea, feeling or sensory impression through movement, requires an examination of the procedures utilized in creative dance. Contrary to what some “free expressionists” might think, I would argue that there are “procedures” one can learn to improve his/her expression through movement. The medium of movement can be broken down into movement elements, for example, body awareness; space awareness; and the awareness of weight, time and flow; and students must be taught to recognize and utilize these elements of movement in their dance expressions.¹⁸

Creative dancers must acknowledge and employ aesthetic features in their expression of ideas, feelings and sensory impressions through movement. Aesthetic features involve what Stuart Richmond refers to as “such things as style, character, design, skillful use of materials, originality, expressiveness, and the fittingness of form with content.”¹⁹ Anne Sheppard, in her discussion of aesthetic theories, refers not only to aesthetic features, but the relationship between these features. “In discussing painting we talk not just about the shapes and colours used but about the balance and the symmetry of the composition, that is, about the relationships between the shapes and colours.”²⁰ We can perceive the features of balance and symmetry in creative dance. For example, a choreographer might create a dance which has an even number of dancers performing symmetrical movements at a high level across the stage. The choreographer could convey imbalance by removing one dancer and having some of the dancers perform different movements at different levels. Whether the audience understands what the choreographer is trying to show by making such changes brings us to Carr’s third condition of assessing “knowing how.”

The third condition of exhibiting recognizable success at expressing some idea, feeling or sensory impression through movement immerses us in a discussion of the traditional critique of the aesthetic theory of expressionism. Two questions must be

addressed at this point: 1) can the audience know the artist's intention, and 2) is it important that the audience interpret an artist's work in a manner similar to what the artist had intended? Regarding the first question, Sheppard answers in the negative.

There is no way of checking what Beethoven's intuition was other than by listening to the music. If he had left a detailed account in words of what he was trying to express that would not help us, for he might have expressed more in the music than he consciously intended to and Croce himself would say that the account in words was at a different level, the level of conceptual thought, and so was not a reliable guide to the artistic expression or intuition. But if we cannot know the artist's expression except through the work, it is misleading to maintain that what was in the artist's mind is more real or more valuable than the object he has produced.²¹

Sheppard's point that if we cannot know the artist's intention, it is misleading to think of the intention as being more valuable than the work, requires closer examination. I am not arguing that the intention is more valuable than the work, but rather that the work is the actualization of the artist's intention, whether the audience recognizes the artist's intention or not. I would acknowledge the possibility that an audience might interpret a work in a manner somewhat different than that intended by the artist. However, recognizable success at expressing an idea, feeling or sensory impression on the part of the artist requires that the interpretation by the audience must be somewhat similar to the interpretation intended by the artist. Although some art appreciators might recoil at the thought that their interpretation should conform to that of the artist's, I would argue that a certain degree of concurrence should exist if the artist is to experience success in his/her expression. Although the objection might be made to the effect that the purpose of art is not to understand the artist's intention, I would argue that the artist's intention is evident in the aesthetic features that he/she has made part of his/her work. To ignore these features in one's interpretation is to fail to understand the work of art. As David Best suggests "to decline to accept an interpretation of a novel or play for which the textual evidence is overwhelming and in the absence of countervailing reasons is a manifestation not of unfettered individuality but of a failure to understand the work and the relevant concept of art."²²

Acknowledging the importance of some concurrence between the audience's interpretation of a work of art and the interpretation intended by the artist has already immersed us in an examination of appreciating art. Art appreciation is a fundamental component of an arts education program and thus it is important to examine the role of practical knowledge in appreciating as well as creating art. Although it may appear ironic to speak of *creating* practical knowledge when *appreciating* art, I would argue that when students are appreciating art, they are creating interpretations.

I will now consider Carr's conditions for practical knowledge and determine whether creating an interpretation of a work of art fulfils these conditions. In Carr's words, [substituting *interpreting* for *x*], for one to know how to interpret, one must 1) entertain interpreting as a purpose, 2) be acquainted with a set of practical procedures for successful interpreting, and 3) exhibit recognizable success at interpreting. Although some audience members might maintain that they are not always purposefully interpreting a work of art but rather simply enjoying it, I would

not consider this experience to be the sort of art appreciation we would employ in an arts education program.

Although people are free to simply observe and enjoy a work of art, if they are to be educated in appreciating art, they must become acquainted with a set of practical procedures for creating successful interpretations. One such set of procedures is employed by Edmund Feldman when he describes a process for observing and understanding art. He suggests four steps: 1) description — attending to what we see, 2) analysis — observing the behavior of what we see, 3) interpretation — giving meaning to works of art, and 4) judgment — deciding about the value of a work of art.²³ As well as following a process such as the one described by Feldman, students must also recognize aesthetic features and feel comfortable using the appropriate discourse, that is, making reference to features such as balance, symmetry, unity, contrast, proportion, dynamics, and so forth.

Having acquired a set of practical procedures for interpreting art, the final condition of exhibiting recognizable success at interpreting must be addressed. As previously discussed, one way in which success at creating an interpretation might be recognized is through a concurrence with the artist's intended interpretation. However, in the event that the artist's interpretation is not easily recognized, comparing interpretations with other art critics is an important means of recognizing the success of one's own interpretation. This situation makes it incumbent upon the arts educator to provide his/her interpretation or to provide interpretations created by more experienced critics or art appreciators. This suggestion brings us to the final section of the paper, an examination of the implications of the preceding discussion for arts education.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ARTS EDUCATION

The application of the notion of practical knowledge to the creation and appreciation of art has significant implications for arts education, both for justifying arts education and for providing guidelines for the content and methods of arts education programs. Regarding a justification for arts education, if one accepts the practical knowledge argument and its application to arts education, it would appear that a sound justification can be made for including the arts in the educational curriculum. A recognition of the potential to attain knowledge through the arts puts arts education on a level playing field with other competitors for curriculum time. However, an examination of the form of knowledge available through the arts, that is, practical knowledge, makes it not only acceptable to include the arts in an educational curriculum, but also desirable. As mentioned earlier, adapting the world to human purposes (making "truth") would appear to be as important as adapting ourselves to the world (discovering "truth"). Students should not be limited solely to exposure to theoretical knowledge but they should have the opportunity to attain practical knowledge. Since the creation of practical knowledge is fundamental to the creation and appreciation of the arts, arts education should be seen as a necessary component of a well-rounded educational curriculum.

The preceding examination of the creation of practical knowledge through arts education also has implications concerning guidelines for the content and methods

of arts education programs. Regarding the creation of art, students must see their expressions as purposeful. That is, students should be encouraged to explore the ideas, feelings or sensory impressions which they intend to express through whatever medium, in a thoughtful manner. This does not mean that students should not freely explore their chosen medium but this exploration should not end there — the artistic cycle should involve the creation of works of art, works which can be shared with an audience. To achieve this purpose, students must be acquainted with the requisite practical procedures. In the example I cited regarding creative dance, these procedures involved understanding and utilizing movement elements as well as aesthetic features. To determine whether students have exhibited success in their artistic expression, they should be given the opportunity to share their work with an audience. An opportunity should also be provided for the audience (this may be the teacher, classmates, or other members of the community) to share their interpretations with the student artists. In this way, students have the chance to see if the audience interprets their work in a manner which concurs with what they were trying to express.

Regarding the appreciation of works of art, students should be shown the difference between simply observing art and becoming art critics. They should be encouraged to create interpretations of the art they observe. However, creating an interpretation requires a set of practical procedures and, thus, a process such as Feldman's and a discourse incorporating aesthetic features should be taught to students in order that they can provide reasons for their interpretations. To determine whether students have exhibited recognizable success in their interpretations, they should be encouraged to compare their interpretations with the artist (if possible), classmates, the teacher, or other experienced art critics.

Having argued a case for practical knowledge, I conclude that the creation of practical knowledge provides a strong justification for arts education as well as guidelines for the content and methods of arts education programs.

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI 5a 30.

2. G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 88.

3. *Ibid.*, 32.

4. David Carr, "Practical Reasoning and Knowing How," *Journal of Human Movement Studies* 4, no. 1 (1978): 15.

5. Stuart Hampshire, *Thought and Action* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959), 131.

6. Saul Ross, *Persons, Minds and Bodies: A Transcultural Dialogue Amongst Physical Education, Philosophy, and the Social Sciences* (Ontario: University of Canada Press, 1988), 24.

7. *Ibid.*, 24.

8. Hampshire, *Thought and Action*, 167.

9. David Carr, "Knowledge in Practice," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (1981): 58.

10. *Ibid.*, 59.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Anthony Kenny, "Practical Inference," *Analysis* 26, no. 3 (1966): 71-75.

13. Carr, "Knowledge in Practice," 60.

14. Ibid.
15. Vernon Howard, *Artistry: The Work of Artists* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1982), 118.
16. R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1938), 129.
17. Jeffrey Maitland, "Creativity," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34, no. 4 (1976): 397.
18. Rudolf Laban, *Modern Educational Dance*, 3d ed. (Boston: Play, Inc., 1975), 25-51.
19. Stuart Richmond, "Three Assumptions that Influence Art Education: A Description and a Critique," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 25, no. 2 (1991): 5.
20. Anne Sheppard, *Aesthetics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 50.
21. Ibid., 25-26.
22. David Best, *Feeling and Reason in the Arts* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), 47.
23. Edmund B. Feldman, *Becoming Human Through Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 348-83.