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**COLLABORATIVE RESEARCHERS: YOUNG CHILDREN'S EMERGENT
PLAY IN THE ART STUDIO**

A Thesis in

Art Education

by

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Abstract

This study explores young children's emergent collaborative play in the art studio in relation to the concepts of social interaction and art practice. Identifying the practice of sketchbook drawing as a vehicle for expanding physical and conceptual spaces, I investigate how children manifest their lived experiences through various forms of art(-making) and play, as performative embodiments. More specifically, I argue that voluntary drawing expands spaces of dimension, embodiment, and pedagogy, provoking children to spontaneously, individually, and collaboratively explore self-initiated play, which makes meaning and yields pedagogically rich learning experiences. Employing a phenomenological approach, I situate myself within the study as an observer, participant, and facilitator in the art studio of the museum-based learning lab school in Washington D.C. where I worked as a summer art specialist intern in 2015. I pay particular attention to the five-year-olds' play events in the school's art studio in order to understand how experiences are translated into creative embodiments (i.e., drawing, sculpting, and playing) and to understand how children's social interactions generate greater opportunities for the children to challenge their competencies. Data consisting of field notes and photographs are presented to effectively portray children's art(-making) and the distinctive play events using open-ended materials. The following questions are considered: How does the very fundamental act of art-making and the use of loose part materials encourage children to expand space in a way that their past experiences are translated and transformed into a different type of creative language? And how do children perform these creative embodiments as a collaborative group with multiple agencies upon material encounters?

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Day 6.

David excitedly begins to tell Billy about the fudge: "This is pink fudge. This is actually pink fudge. Isn't that cool? Pink fudge! Pink fudge!" Listening from afar, I ask, "What would that taste like?" After a short pause, David answers, "Blueberry." Before I finish responding, "Blueberry? It tastes like blueberry?" David corrects, "No, it actually doesn't taste like blueberry. It tastes like umm... it tastes like umm... like...vanilla." Then David shifts back to drawing the fudge and explains to Billy, "And all of it pours inside here when it's out, okay?" Billy attempts to give function to an element in the drawing: He starts with, "This is, this is, the umm...", but suddenly David finishes the sentence saying, "Researcher." Billy goes, "What?" David nonchalantly repeats, "Researcher," while continuing to draw. After a short silence, Billy goes back to explaining the function of a drawn element: "This delivers the fudge." David also describes the process: "The pink fudge gets into a woven basket like these. So all the pink fudge is inside these in the roof. This fudge is very cool, right?" Billy answers, "Yeah, we make the fudge." David says, "Yep, we make the fudge. We just make the drawings of it, right? We're artists that make these fudge."



Figure 1: David's drawing of the pink fudge machine

The conversation above occurred during studio time, while David and Billy were each drawing in their sketchbooks on the floor (see Figure 1). During the process of drawing a fudge machine, David became fascinated with a magenta crayon that he had never used before and insisted that it could be the fudge in the fudge machine. He and Billy had been talking about multiple subjects during the drawing event, such as the order

of their birthdays and David's sleepover, all the while inserting narratives about the reality of their drawing. This particular section of the dialogue suggests that the children are enthusiastically representing the procedure of the fudge machine's operation, explaining the functions of the machine and the order of steps, as well as their own roles in the "making" (Zurmuehlen, 1990). Looking closely at the flow of conversation and vocabulary, I am uncertain what exactly David intended to convey by saying "researcher." Perhaps he had recently learned the word and wanted to use it in the context in which he was creating "cool" stuff. Conversely, he might have viewed himself as a "researcher" during the performance of drawing. The two five-year-old boys' understanding of an artist, however, seems clear, as they showed agency in deciding what they wanted to make.

These two words, "researcher" and "artist," describe the positions with which I identify in studying art education. As a researcher, I ask questions about what I see and think in everyday life; I search and *re*-search (see Wilson, 1997) various objects and concepts in a way that makes sense to me. As an artist, I make such thoughts visible. I used to think of myself exclusively as an artist, based on the fact that I have *practiced* art for many years and have acquired a degree in the visual arts. However, as I engaged more with art practice, theory, and pedagogy, I came to realize that the role of an artist is not confined to creating tangible products, but extends to provoking change and challenging boundaries, in doing so inviting others to see and experience a different world. The compelling roles of the researcher and artist, therefore, stimulate me to continue to pursue art and research through art(-making).

I occasionally add another title to my list, “educator,” since I continuously engage with students in educational settings as an adult who teaches. However, the verb “educate” does not quite fit the approach I take in this particular study: rather than imposing values on and imparting knowledge to students, I participate, engage, and play with the students in my classroom, seeking to release my adult authority. In doing so, I aim to understand my students as both researchers and artists as well. Put differently, I do not adopt a rhetorical approach whereby I suggest I cherish students’ potential to *become*, but instead I recognize students as already-extant autonomous individuals with the competencies to perform their agencies.

This study explores young children’s emergent collaborative play in the art studio in relation to the concepts of social interaction and art practice. Situating drawing as a vehicle for expanding physical and conceptual spaces, I investigate how children manifest their lived experiences through performative embodiments. More specifically, I explore how children spontaneously, individually, and collaboratively engage in self-initiated play in order to make meaning, thereby yielding pedagogically rich learning experiences. This study adopts a phenomenological approach: I situate myself within the study as an observer, participant, and facilitator in the art studio at a museum-based lab school in order to document emergent activities. I pay particular attention to the five-year-olds’ play events in the art studio in order to understand how experiences are translated into creative embodiments (i.e., drawing and playing) and to understand how children’s social interactions generate greater opportunities for the children to challenge themselves. Data consisting of field notes and photographs is presented to effectively portray children’s art(-making) and distinctive play events using open-ended materials.

The subsequent chapters provide a description of my research process and the results of my data analysis, as well as a reflection on what I have learned from undertaking this study. Chapter 2 describes the methodology and specific setting of this study, as well as the theoretical framework that acts as the foundation of my argument. This chapter also includes a section that examines the purposes and processes of documentation within three aspects: (1) rendering children's process of making; (2) helping the researcher to build relationships with children; and (3) enabling the researcher to perform the "pedagogy of listening" (Rinaldi, 2006). Chapter 3 focuses on the importance and influence of sketchbook drawings, exploring how engagement in voluntary drawing promotes the expansion of spaces—both physical and conceptual—as dimension, embodiment, and pedagogy. Chapter 4 presents and describes the emergent collaborative play events in the art studio; it also uses specific examples to illustrate how everyday experience is embodied through play. As I examine children's play events through the lens of contemporary art concepts, Chapter 5 focuses on children's roles as artists and creates links between art and play. Concepts such as loose-part materials, materiality, scale and space, and processes of making are interrogated in order to better understand how children's art activities align with artists' approaches to creating artwork. I conclude with Chapter 6, which considers the study's pedagogical implications and reflects on both the expectations and limitations of conducting research with children.

Chapter 2

Research

Methodology

This study adopts a phenomenological approach in order to examine children's emergent art and play events in the art studio. Phenomenological research enables the researcher to examine the core of various phenomena, making clear the researcher's perspective without devolving into generalizations. This research approach focuses on description; explores the intentional relationship between individuals and situations; and discloses the essences, or structures, of meaning immanent in human experiences (Finlay, 2009). Because the approach focuses on both the description and the interpretation of lived experiences, it enhances our understanding "beyond what we must recognize as our normal ways of getting by, being and doing, in the thrall of everydayness" (Thompson, 2014, p. 82). Especially when studying with and about children, the phenomenological research approach is beneficial, as it draws on children's narratives while engaging in an activity, as opposed to relying on formal interview sessions. Put differently, it is effective for engaging in conversations and observing the naturally occurring verbalizations of children. Recognizing that phenomenological research asks *what* and *how*, rather than focusing on causal relationships, I developed the following questions to guide my inquiry: How does the very fundamental act of art-making (i.e. drawing) expand space in a way that past experiences are translated and transformed into a different type of creative language? And how do children perform these creative embodiments as a collaborative group with multiple agencies upon material encounters?

In order to ensure detailed observations, I considered the following questions: How does the experience of museum-based learning shape experiential, intellectual, and creative art activities in preschool classrooms? How do children incorporate the non-object elements of museum spaces, such as the people they encounter or what they experience during the journey to the museum, into their artwork? By keeping these questions in mind, I was able to observe and focus on specificities of children's engagements in the art studio and accumulate research data in the process.

I held twenty participation-inflected observation sessions, which took place from June 30 to July 31, 2015, for one hour each day. I worked as a summer art specialist intern facilitating art classes for children from ages one to five at a preschool located in Washington, D.C. As a museum-based lab school, children frequently (at least twice per week) visit adjacent national museums as part of their everyday lessons. I occasionally accompanied the classes on these museum trips in order to observe what and how the children learned outside of the classrooms. My research was specifically focused on the five-year-olds, observing their engagement in art activities every afternoon in the art studio. Data was collected for five consecutive weeks, one hour per day. Between the two five-year-old classrooms I observed, the participants were primarily children who were awake during naptime and who chose to come to the art studio instead of participating in other activities. A maximum of 10 students were able to work in the studio at any given time within the one hour, and students could be added or switched. Prior to undertaking my research, I had acquired parental consent to study the participants' artwork and narratives with the understanding that the data would be kept confidential. For the

purposes of this study, data consists of documentary photography, video, and audio recordings, as well as descriptive field notes based on observations.

My roles in this study are those of an observer, participant, and facilitator. First, as an observer, I looked at individual children's practices of art-making, such as the children's choice of materials, subjects for their drawings, and creative skills. In terms of children's social practices, I carefully studied the children's verbal expressions, body gestures, and playful interactions with their peers. In doing so, I came to know each child's preferences for art(-making), his or her personality and interests, and the child's typical style of interacting with peers. I also observed the children in the studio as a group in order to understand the peer culture and the children's common interests in art and play.

Next, as a participant, I was involved in the occurrences in the art studio: I engaged in conversations, occasionally sat down to work on the same activity as the children, and played with the children. Because of this interactive research approach, I was able to see and understand the children and their art-making in a way I could not possibly have otherwise. Finally, as an intern at the school, I facilitated art classes for the children. For each studio session, I prepared one or two main art activities that introduced the children to a variety of materials, skills, and concepts in art. However, I was flexible in modifying plans or allowing children to spontaneously initiate activities they wished to explore. I was more interested in child-initiated play and art activities because I felt that they display children's agency to make selections and, when performed as a group, present the peer group culture. Being a facilitator also involved supervisory responsibilities, such as supplying materials, preventing safety hazards, and mediating in

children's conflicts. Although managing these multiple roles was complicated at times, it allowed me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the children's art and play activities.

As a proponent of the Reggio Emilia approach, I had endeavored to incorporate its the philosophy and practice into my research. Reggio Emilia approach is an educational philosophy focused on preschool and primary education and that was developed in the villages around Reggio Emilia, Italy, after World War II. Loris Malaguzzi, the pioneer of this approach, aimed to “promote children's education through the development of all their languages: expressive, communicative, symbolic, cognitive, ethical, metaphorical, logical, imaginative, and relational” (Malaguzzi, 1996). The approach also emphasizes the principles of respect, responsibility, and community by encouraging exploration and discovery in a supportive and enriching environment that takes into account the interests of the children via a self-guided curriculum. Art activities in Reggio schools are practiced in a space called the *atelier*, which can be translated into “studio space.” Lella Gandini (2015) describes the *atelier* as the center for work, or the “physical hub and the conceptual space that [is] both catalyst and container” for meaning-making (p. 112). In the atelier, the *atelierista*, a teacher who has studied at an art school, uses visual expressions to engage with the children as their organizer, interpreter, co-organizer, and collaborator. Believing that children learn through their bodies (Vecchi, 2010), the Reggio Emilia approach regards the atelier as a horizon of imagination and sensory experiences that is free from preconceived ideas or outcomes.

I regarded the studio space as an atelier and myself as the atelierista. As an open space apart from classrooms, the studio provided various small workspaces, all of which

included materials, that children could come and use. Children's works were displayed on walls so that parents, teachers, and peers could see what the children had been working on as they passed by. There was a whole wall painted with blackboard paint, and another wall was lined with cabinets. Two tables—one large and one small—were located in the studio, with a number of child-sized chairs. I considered this space moderately sized for accommodating the maximum number of 10 students that the school allowed in the studio at a given time. Adopting the role of atelierista, I facilitated experiences in the art studio for five weeks during the summer after the full-time art instructor had left.

Although I had to adjust to the particular setting, I found that being new to the environment helped me distinguish between the studio rules and habits to which the children were accustomed and the ones they were presently adopting/constructing with me in the studio. Through constructing a new relationship with me, children were forming different relationships with the studio space and the performativity in the space. For example, I realized that setting time aside for the children to work in their sketchbooks before the main activity was a new routine, since several of the children asked why they were having this time. Sitting around the large round table was also something with which the children had to familiarize themselves. I considered these differences as possibilities, in which could suggest diverse activities, materials, rules, and spaces. In doing so, I was able to use the art studio as a space to spark and further stimulate the children's creativity.

Documentation

Reggio-Emilia-inspired schools utilize documentation as a primary strategy through which the new is made visible and opens up for new thought and extension (Davies, 2014). Along with Davies' (2014) understanding of "new" as differentiation, I consider unexpected encounters, different relations, and emergent spaces as significant possibilities of constituting the new in documentation. Carlina Rinaldi (2006) emphasizes that Reggio Emilia has used the documentation methodology for many years and documentation is seen as an integral part of the procedures aimed at fostering learning and modifying the relationship between learning and teaching. Especially when studying the complexities and "social practice" (Pearson, 2001) of children's art making, researchers in art education tend to incorporate documentation strategies as a primary tool for gaining a deeper understanding of art-making (see McClure, 2008; Schulte, 2011, 2015; Thompson, 2009; Wilson & Wilson, 2010).

This study also relies heavily on documentation. During my time at the preschool, I collected documentation that has since helped me to recall, interpret and reinterpret, and reflect on salient moments of children working in the art studio. Because documentation may refer to both process and product (McClure, 2008), it suggests multiple forms of interaction between the documenter and the subject, the subject and the situation. In other words, documentation not only refers to children's work as a product, but it also serves as a process by which to consider the complexities of children's performativity, narratives, and social interactions with peers. The documenter, therefore, needs to be attentive to how documentation produces meaning in various ways, understanding how the roles provoke and foster meaningful moments. Three significant functions of documentation

are: (1) rendering children's process of making visible and allowing the researcher to see it differently; (2) helping the researcher to build relationships with children; and (3) enabling the researcher to perform the "pedagogy of listening" (Rinaldi, 2006).

First, documentation "makes visible" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 68) a child's construction of internal and external knowledge. Through documentation, an educator can trace specific moments during the learning process, as well as different steps in the shaping of an event or artwork. By tracing these moments, the educator is able to realize ongoing strategies, performances, communications, and relationships, encountering time and space differently. For example, rather than looking solely at David's completed drawing, I considered the audio recording of David and Billy's conversation. This audio recording informed my understanding of how the drawing performance evolved. If I had only looked at the final drawing, which consists of multiple semicircles filled with pink color, I would not have known how David's ideas of drawing the fudge machine developed and were then modified. The documentation that captured the language, gestures, and situational elements contributed to making David's work visible, as well as to enabling me as a researcher to encounter and see the work differently.

Next, documentation enables the researcher to engage in participatory work, building relationships with his or her subjects by "being there" (Thompson, 2009). Art educator and researcher Christine Thompson (2009) conceptualizes "being there" as "observing and documenting, but also interacting with and responding to children" (p. 27). Beyond the physical co-existence of an adult and children, "being there" requires that the adult "take the time to linger, to live within the situation, in order to see those things that begin to occur or perhaps are noticed only when given enough time to become

evident” (Thompson, 2009, p. 27). In recalling my experience of “being there,” I recognize that taking the time to be present in potential moments and building relationships does not necessarily occur naturally. Although I adamantly believe this is one of the key purposes of documentation and an ethical necessity, it is undeniably challenging to find opportunities to engage in moments of “being there” as a facilitator of a whole class. Perhaps this reality is the reason why sincere moments of building relationships are valued as a salient experience to be celebrated and investigated.

Lastly, documentation requires pedagogical encounters of listening. Carlina Rinaldi (2006) writes about the “pedagogy of listening,” which refers to the researcher using all of his or her senses, openly and sensitively, to listen to children. Rinaldi (2006) defines listening as “an active verb that involves interpretation, giving meaning to the message and value to those who offer it. Listening that does not produce answers but formulates questions; listening that is generated by doubt, by uncertainty” (p. 65). Listening, therefore, is an active performance that requires asking questions out of curiosity rather than with the intent of obtaining definitive answers. Building on Rinaldi’s (2006) notion of listening, Bronwyn Davies (2014) theorizes the concept of “emergent listening” as a mode by which to realize the possibilities for life and one’s relation to it to creatively evolve into something new (p. 21). The concept of “emergent listening” is closely tied to Davies’s concept of the “not-yet-known,” the not-yet-thinkable space where one must forget and let go in order to become open to that which is new (p. x), as well as Davies’ practice of documentation:

In order to keep the walls alive, to make a commitment to life as a mobility itself, in which the not-yet-known of the children’s thoughts has space to emerge, the

photos and paintings, along with quotes from what the children say, are posted on the wall in an informal way that invites...both child and adult, to stop and contemplate what it is that is emergent there. (p. 25)

I considered each of these conceptualizations of listening as an invitation to reflect on and reconsider how I practiced documentation in my own research. I created questions that led to further contemplation: Have I approached documentation in a way that encourages active listening and the construction of meaningful relationships, yet leaves spaces in which more questions can be generated? If not, how might I engage differently in documentation in future research and develop ways of inviting moments of emergent listening? These concerns will be further examined in the last chapter.

Theoretical Framework

Social Interactions of Childhood

The underlying premise of this study is that children embody their experiences through social interactions, and the children's social competencies are subsequently performed and practiced through creative languages. To begin to understand how an individual internalizes everyday experiences, it is necessary to consider developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky's (1987) sociocultural theory. Vygotsky asserts that a child's social interactions play a significant role in his or her development of cognition, whereby:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of

concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978, p. 57)

According to Vygotsky, individuality emerges out of sociality. The two levels of learning—first through interaction with others, and then through integration into the individual's own cognitive structure—provide an understanding of how human beings are social by nature, yet gradually individualize themselves through internalizing their experiences.

Social constructionism offers a critique to development theory, suggesting that children are active and creative agents and that therefore socialization is a collective process. From this perspective, socialization signifies the “development of interactional competence, as individuals become increasingly capable of taking the role of other . . . and competently aligning their actions with others” (Adler, 1998, p. 10). Moving outward from the adult viewpoint yet incorporating structure and agency, Thorne (1993) explores the “group life” of children, looking at the “social relations, the organization and meanings of social situations, the collective practices” (p. 13) through which children and adults create and recreate salient concepts in their daily interactions. I employ the notion of group life in this study, considering how accumulated, everyday social interactions generate behaviors that have meaning to an individual and within his or her given group.

William Corsaro (1985) specifically regards the peer group as the most significant public realm for children, as it is important to highlight children's relationships among their peer groups in order to better understand children's social practices and the forms of collaboration that occur there. Children engage in group art activities intentionally and/or unintentionally: they draw together, play together, and talk about what they are doing

together in various ways. In this study, children's interactions at the studio can be understood through Patricia and Peter Adler's (1998) notion of "compartmentalized friends," or those friends who are easily available for interactions at certain times and places. Friends of this nature might be limited to specific activities or skills, thus giving them access to particular characteristics of one another:

[C]ompartmentalized friendships were often role *relationships*, involving individuals in specific types of interaction and dealing with only certain aspects of their complete selves. As such, compartmentalized friends might have access to a different part of people than what they presented to others, from their most intimate and reflective selves to their most situation-embedded or superficial selves. Compartmentalized friendships, then, were somehow constrained, restricted, or confined, by location, setting, time, season, dimension, or role. (p. 136, italics original)

Considering that the children coming to the studio were from two different classrooms, their relationships could be considered to be compartmentalized friendships. The children shared an interest in art and engaging in art activities at a certain time of the day. Because this group of children was attending school in one of the major cities in the country, however, they may have had fewer opportunities to see each other outside of school than children who attended school in smaller communities.

Although the children's friendships were compartmentalized, they were no less strong for being so; indeed, a strong group culture can be constructed through play activities. Corsaro (2003), in his book *We're Friends, Right?*, highlights the complexities of friendship, suggesting that friendship is accordingly best understood in relation to the

specific social situations of children's lives. Based on his extensive observations, Corsaro argues that preschool children organize and utilize their "peer culture" to negotiate childhood by learning from their collaborative work in friendship, sharing, fantasy, role-play, and resolving conflicts. According to Corsaro, as children attempt to gain control of their lives and share that sense of control with those in their existing peer group, they tend to protect their interactive play spaces by refusing to let others join. To Corsaro (2003), this action is not about being selfish, but rather about being willing to "keep sharing what they are already sharing" (p. 40). This implies that children intentionally affirm their peer culture through agentively controlling the space where multiple interactions and complex communications occur. From this perspective, children's engagement in the art studio, apart from their classrooms, is noteworthy in that it creates unique spaces for spontaneous, meaningful, and entangled social interactions, in which children can exercise agency.

Art as Social Practice

Children's social relationships can also be practiced within the activity of art-making. That is, when children engage in art, they not only create graphic artifacts, but they also perform social competencies. Art-education theorist Phil Pearson (2001) argues that children's drawing is a social practice as it "can be play activity, narrative activity, a measured strategy for social approval, or the equally measured pursuit of the inductively grasped competence appropriate to given representation systems" (p. 358). According to Pearson, children make decisions about representing certain subjects, and these artistic decisions increase as they become less reliant on adults to determine subjects for them.

This is because “children learn how to operate in the social world as autonomous social beings” (p. 361), and drawing is a venue to perform that agency. Thompson (2009) shows how the manifestation of children’s artistic languages intersects with social, cultural environments to provoke such languages. Based on her research with children, Thompson believes that “drawing is an intensely social activity, a public performance that leaves a residue of meaning to be seen, shared, reviewed, discussed, revisited, and revised” (p. 32). I have also come to believe that drawing evokes and creates stories, relationships, and experiences that are closely intertwined with the visible marks made on the paper. Drawing is a form of public yet personal engagement by which children can effectively practice their social competencies.

Considering play as a distinctive social activity, Elizabeth Wood and Emese Hall (2011) use empirical research to explore drawing as intellectual play and as a means of authoring spaces for self—drawing play as a process through which children form their identities. In viewing drawings as similar to play scripts in their inclusion of children’s representations, identities, and feelings, Wood and Hall (2011) regard both drawing and play as activities that reveal the hidden transcripts of childhood. The researchers thereby link play and drawing by using three themes: playing *at* drawing, playing *in* drawings, and playing *with* drawings. Social interactions with others (i.e., peers or adults) occur in “playing *at* and *with* drawing,” times in which children reveal the complex imaginative processes that underpin their playful transformations of the social and cultural worlds in which concepts of power, agency, and identity are embedded (p. 267). For example, children’s group drawing activities involve collaborative, interactive processes of communicating about what the children are thinking, and the narratives, images, and

symbols that emerge during the drawing process lead to the sharing and establishment of meanings within the space, thereby creating powerful group identities. The study therefore theorizes that children create spaces in drawing for authoring their own identities and use drawings as a way of positioning themselves in relation to others (p. 279).

My research also aligns with this notion that art, especially drawing, is a social, personal yet public, practice in which children engage. Rather than seeing children's drawing solely as a manifestation of playfulness or as a representation of everyday experiences, I believe it is necessary to understand how children legitimate themselves as social beings, perform their agencies, and perform their own meaning-making through social practices. In this spirit, I incorporated sketchbook time into the beginning of each studio session, believing that the social practice offered greater possibilities for other forms of art engagement. The next chapter describes the theory and practice scaffolding the children's sketchbook drawings, as well as how I envisioned that such an experience could be transformed and expanded into a space of multifaceted possibilities.

Chapter 3

Sketchbooks: A Philosophical Suggestion for Expanding Spaces

As a new art instructor, I incorporated activities and formats different from those the children were used to. One of the biggest changes for the children, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, was the everyday activity of drawing in sketchbooks. I adopted the philosophy of sketchbooks from the Penn State Saturday Art School, which I had participated in as a student-teacher during the previous semester. At the Saturday Art School, children are encouraged to engage in “voluntary” drawing (see LarkHorovitz, Lewis, and Luca, 1973) in their sketchbooks using drawing materials (usually color markers) for the first 15-20 minutes of each class, before beginning the main activity. When I first suggested this idea to the children at the preschool, the children looked puzzled, and some commented, “We didn’t have this time before.” Although it took several days for the children to become accustomed to picking up their sketchbooks as they entered the art studio, the sketchbook activity soon became the core of studio time, as well as the time during which the most robust dialogues and performances emerged. The children came to be excited about their sketchbooks as well as drawing in general, exclaiming, “We can draw whatever we want!”

In order to help the children make their personal sketchbooks, I devoted the first couple of classes to help the children bind papers: orange-colored construction paper was used for the covers of the sketchbooks, and regular letter paper was used for the inner drawing sheets. I used hole punchers and binding rings to fasten the paper together, mainly because this method of binding meant that new sheets could be added when all of the original pages had been filled. I then placed all of the sketchbooks on a bookshelf

near the entrance of the studio so that each child could grab one as he or she walked into the studio. I normally encouraged the children to sit around the big round table with the drawing materials placed in the center (see Figure 2 and 3), but the children were also allowed to draw at the smaller table or on the floor if they wanted to. While the children were drawing, I typically sat next to or behind them, paying careful attention to the dialogues and the subjects each child chose to explore: I considered possible experiences that might have generated the subjects, linked relationships, and envisioned how the dialogues would develop into. Since some children were inclined to tell stories about what they were drawing and how they were doing it, I would often become a participant in their conversations, listening and asking questions about their thinking. In doing so, I was able to document the processes and narratives that emerged during the drawing activity, while simultaneously observing the multiple interactions among the children that were contributing to the formation of a group culture.



Figure 2: Sketchbook shelf



Figure 3: Working on sketchbooks on the large table

Some might perceive the sketchbook activity as a rehearsal for the main art activity. However, I believe it engenders critical learning opportunities for children, allowing them to perform creative languages. It also, in fact, may yield the most interesting and engaging narratives, thinking, and debates. Thompson (1995) believes that voluntary drawing is a form of art-making that is significantly different from the art-making that occurs during teacher-initiated lessons and that it helps students “learn something about themselves as artists, as individuals, and as participants in the cultures which converge and emerge in their classroom” (p. 7). Thompson’s concept and empirical practice of sketchbooks is inspired by Anne Haas Dyson’s (1986, 1989) ethnographic work on journal-writing in language-arts classes, an activity in which

children themselves choose what to write about. In her extensive study of literacy development, Dyson (1986, 1989, 1993, 1997b) discovered that children reinvent culturally coded symbolic systems through journal activities with children incorporating drawing as graphic language. As children learn to become “writers” and perform communicative fluency, they linger in the realm of “multiple social worlds” (Dyson, 1993). Applying this framework to sketchbooks, when children draw, they not only create visual artifacts, but they also process and perform social competencies through *languages*.

I believe this theory and practice of voluntary drawing suggests various exciting possibilities. The phrase, “We can draw/paint/make whatever we want,” appears a number of times in my documentation, both during sketchbook time and during other art activities, as the anecdote about David’s pink fudge machine suggests. It was clear to me that allowing the children autonomy over content and material enabled them to embody and perform their agencies to “make” as artists. Building on what I observed, I propose that the voluntary drawing of practicing competencies through languages expands *spaces*. By spaces, I mean an assemblage of three interwoven concepts: (1) space as dimension, (2) spaces of embodiment, and (3) pedagogical spaces.

First, making two-dimensional drawings suggests ways to later create three-dimensional forms of art (i.e., clay work, structures with loose parts). Drawing may allow a child to sketch an intended idea for a sculpture, but drawing may also stimulate a child to come up with the idea to create a three-dimensional work. I believe this interplay between the dimensions—drawing and making—encourages possibilities to imagine and create. This is because the images or subjects that children draw usually represent what

they admire and fancy (Thompson, 1995). These interests are represented in the act of making three-dimensional art as well. For example, Robert, who regularly drew automobiles in his sketchbook, also deliberately and enthusiastically made motor vehicles and spaceships with recycled materials such as plastic bottles and egg cartons. Although his drawings were interesting, he exhibited greater proficiency in making detailed elements and functions. This implies that drawing not only yields possibilities for works of augmented dimensions with material engagement, but also that drawing can generate ideas to be conveyed outside of drawing. This notion of expanding dimensions in artworks will be further illustrated in the next chapter.

Next, voluntary drawing broadens the performative space of embodiment. While the first concept takes into account the space and dimension of a work, this concept encompasses the bodily and physical space in which the self performs embodied experiences during the act of making. In other words, drawing invites a child to manifest his or her lived experiences within a given physical space using all the senses—through thinking, visualizing, verbalizing, feeling, and performing. For example, one of the distinctive forms of embodiment I see in children is play; children exhibit everyday experiences that have been processed and internalized in their minds through play. Considering Wood and Hall's (2011) theory that children play in, at, and with drawing, drawing and play can help a child move from his or her internal space to recognizing and inviting others into the space. In other words, the capacity to stretch boundaries, from the material space of the sketchbook to the physical space of self and others, is manifested in children's imaginative and performative behaviors. Drawing on Winnicott (1971),

Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005) uses the notion of “transitional space” to suggest the process by which inner realities come into contact with outer realities, describing how:

For a surprising moment of spontaneous play, creativity, and imaginative putting to use—when we are in transitional space—we are neither ourselves as we have come to know them nor are we our others....We are crossing that important internal boundary that is the line between the person we have been no longer are and the person we will become. (pp. 61-62)

Through play, therefore, children traverse boundaries and expand the spaces of embodiment, using all of their senses to better understand themselves and others—or the self that becomes the other.

Lastly, engaging in voluntary drawing expands pedagogical spaces. That is, the process and performativity of voluntary drawing contributes to “knowledge in the making” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 1), through which the experience of the learning self is disclosed. Ellsworth (2005) considers pedagogy to be the “impetus behind the particular movements, sensations, and affects of bodies/mind/brains in the midst of learning” (p. 2) and suggests that the interplay between embodied experiences and pedagogy allows for emergent transitional spaces of learning. Considering drawing as the sensational embodiment of experiences that generates meaningful learning experiences, she considers children to be competent in performing their agencies to make knowledge as well as to establish pedagogical “pivot points” (Ellsworth, 2005). That is, the voluntariness and autonomy of drawing and self-initiated play foster pedagogy in a way that makes meaning for each child as well as for the group. Putting this notion in dialogue with the Reggio Emilia philosophy of children constructing their own learning opportunities as

part of a self-guided curriculum, I believe that children, by performing their own agencies, create and expand pedagogical spaces.

I believe the practice of sketchbook drawing, therefore, helps children to challenge and traverse the boundaries of space—of dimensions, physical embodiment, and pedagogy. Given this concept and Corsaro's (2003) understanding of peer culture, we might ask: how do children actively expand space upon emergent encounters, yet collaboratively bring everyday experiences into visibility? How do children construct the processes of experimentation and failure that might potentially lead to an evolved form of embodiment? The next chapter provides descriptions and documentation of the two main events through which the children in my studio challenged themselves to expand spaces. The chapter also provides a consideration of children's distinctive everyday experiences in relation to the events.

Chapter 4

Manifestations of Experience: Emergent Collaborative Play

Event 1: Making an Igloo

It was a Wednesday afternoon when I was waiting for the clock to strike 1:50pm—the time the children would begin to arrive at the studio—with my lesson plan for a storytelling activity in hand. That morning, I had joined in on the school's field trip to the National Art Museum, and I had envisioned the children drawing about and telling vivid stories of their trip in the studio later that day. Reflecting on my observation question about how museum experiences would creatively influence children's drawings, I was excited to see the fascinating works the children would create, and I was eager to document the narratives as research data; it seemed to be the ideal opportunity to gather tangible data and prove my hypothesis of museum experiences generating children's narratives and art works. My only concern was the unavoidable presence of a new material in the corner of the art studio: a stack of large Styrofoam slats that had been unexpectedly donated by a family that morning while we were at the museum.

As the children entered the art studio, they immediately started to show interest in the new and strange material, and of course, they were excited to play with it. After a brief moment of contemplation during which I wondered if I were sacrificing a prime opportunity to see how the children interpreted their museum experiences through art, I came to the conclusion that the students should be allowed to play with the Styrofoam slats after their sketchbook time. The children immediately pulled out the slats and began to explore the materiality of the Styrofoam at some point, breaking the slats into smaller pieces, feeling the texture of the bumpy parts, and jumping on the slats. Interestingly,

while some children merely played with the pieces as open-ended objects, others attempted to draw on the surface with markers. Among the group of children playing with the Styrofoam was a young girl who introduced the idea of building an igloo with the broken pieces. Some of the other children agreed and began to break down the big Styrofoam panels into smaller pieces. After a while, two girls, including the one who had introduced the activity, began to draw rectangles on the surface of the Styrofoam pieces in order to make a window. The children asked to use tools so that they could punch holes through the Styrofoam; I could only suggest child-friendly scissors to use as gimlets, encouraging them to punch one hole at a time. Although they were not completely satisfied with the scissors, the children systematically divided the tasks that they thought needed completion. Some drew rectangles on the surface of the Styrofoam with markers, and others worked on punching holes following the marker lines (see Figure 4).

The children soon realized it was impossible to make windows by punching holes in a rectangular shape and became frustrated with the fragility of the Styrofoam. The constructive play gradually transformed into physical play, with children jumping on the Styrofoam slats and breaking them into smaller and smaller pieces. The children now pretended as if the space was a “winter wonderland,” gathering the crumbs of the foam and joyfully tossing them up in the air as if it were snowing. The children now seemed more focused on having fun than on constructing an igloo. When the studio time was over, the children concluded their play event by filling the whole studio space with Styrofoam pieces and crumbs (see Figure 5).



Figure 4: Punching igloo windows



Figure 5: After the “winter wonderland”

Drawing on Styrofoam

The next day, having not given up on the idea of connecting the children's museum experiences with art-making, I devised an activity in which the children would draw about the museum trip on the Styrofoam slats. After sketchbook time, I asked, "Friends, what did we do yesterday?" Two girls enthusiastically answered, "Make an igloo!" Another boy responded, "Sleepover." I asked a couple more questions to remind the children of their trip to the art museum the previous morning (at this point, I realized visiting museums during school was so routine to them that they no longer even took note of it). I suggested that the children draw about what they remembered seeing and feeling, or perhaps a peculiar experience that they had had during the journey to the museum. I also shared what I recalled about the visit. My intention of encouraging "drawing only" on the Styrofoam stemmed from the desire to introduce different possibilities for using the material than breaking it and punching holes in it—to use it instead as a solid surface, such as a canvas. Yet even after I introduced the possibility of drawing on the Styrofoam, some children, especially the boys, remained more interested in breaking the Styrofoam and punching holes in it, and I had to remind them of the rules. The children's drawings nevertheless reflected multiple past events and imaginative stories which were unrelated to the museum visit (see Figure 6 and 7).



Figure 6: David's Styrofoam drawing about his family and Independence Day fireworks



Figure 7: Jen's Styrofoam drawing about her mom, diamond shapes, and signs

Event 2: Constructing Space Stations

After the weekend, two boys, Robert and Zach, began playing with some aluminum pans that were in the room after sketchbook time, pretending they were spacemen. Then, finding empty plastic bottles in the recycling bin in the studio and attaching them to the pans with duct tape, the boys created spaceships. After a while, they decided that their spaceships needed a “space station” as a place to land. Robert and Zach grabbed a large Styrofoam slat from the pile to make a space station for their spaceships (pans). Naturally, the girls, Hannah and Alyssa, decided to join the group, and the four teamed up in pairs to build the space station—Hannah partnered with Robert, and Zach paired with Alyssa. The children insisted that they first need a “base” on the ground; they then grabbed two more slats for walls and asked me to use duct tape to hold the slats together. Each team built an independent station that included a roof and additional walls so that the pan-spaceships could be placed inside. When I told them I was out of duct tape to connect walls, they used chairs to support the Styrofoam walls. Building space stations soon became a competition, with the children comparing their structures: Alyssa said to the other team, “Look at ours.” Hannah and Robert were taking the other team’s pieces to add on to their own structure, causing Zach to yell, “Stop stealing! We’re using our own.” At this point, thinking that this competition could only yield frustration instead of joy, I suggested, “How about we share?” After an a-ha moment, Zach repeated my words with excitement, “How about we share the base?” Alyssa enthusiastically responded by saying, “How about... and we make a bigger one with both of ours?” This idea made Zach excited; he jumped up and exclaimed, “Hip, hip, hurray! Hip, hip, hurray!” Zach

then insisted that he needed more Styrofoam pieces, repeating, “The more the merrier! The more the merrier!”

As children proceeded to build the joined structures of space station together, they also engaged in an imaginative play performance, sitting on the chairs and pretending the Styrofoam structure was a desk. Robert, sitting on one of the chairs, said to Alyssa beside him, “Ooh, I got a little desk.” Alyssa found another chair in front of her and sat like Robert, saying, “You can be at the back and I’m at the front” (see Figure 9.2). Robert spoke to himself, calling the structure “my little home desk.” Then Zach approached them with curiosity, asking, “What are those?” Alyssa responded, “This is a computer and now I’m going in here, okay?” and left the spot to go inside the open space of the rectangular Styrofoam construction. Zach then took Alyssa’s seat and also pretended to be in a lab. He stated, “I’m in my lab! Tap, tap, ta-da-tap!” Robert joined in the noise-making: “Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap.... Okay everybody, tap, tap, tap....” Then, jumping off his chair, he insisted that they should move to a different space.

Meanwhile, Hannah explored the constructed spaces and was determined to crawl inside one of the Styrofoam-walled boxes. She peeled back the wall carefully as if she were opening a door; she then made sure that the wall was still supporting the roof and crawled into the space. Robert followed behind her in an attempt to crawl inside as well, but before putting his body completely into the space, he informed everyone else: “Hey, I figured that we can go inside this little thing.” He then put himself completely inside the space and left the door open. Alyssa, after listening to Robert’s announcement, ran toward them, crawled into the space, and closed the door behind her. There were thus three children in the tiny space surrounded by Styrofoam slats. The door was closed for a

couple seconds. After wiggling around for a moment in the space, perhaps trying to position themselves more comfortably, Alyssa and Robert opened the door to peak out as if they were checking to see if anyone had observed them on their adventure. When Zach approached, they affirmed that the space was full and refused to let him join, saying, “Sorry, Zach, this is full.” The play activity continued to evolve as the children discovered other materials that could be added to the structure. However, soon after, the studio time was over and the children had to clean up and return to their classrooms.



Figure 8: Building independent space stations



Figure 9.1: Construction in progress for a joined space station



Figure 9.2: Pretending to be in a laboratory



Figure 9.3: Stepping inside to the space station



Figure 9.4: Three children playing inside the space station

Considering Possible Catalysts

Before interpreting the emergent events above, I would like to consider various possible everyday experiences that could have acted as significant motivation for the children's play activities. Within my short time at the preschool, I observed salient moments that explicitly or inexplicitly seemed to be related to the children's play events. For example, the first play event, in which the children systematically ventured to construct an igloo, could be attributed to the students' visit to a national folklore museum. At a family-friendly activity center in the museum, there is an igloo-building play area that helps visitors to learn about Native American habitats. The igloo at the museum was able to be easily built by connecting the cushion-filled parts encased with Velcro® in a numeric order. I had accompanied both of the classes that visited my art studio on their visit to the museum two weeks before the play event, and I had seen the children either watch or partake in the igloo-building play with their classroom teacher. In this regard, I believe the children were able to immediately visualize an igloo when one of their classmates spontaneously initiated the idea, and they happily agreed to collaborate in the making.

Although many children likely share an interest in spaceships, the children at this school had also had an extraordinary experience with the former art instructor before he left that may have shaped their interest: over the past year, the instructor had filmed a *Star Wars*® reenactment video in which all the preschool students had partaken. The children created costumes and objects out of the materials in the studio and pretended to be characters in the movie, acting and narrating with peers. More interestingly, the video had been screened at one of the national museums adjacent to the school, and all parents

and members of the school had been invited to watch. Since the video clips were taped at the studio over a long period, “*our* Star Wars movie” remained a commonly mentioned subject even after the instructor left, frequently appearing in the children’s sketchbook drawings. This is only to suggest a few of the distinctive events that I observed.

Therefore, the group culture that had been cultivated over the children’s time at the school, in addition to each child’s lived experiences, may have significantly affected the play events.

Chapter Five

Analysis: Playing in Spaces as Collaborative Researchers and Artists

Messing about materials

Children play with things that are available in their physical surroundings; both of the play events described in the previous chapter portray young children using their immediate objects to play, in doing so exploring play's physicality and possibilities. Philosopher David Hawkins (1974) believes that a child's first major achievements in exploratory learning not only come in relation to the human world, but also "come equally, and perhaps more readily, in his exploration of the things of his surrounding physical environment, and of their responsiveness to his testing and trying" (p. 60). Hawkins conceptualizes "messaging about" as a learning phase that evolves with the child and thus develops in quality. "Messing about" becomes "a way of working that is no longer childish though it remains always childlike, the kind of self-disciplined probing and exploring that is the essence of creativity" (1974, p. 70). Looking at the documentation that I collected during my research, I find that the physical environment of available *things* in the space invited the children to explore, test, research, and try possibilities, using their own strategies and inventing their own solutions.

What, then, could be defined as the *things* that children play with? Architect Simon Nicholson (1971) proposed the theory of "loose parts" to suggest that children want to interact with variables, such as materials, shapes, physical, and phenomenological interactions, and words or concepts. He emphasized that having materials available in the play space allows children to use materials as they choose, exploring the possibilities to carry, move, combine, redesign, take apart and put materials

back together in multiple ways. All the materials the five-year-olds used in their self-directed play events—Styrofoam, bottles for recycling, markers, scissors, and duct tape—were loose-part materials available in the studio space. The materials came with no specific set of directions; rather, they could be used alone or combined with other objects, stimulating the children to discover their own ways of using them. This notion is particularly compelling considering children's constant exposure to single-purpose toys nowadays. Such toys prevent imaginative thinking with specific instruction of use, whereas loose parts promote the realization that children are capable of playing and make use of redesignable and rearrangeable variables. Perhaps because of the prevalence of single-purpose toys in the early-childhood environment, the children in the studio were more troubled by the huge, white, plain Styrofoam that invited them to imagine multiple purposes. In thinking about Styrofoam in particular, I am drawn to take a closer look at the concepts of material and materiality.

The powerful capacities of materials have been identified and contextualized by a number of educators in early-childhood education. Educators who adopt the Reggio Emilia approach use the phrase “hundred languages” as a metaphor for the teaching, learning, and expressive use of materials that are found within school settings (Schwall, 2015). In thinking about how the particular material of Styrofoam played an active role in the play that occurred in the studio, I believe it is essential to interpret, respond to, and problematize material encounters. Upon initially encountering the material, the children explored and examined its materiality by using all their senses. They not only encountered the Styrofoam being subject to transformation through processing, but they also experienced frustration with its fragility. This process of experiencing the infinite

possibilities yet simultaneous weakness invited the children to learn about the material, “becoming aware of the innate problematic of the material” (Adorno, in Leach, 2005, p. 12). The material was subsequently utilized in forming relationships; from representation to imaginative construction, the children engaged, expressed, and communicated with the material as well as with their peers in ways that carried meanings. Kind (2010, 2015), an atelierista, reflects on children’s encounters with materials, imagining how a material could become “a partner in the creative process, an object of encounter rather than a medium for re-presenting thought” (Kind, 2010, p. 125). Viewing a material as both a partner and an object draws attention to the material’s subjectivity as a medium with which to communicate and negotiate. Moreover, Kind (2015) believes that materials *live* in the world in multiple ways; “they evoke memories, narrate stories, invite actions, and communicate meanings” (p. 865). I believe, too, that the material encounter is a relational encounter: children interact with materials in ways that help them explore the realm of the “not-yet-known” (Davies, 2014) and that contribute to the performativity of expanding space, as well as help the children in creating their own identities.

The scale of construction using materials is also one of the reasons why the play events, and especially that of the space stations, are interesting to investigate. With Styrofoam slats bigger than their bodies, the children collaboratively worked to construct space stations and expanded their scales during the process of making. Expanding the scale of an artwork requires enough physical space in which to perform the expansion, as well as the necessary understandings and experiences of the use of the particular space. For example, one might ask: how have I used the space in the past and what kind of movement is restricted by the frame of the space? To what extent can I expand the scale

of an artwork in the physical space? The book *Working Big* (1975) by John Lidstone articulates how children artistically use outdoor space—in a way they possibly cannot use paper in classrooms—finding that children’s space is similar to artists’ space:

When there are no space limitations; when techniques do not impose restrictions, when the child, through his own exploration of the forces and materials involved, decides on his own way of working; when total physical preoccupation is possible, the child is revealed as a consummate artist in his own right. Observing youngsters work in this way leads to the inevitable conclusion that for children art is play and play is art. (p. 10)

Lidstone’s notion helps recognize the possibilities of physical space such that it allows children to engage in play/art activities on larger scales. Understanding the relationship between scale and space, the author further explains that large-scale art projects cannot be accomplished by a single artist working on his own, but by a team working together (Lidstone, 1975). In this respect, the children’s collaboration in constructing space stations represents an inevitable yet logical decision that allowed an exuberant process of play to enter into the art studio. Based on these observations and questions, the next section explores how the physicality of material and space invites children to engage deeply in the process of making.

The Playing Artists

Both art and play involve “the freedom, the autonomy, and the originality of the individual” (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 133). Spontaneous and joyful, rebellious or amusing, personal yet public, play and art take a variety of forms in daily life with mutually

inclusive intersections. Although the boundary between art and play is able to be dismantled, I nevertheless consider the documented events of my research as part of a performance of artists. This is based on a question I asked myself upon revisiting the documentation: “Would the play events have happened outside of the art studio?” I answered, “No.” I adamantly believe that the studio space in which the children engaged in creating works of drawing and painting invited them to expand their realm of play by participating in a different type of art-making with loose parts. As I subscribe to Pearson’s (2001) notion of art as a behavior, not a product, I view children making art as encompassing a multiplicity of behaviors in forms of exploration, communication, and play. These behaviors are not unlike the assemblage of behaviors that artists use in approaching their works.

Children are process-oriented rather than product-oriented. Especially during the second play event of making space stations, I observed that the children were playing within the performance of “making” (Zurmuehlen, 1990), rather than conceiving or naming, switching back and forth between pretend-play and the reality of construction. While they were committed to making the structures stable as space stations, they also played pretend as astronauts working in a laboratory. To the children, the making was not a task to complete, but rather, a performance that generated imaginative engagement and joy. The making was also a means to bring presence to the things that with which they played; their sculptural creations were both objects to play *with* and spaces to play *in*. Immersed in the process of playing and creating, the children were not aware of what was happening outside, including that I was making a video of them. This behavior is consistent with many artists’ approach to their works. Jackson Pollock (in Wigal, 2006)

said: “When I am *in* my painting, I am not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a short 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about” (p. 51). Being *in* the artwork, therefore, leads one to focus on the presence of the work and the process of making, which may be the whole purpose of making the artwork after all.

In this respect, looking at the Styrofoam events, I find that the children's use of open-ended materials to explore and build structures has resonances with contemporary art. Within the discursive realm of contemporary art, interactivity and engagement with the materials and its installation are the primary features that can be seen in the documentation. Contemporary artist Michelangelo Pistoletto, for example, embraces all the features mentioned above in his work *A Mirror of Judgment* (2011). Pistoletto installed endless numbers of upended rolls of corrugated Cardboard that stand chest-high throughout Serpentine gallery in London. The whirling patterns in this work created paths so that viewers passing by become part of the action (see Figure 10). Although the paths seemed to form simple labyrinths, symbols of the four major religions—Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism—were represented through the patterns, and a mirrored structure was placed in the center of the gallery room. This work suggests that even seemingly profound subjects can be created and displayed using the simplest materials, while simultaneously actively inviting others—the viewers—to become part of the artwork.

Another example is Sarah Sze's installation works. Incorporating painting, architecture, and installation, Sze investigates the value humans place on objects as well as how objects give meaning to the places and times people inhabit. Her work *Triple Point (Pendulum)* (2013), installed at Venice Biennale, Italy, uses salt, water, stone,

string, a projector, video, a pendulum, and other materials as part of a cluster of objects (see Figure 11). Over the years, Sze gathered objects such as leaves, stones, and tickets, providing a way to sculptures in which the technique (projectors, lamps, fans) is interrelated. Such techniques interact with the organic objects to create artifacts based on the idea of connectivity; the physical gear of the material, therefore, becomes inseparable from the clusters of elements, recreating the space from the inscription of an order within chaos. This concept can also be seen in children's play in the studio, which was primarily installation-oriented rather than product-oriented.



Figure 10: Michelangelo Pistoletto, *A Mirror of Judgment*, 2011 (image retrieved from <http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/michelangelo-pistoletto-mirror-judgement>)



Figure 11: Sarah Sze, *Triple Point (Pendulum)*, 2013 (image retrieved from <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/177636?locale=en>)

Re-imagining in Collaboration

In thinking of the group of children in my art studio as collaborating artists, I have come to recognize that the act of collaborating enhanced the qualities of the children's play and construction as experienced while "messing about" with materials, connecting with past experiences, and communicating with others. During the first play event, each child re-imagined the sensory experience of playing with the cushion-filled igloo parts at the museum, translating this experience into the use of a different type of material—Styrofoam. Vygotsky (1978) writes that "behavior can be understood only as the history of behavior" (p. 8); in this case, the children's histories of play experiences were brought

into a different space and setting, which motivated a new form of play upon the children's encounter of a new material. The group's knowledge of their sensory experiences, the structural process, and the final construction of the cushion-made igloo may have acted as a model for the classroom version of the igloo. Rather than attempting to create a representational form, the children could be understood as imagining and re-imagining the experience of using their senses to collaboratively create a play space. Moreover, given how the peer group collaborated to play with the new material, it is important to highlight how the structured rules of building an igloo functioned as a specific communication element. Bateson (1972) argues that a degree of group cultural knowledge regarding rules and roles exists in the play context and that this signals to children which systems are appropriate for them to apply. The children breaking down the Styrofoam, discussing their unique ideas of how to create an igloo with windows, and then enacting their roles of drawing squares or punching holes to create those windows all signify that collaboration emerged upon communicating about their group experiences. Although the igloo play transformed into physical play, I believe the children's attempt to envision a prototype and engage in the necessary process to re-imagine their experience at the museum was significant in that it led to further development in play.

Verbal communication plays a significant role in collaboration. In both of the children's play events, especially during the second event of making space stations with Styrofoam, the children communicated with their peers, using spoken language to plan, negotiate, and narrate their activities to each other. Upon establishing the initial goal of constructing a base for their space stations, the children engaged in multiple utterances of

calling each other's names for help and attention. Responding to verbal languages, the children collaborated in making the Styrofoam walls stable and structuring a play space with which they could engage. As the play evolved, the children began to pretend, switching back and forth from the reality of building the space stations and imagining they were *in* the space stations. During this phase, the children drew on a broader scope of verbal languages, such as requesting to be play partners, announcing what was being pretended or discovered, and allowing/refusing other children to join in particular play spaces. In fact, Brian Sutton-Smith (1981) regards pretense as communication, articulating that "imaginative play needs to be considered first and foremost as communication" (p. 41). This suggests that the children's imaginative play of pretending to be spacemen was a communicative performance, and as the children collaborated, these communication elements enhanced the children's social interactivity and artistic playfulness.

Chapter 6

Reflection

Reflection has always been integral to my research journey, both during and after my experiences engaging with the children. Every day after work, I thought about what had happened and what I might have done differently to make the sessions more meaningful for the children. Being actively immersed in my relationships with the children and their artwork, I contemplated how the children perceived the experiences in the studio in relation to the entangled interactions of materials, space, and individuals. To reflect, as Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) write, means to inter-connect with something, which is “always done in the midst of a complex network” (p. 536). This inter-connection allowed me to question whether I was reinforcing preconceived ideas or being truly critical of my teaching and research practices. This last chapter of my study presents my reflections on my pedagogy and various classroom moments, my expectations and failures, and my thoughts on what I might have done differently if I had been more aware of the realities of researching with children.

Thinking about pedagogy

I think about various classroom moments that emerged in my research journey: how the children in my art studio autonomously constituted their learning experiences and how I might have differently or more effectively supported such pedagogical moments. Learning, I believe, is an active phenomenon, rather than a task that is to be completed, and it takes place using sensational embodiment. Ellsworth (2005) suggests that individuals encounter pedagogy emergently through experiences of sensational

construction—through experimentation in thought—and she thereby regards pedagogy as "unable to contain or control where and when its address arrives or how it is taken up" (p. 55). For Ellsworth, learning involves indirect cognition:

Learning never takes place in the absence of bodies, emotions, place, time, sound, image, self-experience, history. It always detours through memory, forgetting, desire, fear, pleasure, surprise, rewriting. And, because learning always takes place in relation, its detours take us up to and sometimes across the boundaries of habit, recognition, and the socially constructed identities within our selves. (p. 55)

In this regard, children's experimental engagement with materials and space could be interpreted as an active process of learning, which is not predicated on an adult's imposition of knowledge, but is instead an emergent, relational encounter of sensations.

Attentive to my positionality in this study, I continuously reflected on the concept of "scaffolding" (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976; Wood & Middleton, 1975) during my observations. A proponent of emergent experiences yet taking seriously the responsibility of effectively facilitating my lessons, I struggled with how to scaffold children's art/play events. One of my most interesting findings in observing children's play was that the children did not hesitate to ask for help if they needed it. Attuned to and making sure to prevent possible hazards, I contemplated whether my tendency to let free play emerge was supporting the children's autonomy and agencies to create their own play or instead reflected negligence. However, since I was "being there" in the moment, the children were able to approach me if they needed instructional help or tools to solve the problems they encountered. For example, during the first event of making igloos, a girl asked how to break one of the huge Styrofoam slats in half in order to make smaller pieces. I

demonstrated how to hold the slat with both hands and use one foot or knee to kick in the center of the piece (this method, according to my understanding, was the easiest and fastest way to break a Styrofoam piece without a tool). She immediately applied the method and began to break all the pieces she wanted to use, subsequently helping her peers to use the same method. Another example was when the children were constructing the space stations. The boys had decided to use duct tape for connecting two Styrofoam slats, and they asked me if I could use my purple duct tape (see Figure 8). In order to keep the structure stable, they carefully directed me as to where to place the duct tape pieces and how many to use. Thus, responding to the questions and needs that the children initiated enabled me to sufficiently contribute to scaffolding the children's play. This is not to suggest that it is only necessary to effortlessly engage in children's play by responding when children ask for help, but rather an affirmation of the significance of the adult's role in guiding children.

Being physically active is not necessary during children's self-initiated play. However, I propose that the adult present should be mentally active—consciously and deliberately—in terms of thinking about how to enhance play quality, as well as when and when not to be involved in children's play. That is, in order to effectively scaffold play, the teacher ought to embody the concepts of flexibility and reflexivity, developed based on deep understandings of each child's play characteristics. The teacher should also envision how the play might be transformed—either positively or negatively—with an adult's help. For example, during the second play event of building space stations, I suggested sharing the base when the competition of building separate space ships started heating up. I decided to propose the idea of sharing the base because I was aware that one

of the boys, Zach, could easily become frustrated, and recognized that the competition was not leading to a positive experience. Not only was sharing pedagogically ethical and appropriate, sharing was also a strategy by which the children could create a structure larger than those they had previously built in the art studio. Sharing was thus an attempt to introduce a learning experience as well as a creative encounter that could engender both excitement and challenges. Although the children could have neglected my suggestion and continued to compete with one another, they embodied the idea and shifted to sharing the base. By combining the two separate stations and creating a huge structure that they could fit inside, the children saw the play evolve into a more meaningful activity. Therefore, when the children and I adapted the process of play, circumstances that seemed challenging transformed into more valuable experiences.

This recognition aligns with the notion of the co-construction of play pedagogy, which places greater emphasis on teachers and children interacting and the relationship between playing and learning than on the pedagogy of play (Johnson, 2014). The pedagogy of play suggests that children co-construct play that may be different from teachers' curriculum goals. The co-construction of play pedagogy, however, emphasizes the relationship of teachers and children in play. Pramling-Samuelsson and Pramling (2014) argue that interaction and communication in meaning-making emerge on two levels: the teacher on one level and the children on the other level. Here, play comes from the children, and the learning goals come from the teacher. This is visible in my documentation of the children creating their own learning experiences through spontaneous, collaborative, and self-directed play, during which I co-construct the pedagogical experiences through my presence as both a participant and the teacher.

Attuned to the children's social practices during play and art-making, I found that the relationships the children had with each other and with me helped constitute meaningful moments in the creative space.

The Realities of Researching with Children

Reflecting upon my research journey, I realize that I had encountered experiences that conflict with my expectations. I designed and expected ideal results without acknowledging the realities of researching with children, especially young children. As I mentioned above, my initial research inquiry was to consider how the contents, objects, and physical site of the museum visit affected children's art-making and creative thinking. I had expected to see sketchbook drawings and main activities relating to the children's recent museum trips or at least partially about the children's daily lives in a school that is located in the museum. I had imagined recording diverse narratives about the children's excitement at seeing an artwork at one of the national museums and the subsequent graphic languages they would produce. However, this was what *I* had perceived as a unique setting for the children, not what the children necessarily sought to celebrate as part of their everyday lives. The environment of the museum and the frequency of visits was more quotidian for the children. The reality was, even when I restricted storytelling activities to museum-related themes, the children naturally told stories about what had happened over the weekend, about monsters and princesses, or whatever spontaneously popped into their minds. It almost seemed like the children were unaware of their immediate environment.

I struggled. For the first half of my research journey, I truly believed that the study would end without yielding any compelling outcomes or interpretations. I was disappointed in myself for delving into this research without completely understanding the realities of it. However, as I let go of my preoccupation with the study's "outcomes" and began to look at the children's behaviors and interactions as they actually existed, I could see that the children's daily experiences, including their museum visits, were imbued in social manifestations in a way that the relationships inextricably entangled: Children's engagement in drawings, conversations, and play, emerged and was performed simultaneously in a way that was difficult to identify separately. Moreover, the complexity of the children's experiences *emerged*. Opposed to my initial research design that anticipated acquiring results, meaningful and pedagogical moments emerged upon the children's encounters with various materials, individuals, and situations. For me, the material encounters were unexpected and difficult to interpret, but the children seemed adept in engaging with such variables—they spontaneously and curiously put themselves in the moment, and the moments actively invited the children to collaborate with one another. Collaboration was another aspect I did not expect to observe; I confess that I had thought about children's art-making as an independent process by which children manifested individual learning experiences. However, the children's wish to interact with their peers influenced every aspect of their art-making and play, whether verbally or physically. Thus, I believe realizing the discrepancies between my initial conceptualization of research and the realities is a starting point for effectively envisioning future research.

How I Might Approach Future Research Differently

The realizations above collectively serve as a path for considering how I might approach research with children in future endeavors. In particular, I would like to conclude this study by touching upon how I might position myself differently in relation to children. Upon re-reading the documentation from this study, I have noticed that I acted as the adult authority. I situated myself in relation to the children as the adult who could perhaps manage the various situations and behaviors. Clearly, the rationales and interpretations were generated from *my* perspective, focusing on my goal of gaining data in order to take away interesting experiences as a researcher. It was not until recently that I came to realize that I was not as attentive to what the children wanted to take away from the studio as I was to my own goals and expectations; indeed, the very fact that I had expectations, a presumed theory, and outcomes in a phenomenological study demonstrates how naïve I was.

What I might do differently in future research would be to be more cognizant of my positionality as the adult in the classroom, and to avoid as best as possible adopting a position of power and control. This research journey allowed me to encounter theories about which I had previously only written, such as the pedagogy of listening and the notion of agentic children. During my observation sessions, I embodied the realization that in practice, it is difficult to completely escape from adopting a position of adult authority in certain social, cultural, political, and institutional contexts. In order to actively participate in the research study from the perspective of children, it is crucial to enhance the quality of relationships, know the specificities of the children's thinking, and invite children to construct and author their learning experiences.

In particular, I would like to experiment with the manner in which I conduct documentation with the camera. The camera offers the researcher the opportunity to engage and reengage in more intensive microanalysis of moments, capturing layers of elements that could easily be misidentified. Cognizant of the importance of the camera, I confess that I exerted authority over the device: I neither asked children to use the camera nor offered for them to take pictures or videos with the camera. I was not paying more attention to the presence of a device that I believed was so powerful, yet I refused to let the children explore the power and possibilities of the device. In fact, in today's era of digital technology, children are much more aware of what a camera can do (Davies, 2014) than ever before and are adept in using such a device. I observed that whenever I approached a child with a camera, normally my iPhone, to take a video or a photo of the child's drawing, the child would check the screen to see if the edges fit the frame and move the paper if it needed repositioning; the children were already aware of how the camera worked and how to present the subject effectively within the frame. In this regard, I have begun to envisage how research documentation would look if children were allowed to take photographs and videos. If what I was able to see were merely fragments of moments, children as documenters could perhaps create experiences of more personal, engaging, and self-directed documentations. How might honoring children's agencies through this experimentally valid approach invite a different realm of research? How might children's experience of documenting become resonating and reciprocal with and in the making? And how might children perform as collective documenters practicing social competencies?

With all the above as legitimate research questions that could be further developed, I anticipate continuing to pursue my study of early childhood art education. In a field that continuously energizes my soul and sparks my curiosity, yet simultaneously produces discomfort as I recognize my positionality, I believe there is more to grow in my research as well as my identity as a researcher and artist. I plan to be more critical, reflexive, and problematizing of the ways educators, including myself, approach children, thereby reconsidering pedagogy as a space of possibilities.

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