

University of Cape Town

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**MAXINE GREENE'S ARGUMENTS ON AESTHETIC LITERACY
AND THE IMAGINATION IN THE CONTEXT OF
CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN
EDUCATION**

*A Dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
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INTRODUCTION

Surely education today must be conceived as a mode of opening the world to critical judgement by the young and to their imaginative projections and, in time, to their transformative actions ~ Maxine Greene (1995, p. 56).

Clues to the problem out of which the question for this thesis arises can be found in the above quote from Maxine Greene. Firstly, the problem emerges from the instability of our rapidly changing society. These changes are so complex that it would be impossible to attempt a comprehensive documentation of them here. I will however, argue that in South Africa we are experiencing immense local changes and global transformations. Globalisation and the proliferation of information and communications have had a profound effect on the political, social, economic and cultural arenas of our society. These changes have repercussions on the lives of most individuals who often find the rate of change quite overwhelming. Attempting to negotiate their way through these perplexities, many individuals simply contract into the “safety and the everydayness” of their own worlds. Unable to find their way through the nettles of uncertainty and change, many individuals feel trapped by the problems of contemporary society without sufficiently developed critical judgement, vision or imagination to free themselves. As Greene points out, ‘There is a withdrawal, a widespread speechlessness, a silence where there might be – where there ought to be – an impassioned dialogue’ (1988, p. 7).

Part of the problem also lies within the domain of education. It is up to education to provide the openings in which Greene’s ‘*impassioned dialogue*’ can not only be encouraged but also take place. In order for this to happen, however, we need to educate with freedom in mind. By this I mean that education has to be conceived of as ‘a mode of opening the world to *critical judgement* by the young and to their *imaginative projections*’. Should education not be concerned with developing critical, reflective and imaginative youngsters, then we might remain content with what is “given” from the outside and passive under the pressures of a fragmented existence. Unable to reflect critically on the world around us and to perceive imaginatively of

alternatives and possibilities, we will probably be incapable of *'transformative action'*. In a country like South Africa, developing youngsters with the courage and the ability to initiate change, should be a major educational goal.

Greene writes that, 'An inability to conceive of a better order of things can give rise to a resignation that paralyzes and prevents people from acting to bring about change' (1995, p. 19). To 'conceive of a better order of things' means being able to imagine and 'to call for imaginative capacity is to work for the ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise' (*ibid.*). Greene proposes the notion that the arts, and more specifically a form of aesthetic education incorporated into the curriculum at all levels, might be the best possible means for encouraging the development of imaginative youngsters. It is with this in mind that the question for this thesis arises:

Are Maxine Greene's arguments on aesthetic literacy and the imagination pertinent to contemporary developments in South African education?

In order to highlight the problem from which the question emerges, I will begin by providing a global picture of our changing society and what appear to be some of the problems consequent on these transformations. I will briefly discuss the emergence of postmodern thought and the unease of the climate accompanying it. I will also examine the effects that the proliferation of information and communications technology has on our society, looking particularly at the problem of technicist thinking and unreflective consumerism resulting in what has been referred to as a 'culture of contentment' (Galbraith, 1993).

It is the reality of many individuals existing in such a way that education needs to acknowledge. In Chapter Two, I will argue that Maxine Greene's notion of freedom is about opening the spaces and perspectives needed to educate in this changing society. Greene's idea of education is the type that provokes youngsters to surpass what is "given" from the outside, enables them to name alternatives and come together to imagine a better state of things. It is a conception of

education that encourages individuals to affirm themselves as conscious, critical beings in a world that needs to be constantly reflected upon, challenged and remade.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss Greene's ideas on the imagination and its role in education; and more specifically, in education geared towards freedom and social change. I will look at the imaginative capacity that creates possibilities, enables us to look at things as if they could be otherwise, and provides the ability to break with what is usually taken for granted. Chapter Three will also include a discussion on the role that imagination can play in the making of community amidst the plurality and diversity of South African society.

Chapter Four moves on to consider Greene's argument that the artistic-aesthetic aspect of the arts can work to release the imagination and 'break open a dimension inaccessible to other experience' (Marcuse, 1977, p. 72). Greene proposes an *informed attending* of the arts through the incorporation of an aesthetic literacy into the general curriculum. Such a form of literacy demands qualitative perceiving of works of art that pose questions to the lives of youngsters as well as provoking them to critical reflection and a heightened awareness of the world around them.

If we are going to place Greene's thoughts within a South African context, then it is important to situate her ideas within contemporary developments in South African education. This means acknowledging the multicultural nature our new education system as well as the changes taking place with the development and implementation of our new outcomes-based curriculum. Chapter Five begins by situating South Africa's Curriculum 2005 within global and local demands and changes in our society. It moves on to discuss the possibilities and the limits of Curriculum 2005 with respect to incorporating a form of aesthetic literacy into teaching and learning at all levels.

While Curriculum 2005, in a new way, acknowledges the important role of the arts in education, I will argue that it still fails to pay substantial attention to the artistic-aesthetic nature of the arts

– the very aspect that enables us to see from unaccustomed angles and to imagine alternative possibilities. Curriculum 2005 provides new openings for the arts and culture in education. However, teachers need to find ways to move through these openings and take full advantage of the imaginative opportunities that the arts present to education.

Chapter Six will illustrate in conclusion how Greene's ideas might provide the direction needed to move through these openings. I will propose that to recontextualize Greene's ideas in South African education, we need to confront both the problems and the possibilities that might arise if we are to teach for imaginative and aesthetic openings in the multicultural classroom.

CHAPTER ONE

The nature of our changing society: A global perspective

Two years away from the twenty-first century, we find our world and society changing in ways we did not envision as coming upon us so soon. Political, social, economic and cultural changes in the global arena are happening far too quickly for the liking of most. It is no longer just the elderly who are complaining of an inability to keep up with global trends. The *angst* of bewilderment, apathy and confusion is becoming endemic among those who will lead us into the third millennium. As we as educators attempt to negotiate our way through education in a dramatically changing society, it becomes imperative that we not only acknowledge these transitions, but that we work towards understanding them in relation to our own practice. Understanding these shifts involves realizing the effects that they will have on youngsters and then considering how teaching and learning need to be changed and adapted to equip children with the knowledge skills, values and attitudes needed to cope and succeed in this world.

1.1 A critique of modernity and the emergence of "postmodern" thought

A massive intellectual revolution is taking place. Signs of this revolution appear everywhere – on university campuses and on television screens, in the thought forms of computer networks and in the lifestyle of the average person. As the twentieth century draws to a close, there is the sense that a particular way of thinking is disappearing and that we are on the verge of something new. Diogenes Allen (1989, p. 2)

In order to establish the problem out of which the question for this thesis is derived, it will be most useful to begin by looking at our society and its changing nature. To understand these changes, it is important to take a global perspective of our country and within this broader framework, begin to make sense of the reasons for these changes and the consequent opportunities and problems.

Indeed our world is changing, in what ways or to what extent is still perhaps debatable, and what we are 'on the verge of' is still unknown. But there are undoubtedly substantial socio-economic and epistemological shifts taking place which are offering new ways of knowing, seeing and theorizing the world. We have, as some have argued (Lyotard, 1984), entered the era of postmodernity. When trying to define postmodernism, we are immediately confronted with a problem. In an article published in *The Independent*, this dilemma was articulated: 'Postmodernism is difficult to define because it is used in different ways within different disciplines. Partly as a consequence it has also become a general term used to describe the awareness of a changing era' (Jencks, 24/12/87).

For our purposes, it would be more appropriate to view postmodernism as a critique of modernity rather than a discourse pertinent to a particular period following modernity. This argument suggests that our ways are neither modern anymore yet nor completely postmodern. We have in no way entirely discarded rational thought and positivism (the belief that true knowledge is scientific and consists of those statements that are objectively and empirically verifiable). To a large extent, these are still the most common modes of thinking that prevail in the West. Along with this mode of thought, there still exists the view that the natural and social condition of human beings can be continually improved by the application of reason and science to technology. There is the opinion that through rationality and empirically based knowledge, social institutions could be designed that would result in higher levels of happiness and freedom from despotism, injustice and cruelty.

As mentioned above, many prefer to argue that we are living in "postmodern" times. However, it is perhaps more accurate to view our society as "late-modern" – offering a critique of modernity in its appropriation of certain "postmodern" characteristics. Such a critique is evident in the fact that many people no longer place all their faith in the modern ideal of human reason and in a belief system where empiricism and logical positivism hold the only key to truth. Instead, they find themselves engaging in a critique of the Enlightenment's faith in progress and its promise of emancipation and social upliftment through education and scientific knowledge.

Postmodernists also criticize modernity's *hubris* and its assumption that universal reason and rationality have the ability to improve continually the natural and social condition of human beings. Perhaps Stanley Grenz best summed up these ideas when he said that, 'The central dictum of postmodern philosophy [is]: All is difference. This view sweeps away the "uni" of the "universe" sought by the Enlightenment project, the quest for a unified grasp of objective reality. What unifies the otherwise diverse strands of postmodernism is questioning of the central assumptions of the Enlightenment epistemology' (1994, p. 327). What then is the nature of our changing world, why is it changing and with such changes, what does it look like?

1.2 Postmodernism and the globalising world

Staccato signals of constant information. Paul Simon (Boy in the Bubble)

Over the last few decades a worldwide change in the production paradigm has taken place which has undoubtedly helped to usher in the so-called "postmodern" mode of thinking. Technology has developed at an exponential rate. The primary feature of this development has been in electronic tele-communications. The information super-highway experiences a non-stop rush hour. In such a world, cash flow is of less relevance than knowledge. Information is power, and will increasingly become the economic variable. This information revolution has provided an indispensable, material basis for the emergence of a new economy. In a very illuminating work on this subject, Manuel Castells identifies this change primarily by its informational and global nature. He suggests that:

It is *informational* because the productivity and competitiveness of units or agents in this economy (be it firms, regions or nations) fundamentally depend upon their capacity to generate, process and apply efficiently knowledge-based information. It is *global* because the core activities of production, consumption and circulation, as well as their components (capital, labour, raw materials, management, information technology, markets) are organized on a global scale, either directly or through a network of linkages between economic agents. It is *informational and global* because, under the new historical condition, productivity is generated through, and competition is played out,

in a global network of interaction (1996, p. 66).

These transformations have taken place throughout the capitalist world economy and are now having a significant effect on South Africa. Andre Kraak notes that, 'Globalisation, while establishing the hegemony of capitalist exploitation across the globe, also provides positive developmental challenges for a country such as South Africa'. He goes on to say that 'there is some certainty in the developmental path that we must follow, one which is informed by the critical relationship now established by global economic forces between knowledge, innovation and development. This new environment has also brought with it new education and training demands' (1997, p. 2). To see how globalisation has changed the nature of our society, even in South Africa, we only have to listen to the dominant watch-words of "effectiveness", "proficiency" and "efficiency" that surround our everyday lives. Even as teachers, we are expected to process the young as "human resources" to perform in a systematized and economically competitive world.

It is this compression of time and space due to the proliferation of information and communications technology that has brought about a society where consumer goods from all over the world are readily and easily available. Along with the excess of material goods, has come the availability and accessibility of international media, fashions, even of beliefs and value systems. With the freeing and opening of international boundaries, such proliferation of commodities depends on a market of consumers. And this is exactly what society has become – a massive market of consumers, who not only compulsively consume material goods, but often, quite unreflectively, pick and choose their values and morals from a "postmodern" supermarket which caters for each individual's needs and desires. 'Little is done to counter media manipulation of the young into credulous and ardent consumers – of sensation, violence, criminality, things' (Greene, 1988, p. 12). With the ever increasing power of the media, people are living in a media saturated world and are exposed, as never before to a multiplicity of beliefs and different moral, ethical and cultural value systems.

It has been argued that such ardent and unreflective consumerism has not yet affected our South African society and that it is still a predominantly American phenomenon. This is, however, a rather naïve outlook and we should not be too quick to assume that we have been any less affected by the manipulation of media, materialism and consumerism. South Africa is riddled with popular trends, fashions, consumer goods and media influence from all over the world. Our children fanatically collect the icons associated with American film stars, spend hours in front of the television watching American sitcoms, movies or cartoons and constantly look out for the latest fashions spreading over the globe. These can be in the form of a new release of *Nike* cross-trainers, the latest N.F.L. cap or T-shirt, or the trends and fashions that have accompanied the massive Rave culture that is sweeping through South African cities. These and more, our society consumes, paying little attention to media manipulation which encourages and perpetuates this consumerism, along with the belief that such goods can bring about a fuller, happier and more successful life.

With this influx of variety, has come a withdrawal of authority. There is now a consensus that consensus is impossible and that we are having authoritative announcements about the disappearance of authority. With the postmodern focus on the local, the particular and the communal, government authority is more decentralized and power is more devolved to local levels. Openings have been made for a multiplicity of ideologies to exist and communities are being given a freedom of choice as never before. This provides tremendous opportunities for the individual. However, it also demands responsibility for the choices that the individual or community makes. While figures and canons of authority disappear, the youth hear from the media that they must make their own decisions, construct their own values and formulate their own moral systems. It becomes essential that as educators we find ways to teach the young how to make informed choices, become critical, reflective thinkers and how to take responsibility, not only for themselves, but for their society at large. Should we fail to do this, when faced with the challenges, the pressures and the relativism of our changing world, young people could easily find themselves trapped by the problems of contemporary society without the vision or the imagination to engage critically with the world around them.

1.3. The nature of our changing society ~ Where are we headed?

The problem of technicist thinking, unreflective consumerism and a 'culture of contentment'

We are all too likely to remain immersed in the taken-for-granted and the everyday. For many this means an unreflective consumerism; for others, it means a preoccupation with having more rather than being more. If freedom comes to mind it is ordinarily associated with an individualist stance: it signifies a self-dependence rather than relationship; self-regarding and self-regulated behavior rather than involvement with others. Above all, it means an absence of interference. Maxine Greene (1988, p. 7)

It is what Greene refers to as an 'immersion in the taken for granted', what Virginia Woolf compares to being 'embedded in a kind of non-descript cotton wool' and what Christopher Lasch calls, 'becoming minimal selves'. It is because of the nature of the world in which we live and the malaises that characterize our late modern society that people often find themselves overwhelmed by external circumstances and trapped in this kind of lassitude and absence of care. Unable to break with the 'cotton wool' of everyday habit and routine, individuals become powerless and even victimized. 'There is a withdrawal, a widespread speechlessness, a silence where there might be – where there ought to be – an impassioned dialogue' (*ibid.* p. 2).

As the opening quote suggests, this for many is primarily characterized by an unreflective consumerism that has in turn given rise to a 'culture of contentment' and a preoccupation with *having* more rather than *being* more. Rather than attending to the actualities of life, people pay more attention to what is "given" from the outside world – be it in the form of consumer goods, information, fashions, a technical mode of thinking and even values. There is a 'tendency to accede to the "given", to view what exists around us as an objective "reality", impervious to individual interpretation' (*ibid.* p. 7). The problem with this mode of living lies in its *unreflective* nature. What distinguishes us as *human* beings on this planet is our ability to think for ourselves,

to choose for ourselves and to imagine. For Stuart Hampshire, the very notion that we can think for ourselves excludes deterministic explanations of what we do. He goes on to identify the human sense of freedom with the ‘power of reflection and the self-modifying power of thought’ (1975, p. 142).

But looking around us we find very little evidence of active imaginations at work, of critical reflection, real thoughtfulness, or a desire ‘to think what we are doing’ (Arendt, 1958, p.5). ‘Thought’, wrote Michel Foucault, ‘is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem’ (1984, p. 388). A society and culture have emerged in the last few decades, globally as well as locally, that show little sign of ‘critical reflection and real thoughtfulness’. Many unreflectively consume what is given from the outside, be it in the form of consumer goods or popular values. They have lost the ability to be ‘subjects of decision’ capable of reflection with the ability ‘to think what they are doing’ (Freire, 1970, p. 28). This type of reflection demands imagination, a consciousness and a moment of being and of mediation between what impinges on one from without and one’s response. Ultimately, the absence of the ability to use our imaginations constructively and perceive of “otherness” undermines the realization of an authentic identity and perpetuates a ‘culture of contentment’. An authentic identity is constructed by a thinking, imagining and reflective individual, someone who affirms herself as a ‘subject of decision’ able to move beyond the “given” and able to seek openings and imagine alternate ways of being and achieving freedom in the world.

Part of the reason for people’s inability to perceive of “otherness” or to reflect critically on the world around them, stems from a failure to use their imaginations to the fullest extent possible. It is argued that the loss of the imagination arises partly out of the shackles that still tie us to modern positivist thought. One writer describes positivism as ‘the decisive moving forward of a disciplined march’. He talks about the way in which positivism discriminates ‘the initiator of speech’ from the object of his speaking ‘as if they really were two discrete things...’ (Blum, 1974, p. 247). It is this mode of technical thinking in inappropriate contexts that leads to the

inability of most people to actively and constructively use their imaginations.

Jacques Ellul wrote: 'Man is caught like a fly in a bottle. His attempt at culture, freedom and creative endeavour have become mere entities in technique's filing cabinet'. So what is it that keeps the cork so tightly sealed in the bottle and traps us in without even the ability to imagine breaking free. Is it technique or technology, is it science or industry? No, the development of scientific thought, as Manfred Stanley makes clear, is legitimate to the pursuit of its scientific ends. What has sealed the cork on the bottle is the use of scientific thought and understanding outside its permissible ambit. It is what Stanley calls *technicism* that has become the primary consolidating force within the current world view and way of thinking. 'Technicism', he writes, 'is the method of legitimation reflecting a particular kind of world view comprising unconsciously taken-for-granted assumptions' (1978, p. 9). The problem arises firstly when, finding ourselves objectified by external controls, we not only internalize the legitimations given for those controls, but 'we accede to explanations we scarcely understand and, without thinking very much about it, submit to what the powerful and faceless say. We are afflicted, even without realizing it, with "false consciousness"' (Greene, 1978, p. 22). Secondly, it becomes a problem when the language of technicism reduces the complexities of human concerns and experience to metaphors of science and technology. What then emerges in the minds of people, is a predominantly technical mode of thinking. Greene writes:

There is an overriding tendency these days, ever since science lost its innocence and linked up in so many ways with an ever-expanding technology, to connect what we used to regard as open-ended experimental enquiry to the interest in technical control.... When values are set aside and social consequences disregarded, it becomes all too easy to train an entire public in a predominantly technical thinking (1982, p. 130).

Somehow the imagination has been buried by this technical mode of thought. We have been trained to push it aside to the periphery, to the margins of our mind, where is it "safest" and unable to interfere with the status-quo and with the "everydayness" of our lives. But the further

we have pushed it aside, the tighter we have sealed the cork that traps us in the bottle. And trapped in this space we have difficulty seeing out, looking beyond, or even lifting our heads. It is as if 'standing before a picture window that opens onto a landscape, we have lowered the shades to the point where we can see little more than the ground, in ways that are awesome in themselves, but it is still not the Matterhorn' (Smith, 1982, p. 7). So we become content with the shades lowered, we settle for the smaller picture and we fail to be critical of our unreflective acceptance and tunneled vision of what lies before our eyes.

Greene refers to such a state of living as being 'asleep', 'immersed in the taken-for-granted' or not being *wide-awake*. When using the term *wide-awake*, she refers to a 'plane of consciousness of highest tension originating in an attitude of full attention to life and its requirements. Only the performing and especially the working self is fully interested in life and hence, *wide-awake*' (Schutz on Greene, 1967, p. 213). In an article entitled *Towards Wide-Awakeness: An argument for the arts and humanities in education*, Greene refers to what Kierkegaard called the 'civilization malaise'. By this he was alluding to man's constant need to make life easier. Kierkegaard examined the way in which the 'benefactors of the age' strove to make life better by making it easier: some invented railways, others the telegraph and others the steamboat. Then came the true benefactors of the age who sought to make spiritual existence easier, and soon realized that higher incomes, miracles of medicine, and the pursuit of material improvement could not satisfy the human spirit. Kierkegaard, like many contemporary thinkers, came to talk of the 'civilization malaise' and became concerned with the depersonalization and bland automatization of the industrial age. He decided that there was a need to make things *harder* and by doing this, awaken people to their freedom and make them aware of their responsibility as individuals in a changing and problematic world. Henry David Thoreau affirmed this idea when he said that, 'Few people are awake enough for a poetic and divine life, to be awake is to be alive' (1963, pp. 66,67). Such thoughts were meant to stimulate a 'conscious endeavor, to arouse others to discover – each in his or her own terms – what it would mean to "live deliberately"' (Greene, 1978, p. 162).

But the technological age has taken its toll, the unease of the “postmodern” climate has emerged, and globalisation has made its mark. Consequently, fragmentation has increased and people have ‘found themselves impinged on by forces they have been unable to understand, contemporaneous with the advance of science and positivistic thinking. Therefore, an alternative tradition has taken shape, a tradition generated by perceptions of passivity, acquiescence, and what Thoreau called “quiet desperation”’ (*ibid.*). It is this passivity and resignation to the state of our world that characterizes the ‘culture of contentment’. Individuals have become content in a culture that is submerged in the taken-for-granted, that accepts the “given” and makes few attempts to reflect critically on their world and imagine a better state of living. Without imagination, this culture remains passive under the pressures of a fragmented existence. A culture comes into being, one that cannot break through the “cotton wool” of everyday life and, unable to do this, they cannot be *wide-awake* and know what it means to live consciously. As Wallace Stevens says, ‘The imagination is part of our security. It enables us to live our own lives. We have it because we do not have enough without it’ (1965, p. 150).

So perhaps this could be the heart of the problem: many people struggle to use their imaginations to the fullest extent possible. The act of imagining has become difficult and people are often unable to perceive of what it means to surpass the given, to look at things as if they could be other than they are, and to realize what it might mean to be free. What does it mean to be a citizen in a free world? What does it mean to think forward into the future? To dream? To reach beyond? Few even dare to ponder what is to come and what lies beyond. Few even dare to go in search.

CHAPTER TWO*A search for critical engagement: Greene's argument on education and freedom*

Seeing our lives as quests opens the way to our seeing them in terms of process and possibilities, in terms of a route, an experience which gradually clarifies itself, which rectifies itself and proceeds by dialogue with itself and others. Merleau-Ponty (1964, p. 21)

It has been said that if we as individuals are to ascertain what our relationship is to some idea of the good, 'we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a *quest*' (Taylor, 1989, p.52). Despite and because of the relativism and fragmentation of our time, it would seem that we should be reaching for conceptions of the good that give our lives direction and meaning. As teachers and educators, 'we would have to accommodate ourselves to live as clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we share. It is simply not enough for us to reproduce the world the way things are' (Greene, 1995, p.1). If we are to understand our lives as a quest, then we are naturally undertaking a search and this implies taking initiative and refusing stasis and the flatness of ordinary life. Walker Percy's narrator in *The Moviegoer* articulates the nature of a search:

'What is the nature of the search? you ask.

Really, it is very simple, at least for a fellow like me: so simple that it is easily overlooked.

The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life. This morning, for example, I felt as if I had come to myself on a strange island. And what does such a castaway do? Why, he pokes around the neighborhood and he doesn't miss a trick.

To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair' (1979, p.13).

Since the narrator says he was 'sunk in the everydayness', his search is clearly for an alternative perspective, one that will disclose what he has never seen before. It is the search that takes away the likelihood of boredom by instilling a consciousness of what is not yet, of what might, unpredictably, still be experienced. Even the fact that he realizes that a search is possible, he says, is to 'be onto something', to begin to perceive of deficiencies and lacks in his own life and question 'the neighborhood' around him. Being moved to 'poke around' may open up spaces that will free him from his environment of everydayness. This experience may be one denoting a willingness 'to learn again to see the world' and to restore 'a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 60). If young people are not persuaded to be 'onto something' there are few challenges. As Greene puts it, 'There are no mountains they particularly want to climb, so there are few obstacles with which they feel they need to engage' (1988, p. 124). They may find no need to take heed of their neighbourhood's shapes and events, whether they be pictures of homelessness, inequality, pollution or violence. Without a 'noticing', there would seem no need to play with alternatives or imagine the possibility of a better state of things. Such passivity and disinterest disallows us the ability to problematize the world or the 'neighborhood' around us. We do not take things seriously or personally, we do not ache to break through a horizon or to question, and if there are no tensions there are no desires to reach beyond and ultimately no desire to go in search.

Greene writes that she is 'convinced that in the domains of education today, people can choose to resist the thoughtlessness, banality, technical rationality, carelessness and savage inequalities that now undermine public education at every turn' (1995, p. 2). The question, as Greene sees it, comes down to freedom, or perhaps the absence of freedom in our schools. By this she does not mean the ordinary constraints or rules established to ensure order. She refers rather to 'the ways in which young people feel conditioned, determined, even *fated* by prevailing circumstances, they are convinced of inimical forces all around them, barricades that cannot be overcome' (1988, p.125). Dewey called this the 'anaesthetic' in experience - that which numbs people into recurrence, routine and uniformity and prevents them from reaching out and beyond.

The challenge of education is to engage as many youngsters as possible in the thought of a freedom that they can achieve through confrontation with, and partial surpassing of, such determining.

‘We seek this freedom, however, only when what presses down, (conditions or limits) is perceived as an obstacle. Where people cannot name alternatives or imagine a better state of things, they are likely to remain anchored or submerged’ (Greene, 1995, p.52). Feeling this way, they are unlikely to search for spaces where they can move together to establish a ‘sphere of freedom’ (Arendt, 1958, p.30). If submerged, an individual cannot embark on a search, a quest becomes impossible and unable to go in search of freedom and openings, our lives quickly become narrow and our pathways become cul-de-sacs. ‘To feel oneself en route, to feel oneself in a place where there is always the possibility of clearings, of new openings, this is what we must communicate to the young if we want to awaken them to their lived situations and enable them to make sense of, to name and to transform their worlds’ (Greene, 1995, p. 150). Freire also speaks of individuals’ incompleteness, ‘from which they move out in constant search - a search which can only be carried out in communion with others’ (1970, p. 80).

2.1 In pursuit of an education for freedom

We need to develop a conception of education orientated to the kinds of learning that may enable persons to break with channeling, to affirm themselves as fully conscious, critical beings. More than that, we need to discover ways of arousing individuals from submergence in reality – not only to recover themselves as persons, but to apprehend cultural change as possible and act in concert to remake their world. Maxine Greene (1995, p. 170)

As educators, it is imperative that we clarify what our broad educational goals are. We need to determine what we are trying to educate for and in the process of educating the young, what kinds of individuals we are trying to develop? The conception of education that Greene speaks of, is one which encourages individuals to ‘affirm themselves as fully conscious and critical

beings' in a world that needs to be constantly reflected upon, challenged and 'remade'. It is with the aim of developing individuals able to imagine a better state of living and willing to initiate change in their society, that we go in pursuit of an *education for freedom*.

When talking about freedom, I am talking about the opening of spaces as well as perspectives and primarily, as Greene specifies, 'the capacity to surpass the given and to look at things as if they could be otherwise' (1988, p. 3). Educating for freedom, means developing a concern for the critical and the imaginative, for the opening of new ways of looking at things and new spaces necessary for the remaking of a democratic community. In South Africa, the making of a democracy has become our primary focus in the economic, political, and social arenas. But as Dewey points out, 'The fundamental defect in the present state of democracy is the assumption that political and economic freedom can be achieved without first freeing the mind' (1973, p. 29). For this reason, the pursuit of an *education for freedom* should become a major educational goal in our country. As South African educators begin to negotiate desired educational outcomes for teaching and learning, undoubtedly, one of the fundamental goals should become the development of critical and reflective thinkers. The orientation of our schools has, in the past, often been one of accommodation to the social, political and economic structures of our society. While empowering South African students to reflect and talk about the problems posed by their past history, they need also to realize the opportunities that lie before them as they enter a new era of democracy and reconciliation. Teachers need to look for ways of educating youngsters to become active citizens in their community and country: individuals who are able to transcend the "given" of society, who are able to imagine a better state of living and who are able to find their freedom in becoming different. As Dewey suggests, we need to realize that we are free 'not because of what we statically are, but in so far as we are becoming different from what we have been' (1960, p. 280). Educating for freedom means educating individuals to become 'subjects of decision' (Freire, 1970, p.28), rather than objects who passively accept the reality around them as fixed and final. In burying the ideologies and the prejudices of the past, it will be up to the young people of our country to move forward confidently, reach beyond themselves and come together to build a just and equitable society.

Greene suggests that,

It is through and by means of education, that individuals can be provoked to reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space. It is through and by means of education that they may become empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of their lived worlds. It is through education that preferences may be released, languages learned, intelligences developed, perspectives opened, possibilities disclosed (1988, p. 12).

If we are seriously interested in an education for freedom in South Africa, we need to take the cognitive action known as *praxis*, or to use Freire's words, 'action and reflection of men (*sic.*) upon their world in order to transform it' (1970, p. 66). Perhaps it is those children who have been 'provoked to reach beyond themselves, to wonder, to pose their own questions' (Greene, 1988, p.12) who are most likely to learn and within that learning, experience what it means to become an initiator of change.

Greene presents a unique approach to teaching and learning that can provoke both educators and students to take initiatives, to transcend limits, and to pursue freedom. This freedom she refers to as *dialectical*: it is a quest for a freedom that is in continual tension with the forces that limit, condition, determine and, too frequently oppress. It is a freedom that is pursued, not in solitude, but in reciprocity with others, not in privacy, but in a public space.

2.2 Towards a positive, dialectical freedom in a South African context

Freedom shows itself or comes into being when individuals come together in a particular way, when they are authentically present to one another...when they have a project that they can mutually pursue. Maxine Greene (1988, pp. 16-17)

As educators in South Africa, there are valuable lessons that we can learn from Greene's pursuit of freedom. In particular, we can learn of the focal role of the arts and aesthetic experience in

releasing human imagination and enabling the young to reach toward their vision of the possible. However, before examining the importance of the imagination and aesthetic experience in education, I will articulate and define what is meant by *educating for freedom*: what are the characteristics of Greene's dialectic of freedom? Furthermore, I will illustrate why this notion of freedom could prove to be relevant for those involved in the future of South African education.

When examining the freedom of which Greene speaks, it is important to understand that it is a freedom that is *grounded* in what Greene calls our 'lived situations'. By this she means that freedom must occur within the matrix of our own particular context, with all its limits and constraints. 'Freedom ought to be conceived of as an achievement within the concreteness of lived social situations rather than as a primordial or original possession' (Greene, 1988, p. 5). In the South African situation, it would involve an awareness of the society around us, an attentiveness to and an understanding of problems such as poverty, AIDS, housing, education, crime and the inequalities created by our apartheid history. As Dewey says, 'Social conditions interact with the preferences of an individual – in a way favorable to actualizing freedom only when we develop an intelligence, not abstract knowledge and abstract thought, but power of vision and reflection. For these take effect in making preference, desire, and purpose more flexible, alert, and resolute' (1960, p. 287).

Having noticed and understood these problems, we are not to dismiss them and try and free ourselves from them. The freedom that Greene affirms is not a freedom which has been arrived at 'by setting aside all external obstacles and impingements' and hence 'without a defined purpose' (Taylor, 1985, p. 157); rather it is an *intentional* freedom that can be exercised only in a resistant world. It is a positive freedom *to* a better state of being as opposed to a negative freedom *from* interferences. This type of resistant freedom only comes into being when individuals can come together in what they perceive to be a resistant world. Without the obstacles or difficulties that the world presents to us, there would be no desire to extend or to test the limits of these constraints.

An extract from Greene's *Dialectic of Freedom* articulates this notion. She writes:

For Jean-Paul Sartre, the project of acting on our freedom involves a rejection of the insufficient or the unendurable, a clarification, an imagining of a better state of things. He wrote of a 'flight and a leap ahead, at once a refusal and a realization' (1963, p. 92). There has to be a surpassing of a constraining or deficient "reality", actually perceived as deficient by the person or persons looking from their particular vantage points on the world. Made conscious of lacks, they may move (in their desire to repair them) toward a "field of possibilities", what is possible or realizable to them. At once, the very existence of obstacles depends on the desire to reach toward wider spaces for fulfillment, to expand options, to know alternatives' (1988, p. 5).

There has thus to be a *realization* and then a *refusal*. We need to acknowledge the malaises of our post-industrial society, be it by recognizing the problem of an unreflective consumerism or by looking at the effects of hunger, homelessness, AIDS, pollution and violence on our society. It means realizing the danger of our technicist thinking, our passive silence and our 'culture of contentment'. If we do not feel impeded somehow and if we are unable to *name* the obstacles that stand in our way, then we will in no way be able to recognize our responsibility and come to a stage of *refusal*. As Hannah Arendt clarifies, the point of *refusal* 'is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it, and by that same token, save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable' (1958, p. 30).

Youngsters growing up in South Africa need to *realize* the malaises of their society. Through naming and understanding them, they need to *recognize* their responsibility to their society and with this recognition, their free choice to *refuse* to accept the *status quo* and *come together with others* to bring about a better state of things. 'Human reality everywhere,' wrote Sartre, 'encounters resistances and obstacles which it has not created, but these resistances and obstacles have meaning only in and through the free choice which human reality is' (1956, p. 599). The wall that lies ahead has to be viewed as a personal challenge and as an obstacle; but it becomes such only to those risking free choice. Dewey also believed that people do not think

about or go in search of freedom ‘unless they run during action against conditions that resist their original impulses’ (1960, p. 286). Freedom is thus achieved in a resistant world, but also, a world in which individuals are allowed the opportunity to make informed choices within a social context where ideas can be developed ‘in the open air of public discussion and communication’ (*ibid.*).

Within the ‘open air of public discussion’, individuals need to realize that in confronting the limitations, the lacks and the deficiencies around them, only a partial surpassing of determinateness (Greene, 1988) is possible. This is where Greene develops her idea of a *dialectic* of freedom. By using the term *dialectic*, she is referring to a dynamic (as opposed to a static) tension between two poles which are not separate or discrete from each other but the opposite ends of a continuum. Such a dialectic is not the type of tension that can be resolved or overcome by a triumph of subjectivity or objectivity or some sort of perfect synthesis and harmony. As Merleau-Ponty said, ‘In thought, as in life, the only surpassings we know are concrete, partial, encumbered with survivals, saddled with deficits’ (1968, p. 99). What this means is that freedom is not an absolute goal, but a dialectical freedom that values the tension between the individual will and the situatedness of context. Such contexts inevitably place a certain amount of weight on the individual. These may include the effects of one’s environment, background, economic status, class membership, physical limitations, as well as the impacts of ideologies and exclusion. Greene clarifies this when she says that ‘the growing, changing individual (no matter how reflective and autonomous he/she appears to be) always has to confront a certain weight in lived situations, if only the weight of memory and past. There are ambiguities of various kinds, layers of determinateness. Freedom, like autonomy, is in many ways dependent on understanding these ambiguities, developing a kind of critical distance with respect to them’ (1988, p. 9). In South Africa, we are particularly conscious of the very different lived situations that people find themselves in. The inequalities of our apartheid past have created inequitable circumstances for many members of our society. Artificial barriers still exist among different social and racial groups and the problems of poverty, unemployment and homelessness are still chronic all around us.

Part of this 'weight' will always be present in our country and we cannot imagine that it does not exist or that it will disappear. There will always be a dialectical tension between desire and constraint, between the individual and his or her environment. These limits, however, must be conceived as historically and contextually specific, as opposed to natural or objectively existing realities. Unless the obstacles around us are perceived as social constructions, made and constructed by humans and therefore able to be changed by humans, they will inevitably be reified into a state of unchallenged permanence. By *naming* the obstacles around us, we are able to focus our attention on them as factors to be resisted, to be fought and perhaps to be overcome. Many of the limitations that confront South Africans are *human* constructions created by the ideologies and injustices of the apartheid system. Already we are in the process of changing these human artifacts and children need to understand the possibility and importance of dismantling these and other constructions created throughout our history. As we prepare to educate children in this country, the reality of each child's 'lived situation' needs to become a part of daily teaching and learning. Ways have to be found to enable children to be provoked to reach beyond themselves to come together and make varied sense of their individual as well as their common world (Greene, 1988).

This 'coming together' is an important characteristic of Greene's freedom. She writes:

When people lack attachments, when there is no possibility of coming together in a plurality or a community, when they have not tapped their imaginations, they may think of *breaking* free, but they will be unlikely to think of breaking through the structures of their world and creating something new (1988, p. 17).

Greene's is a *social* understanding of freedom, whereby individuals - *together* - confront the limitations that society presents before them. 'Human beings', as Dostoevsky said, 'do not have the strength to tolerate the vague and enigmatic; they want something they can all believe in together; they want a shared certainty' (1945, p. 292). Dewey agreed with this notion and stressed the point that 'a democratic society must have a type of education which gives the

individual a personal interest in social relationships and the habits of mind which secure social changes' (1916, p.115).

These different characteristics of Greene's idea of freedom and educating towards this goal encapsulate many of the visions we have for South African education. As we go in search of change, Greene's ideas can provide some useful sign-posts in this direction.

CHAPTER THREE

Imagination and social change

Our imagination gives us the capacity to invent new visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools. Maxine Greene. (1995, p. 39)

If we can agree that Greene's idea of educating for freedom is a worthy goal, then it would follow that we need to look at the ways in which she proposes that such a form of education might come into being. Greene's conception of education is orientated to the kinds of learning that enable individuals to 'break with channeling' and to affirm themselves as fully conscious, critical beings. More than that, she looks to discover ways of learning that arouse people from submergence in reality and move them to critical reflection and, in time, transformative action in their world. However, she believes that individuals will not become fully conscious unless the 'stage set collapses' and everything that they have taken for granted about their routines becomes questionable; unless, as Camus put it, 'One day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement' (1955, p. 13). The weariness, he said, 'comes at the end of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness' (*ibid.*). One way of helping the "why" arise, is through the imagination. It is through the imagination that we learn to discover what *might* be and we are enabled to take a variety of perspectives on our worlds, to look from many vantage points and to discover how 'perspectives blend' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xix).

'Of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken-for-granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions' (Greene, 1995, p. 3). What this means is that it is our ability to imagine that enables us to envision possibility and to perceive of openings through which to move creatively and act. It is these openings that form the kinds of spaces needed in order to

educate for freedom. ‘The opening of public spaces in which students, speaking in their own voices and acting on their own initiatives, can identify themselves and choose themselves in relation to such principles as freedom, equity, justice and concern for others’ (Greene, 1995, p. 68). It is with such a view of education that we may provide youngsters with the values and principles that will enable them to initiate meaningful change and bring into being a more humane world. Imagination provides the openings needed for the development of a democratic community. Without imagination we can not even begin to envision the possibilities that lie ahead of us and neither can we begin to educate with freedom in mind.

3.1 Imagination ~ The power of the possible

The Possible's slow fuse is lit

By the Imagination.

Emily Dickinson (1960, p. 688)

To call for imaginative capacity is to work for the ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise.

Maxine Greene (1995, p. 19)

Imagination, writes Wallace Stevens, ‘is the power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal’ (1965, p. 153) (and the abnormal in the normal), or as Greene stipulates, imagination provides ‘the ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise’. It is this notion of creating possibilities that forms the seed out of which Greene’s ideas on the imagination grow. She proposes that without imagination we are unable to give credence to alternative realities, to set aside familiar distinctions or to see beyond, and acknowledge other possibilities. Part one of Greene’s latest book, *Releasing the Imagination*, is entitled ‘Creating Possibilities’, and it is in the creation of these alternative possibilities that she calls on the power of the imagination. She recognizes the way in which experiences can be expanded through the entertainment of associations and alternative possibilities and how, through the use of the imagination, we can

learn to look at things as if they could be other than they are. Mary Warnock affirms this notion of the imagination as one of the powers of cognition allowing for the sense ‘that there is always something *more* to experience than we can predict’ (1976, p. 203). Stevens also wrote that ‘the imagination is the power of the mind over the possibilities of things, but if this constitutes a certain single characteristic, it is the source not of a certain single value but as many values as reside in the possibilities of things’ (1965, p.31).

For Greene, the power of the possible lies in the ability to imagine. It is the imagination that allows us to entertain the idea that things could be different than they are, to conceive of a better state of affairs or an alternative mode of living, thinking and acting. ‘Imaginative visions...above all shape the imaginative life as a *prelude to action and an incitement to reflection*’ (Brann, 1991, p. 797).

3.2 Imagination and breakthroughs

The crucial point has to do with the capacity to somehow break with what is merely given, to summon up absent or alternative reality. Maxine Greene (1988, p. 16)

As South African educators attempt to break away from the old system of education and implement the new Curriculum 2005, the response from many is what Dewey (1929) would have called the ‘quest for certainty’. Our present situation of economic and political uncertainty has much to do with this anxiety as do the current challenges to our traditional authorities and systems. In response to school changes, many parents yearn not merely for the predictable, but for the assurances that used to accompany the old models in education. Talk of tapping hitherto untapped possibilities and exploring unexplored alternatives does indeed serve to intensify this unease. At the same time, parents and educators are becoming more and more aware of the changes taking place in our society, demanding that children are able to master a whole range of novel and unfamiliar skills. And still, the contradictions and unease continue to multiply

between what it is said that schools must do and what parents believe the task of education ought to be. Such anxieties are particularly acute for communities and families feeling the powerlessness of impinging poverty and unsettling change in their own lives.

In our country, many students face fearful inequalities created by our past. While these objective and subjective realities need to be taken into account, it may be a general difficulty to conceive of a better order of things that has given rise to a resignation in many individuals that paralyzes them and prevents them from acting to bring about change. To call for the imagination to re-enter our education system in a dynamic manner, is to work for the ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise. As Greene specifies, ‘To ask for intensified realization is to see that each person’s reality must be understood to be interpreted experience - and that the mode of interpretation depends on his or her location in the world’ (1995, p.19). It also depends on the number of vantage points or perspectives that the individual is able *or enabled* to take - each disclosing aspects of a contingent, not a self-existent, world.

It is in moving toward possibilities and breaking with the given that we begin to recover the imagination and that we start to see it for what it is: ‘The power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal’ (Stevens) (and again, the abnormal in the normal). In beginning to break with the ordinarily taken-for-granted, we start to realize what the real function of the imagination is. As Greene explains, ‘To tap into the imagination is to become able to *break with what is supposedly fixed and finished*, objectively real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or “common-sensible” and to carve out new orders of experience’ (1995, p. 23). In doing this, an individual might become freed to form notions of what should be, glimpse what might be and imagine what is not yet.

Greene recalls Stevens’s *Man with the Blue Guitar*, where to play on the blue guitar is to play on the imagination:

They said, "you have a blue guitar
 You do not play things as they are."
 The man replied, "Things as they are
 Are changed upon the blue guitar."
 And they said then, "but play you must,
 A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,
 A tune upon the blue guitar
 Of things exactly as they are" (1964, p. 165).

In the poem, the blue guitar evokes in its listeners a certain unease as it does not 'play things as they are'. The audience wishes to hear a tune that celebrates the comfortable, the normal and the ordinary. He replies to this request by saying that they must

Throw away the light, the definitions
 And say of what you see in the dark
 That it is this or it is that,
 But do not use the rotted names.

He pleads with them to see beyond the given and the familiar, to look with their own eyes, to find their own voices and to avoid the formulations devised by official others. He replies:

You as you are? You are yourself.
 The blue guitar surprises you.

He asks the audience to risk the 'surprise' that the blue guitar provides. The 'surprise' refers to becoming different to what you are and to 'be yourself' is to be in the process of making breakthroughs and creating and recreating yourself and your identity. Greene writes that 'the surprise comes along with becoming different - consciously different as one finds ways of acting on envisaged possibility. It comes along with hearing different words and music, seeing from

unaccustomed angles, realizing the world perceived from one place is not the only world' (1995, p. 20).

What this awareness and imaginative thinking includes is the realization of leaving something behind while moving forward to something new. The *breakthrough* comes with the 'conscious adjustment of the new and the old' (Dewey, 1934, p. 272) and the imagination is the 'gateway' through which meanings derived from past experiences find their way into the present. In South Africa, the breakthrough will come when we are able to reach beyond our life stories and where we have been, and go in quest for something new. As Greene clarifies, 'It is against the backdrop of those remembered things and the funded meanings to which they gave rise, that we grasp and understand what is now going on around us' (1995, p. 20). This is but one reason why it becomes so crucial that we train the young to use their imaginations. Coming to terms with the past and confronting the challenges of the future will always involve the imagination. In an article entitled, *Imagination*, Warnock expresses the idea that not only does imagination enable us to make connections with the past, but more importantly, 'It is our ability to think about the future... We think of *possibilities* as well as actualities; and this is the role of the imagination. It is to think of things, not as they are, but as they might conceivably, or nearly inconceivably, be' (1983, p. 76).

Along with involving the imagination, breakthroughs will always involve an element of risk. Moving forward and creating openings and breakthroughs in South African education requires taking major risks. As we make 'adjustments of the new and the old', we are attempting to become acquainted with - and accept - the enormous variety of human lives, the multiplicity of beliefs and the diversity of customs. To come to terms with such additional realities always means taking a risk, a risk which many adults are still unwilling to take and to see their children take. But with these risks come breakthroughs, and as Dewey mentions, 'Because...this conscious perception involves a risk, it is a venture into the unknown, for as it assimilates the present to the past it also brings about some reconstruction of the past' (1934, p. 272).

In talking about the *imagination and breakthroughs*, Arendt simultaneously talks about

beginnings. She writes, ‘It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings’ (1961, p. 169). As a person chooses to view herself, in the midst of things, as beginner, learner and explorer, she develops the imagination to envisage new things emerging and new possibilities opening. She begins to see herself as an initiator and an agent existing among others with the power to choose in a light of possibility and in a space of freedom. If we as teachers want to provoke our students to break through the limits of the conventional and the taken for granted, then we ourselves have to experience breaks with what is established in our own lives, we have to keep arousing ourselves to begin again. Greene says, ‘I am moved to reach into my own story, into the ambivalence of my own choosing to act in such a way that I break loose from anchorage and that I stir others to break loose along with me, so that we all become different, that we all engage in a dialectic to reach beyond where we are’ (1995, p. 110).

3.3 Imagination and the expanding community in South African education

Our most specifically human mission is: to remake the world imaginatively and this should be done in concert with others around us. Eva Brann (1991, p.707).

I am reaching toward an idea of the imagination that brings an ethical concern to the fore, a concern that...has to do with the community that ought to be in the making and the values that give it colour and significance. Maxine Greene (1995, p. 35).

Imagination is what, above all makes empathy possible....It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we...have called "other". Maxine Greene (1995, p. 3).

If we can link imagination to our sense of possibility and our ability to respond to and empathize with other human beings, can we link it to the making of community as well? Agreeing with Dewey that ‘a clear consciousness of communal life constitutes the idea of democracy’ (1954, p. 148), it would follow that in forming a curriculum for our country’s education system, teaching children to collaborate and come together to form something common among themselves would be vitally important. To imagine a democratic community accessible to the young is to summon up the vision of what Dewey calls a ‘conjoint experience’ of shared meanings and common interests and endeavours.

In education, we need to encourage a community of persons who have a feeling of agency and who are ready to speak for themselves: the ability of young people to interpret their experiences in a world they *come together* to name. Community is not about a question of which social contracts are the most reasonable for individuals to enter. Rather, the question is, what might contribute to the pursuit of shared goods: what are ways of being together, of reaching toward some common world in our diversity?

Greene argues that a lack of imagination results in an incapacity to create or even to participate in what we might call a community. She says that the making of community requires teachers to *respond imaginatively* to *all* children in their classrooms. In our multicultural classrooms of South Africa, this means responding to children of all races, languages and cultures. ‘To respond to those once called at risk, once carelessly marginalized, as living beings capable of choosing for themselves is, I believe, to be principled. Attending that way, we may be more likely to initiate normative communities, illuminated by principle and informed by responsibility and care’ (Greene, 1995, p. 42). Yet, once the distinctiveness of many voices has been attended to, it becomes important to identify shared beliefs which, as Greene points out, ‘can only emerge out of dialogue and regard for others in their freedom, in their possibility’ (*ibid.*).

It is with this type of community in mind, that South African educators can respond to Greene’s ideas on the role of the imagination in expanding our community. As we try to negotiate our

way through the new challenges produced by educating in multicultural classrooms, Greene's outlook provides some refreshing possibilities. She says:

We need to seek this power, the unexplored power of pluralism and the wonder of the expanding community (1995, p. 168).

We need to take advantage of the progressive potential of postmodernism with its opening of positive spaces and its celebration of identities previously denied by assimilation or exclusion. Greene indicates that 'we should think of education as opening public spaces in which students, speaking in their own voices and acting on their own initiatives, can identify themselves and choose themselves in relation to such principles as freedom, equity, justice and concern for others' (1995, p. 68).

Greene in no way advocates an extreme postmodern relativism and neither does she support a strong postmodern individualism and unreflective celebration of difference. Instead, she points out the value of *coming together*, of imaginatively seeking out commonalities and of building a community of individuals who are able to engage in meaningful dialogue and relationships with one another. Such encounters are, she proposes, a way of overcoming exclusion, alienation and misunderstanding between different cultural groups. She claims that 'the more continuous and authentic personal encounters can be, the less likely it will be that categorizing and distancing takes place. People are less likely to be treated instrumentally, to be made "other" by those around' (*ibid.*, p. 155).

In South Africa today, 'authentic personal encounters', the 'opening of spaces' and the 'finding of voices' previously unheard should be important aspects of education. Old silences have been shattered, long-repressed voices are making themselves heard, and amidst such changes, while confronting multiplicity and plurality, we find ourselves challenged to search for commonality - what Dewey called 'the Great Community' (1954, p. 143). This type of community comes into being only when 'diverse people, speaking as *who* they are and not *what* they are, come together

in both speech and action to constitute something common among themselves' (Greene, 1995, p. 155).

We use our imaginations to enter into the world of other people and to discover how the world looks and feels from their vantage point. Greene says that 'it may well be the imaginative capacity that allows us to experience empathy with different points of view, even with interests apparently at odds with ours' (*ibid.*, p. 30). With many different cultures and races attempting to come together in the classroom and in different situations of learning, this type of empathy and consideration of other cultures becomes important.

However, in learning to come together, to accept and to understand those from another culture, we are not required to abandon our own culture - we should cherish our own histories and know and feel that our own stories are worth telling. An important point is to realize that our cultural background plays a part in *shaping* identity, but it does not entirely *determine* identity. 'It may well create differences that must be honoured; it may occasion styles and orientations that must be understood; it may give rise to tastes, values, even prejudices that must be taken into account' (Greene, 1995, p. 163). However, culture should never become an absolute, it should be continually reshaped and revalued in order to survive as a tradition in the modern world. As Basil Singh suggests, we should see culture as 'a living organism which interacts with other organisms and with its environment. In this process of interaction, it changes and causes others to change. Thus no culture must be sealed off from others, but must be open to allow adaption and development to take place' (1996, p. 310). Parekh also supports this view and points out that 'if children never get beyond the framework of their own culture and beliefs, they are unlikely to develop lively inquiring minds, imagination or a critical faculty' (1985, pp. 22-23). He goes on to say that multicultural education 'is an education for freedom - freedom from inherited biases and narrow feelings and sentiments, as well as freedom to explore other cultures and perspectives and make choices in full awareness of the available and practical alternatives' (*ibid.*).

What becomes essential in multicultural education, is the provision of opportunities and openings for diverse learners to interact, to look through alternative perspectives and through this, to learn how to build bridges among themselves, to move beyond themselves and to reach out to the common to repair. Greene's ideas stress the importance of *community*. The community of which she speaks is not one of conformity, but

a community attentive to difference [and] open to the idea of plurality. That which is life-affirming in diversity must be discovered and rediscovered, as what is held in common becomes always more many-faceted, open and inclusive, and drawn to untapped possibility (1995, p. 167).

CHAPTER FOUR

Releasing the imagination: The role of the arts in developing aesthetic literacy for creative use of the imagination

It is through the imagination, the realm of pure possibility that we freely make ourselves to be who or what we are, that we creatively and imaginatively become who we are, while in the process preserving the freedom and possibility to be yet otherwise than what we have become. G.B. Madison (1988, p. 191)

Having examined Greene's dialectic of freedom and the interrelationship among freedom, possibility, community, and imagination in education, it becomes clear that imagination, and the emotions, including taste and sensibility, can be, and ought to be, educated. The argument here is that a powerful way of educating them is through initiation into the artistic-aesthetic domains. This is Greene's thesis and it would be useful to look at her approaches to teaching and learning that can provoke both educators and students to transcend limits and to go in search of openings. What comes to light is the focal role of the arts and aesthetic experience in releasing human imagination and enabling individuals to become reflective citizens able to reach toward a vision of the possible and in time, toward meaningful change.

As those involved in South African education begin to negotiate and implement Curriculum 2005 - the new curriculum which is to take us into the twenty-first century - of paramount concern is the need to develop critical, independent learners and thinkers. Our aim is to prepare these learners to lead successful lives within the complexities, the ambiguities and the challenges that they will face in the world. We have already looked at the importance for schools to develop in youngsters the imagination to explore alternative possibilities and to provide them with 'the opportunity to project themselves in rich hypothetical worlds created by their own imagination' (Oliver & Bane, 1971, p. 270). It follows that our new curriculum should be concerned with ways in which critical and reflective thinkers can be developed. However, this

concern for the imaginative and for the opening of new ways of ‘looking at things’ is insufficiently acknowledged in a curriculum which places a large emphasis on the need for generic skills to improve and constantly upgrade performance in the work place. The proliferation of information and communications technology has ensured that the academic emphasis in most schools has remained on the development of mathematically, scientifically and computer literate individuals. As we prepare students to compete at global levels, it is difficult to escape the need to equip them with the skills that will enable them to achieve economic success and power in the corporate world.

However, while such educational goals remain vitally important, they will not guarantee the development of critical and reflective thinkers, or cultivate in the young the ability to transcend the given and imagine alternative ways of being in and changing their world. If we can confidently say that *meaningful change* and an *education for freedom* is what we are striving towards, then we should seek alternative ways of developing imaginative young people willing and able to go in search of their own visions and their own openings through which to move.

4.1 Teaching for openings towards meaningful change ~ The arts in education

To enter into the contemplation of a work of art is to pass through the context of the actual to appreciation of a unique, discontinuous possibility. Dorothy Walsh (1967, p. 297)

It is my conviction that informed engagements with the several arts is the most likely mode of releasing...imaginative capacity and giving it play. Maxine Greene (1995, p. 125)

While Curriculum 2005 is providing more dynamic and open-ended methods of teaching, it still fails to acknowledge sufficiently the vital role that the arts might play in education and ultimately, in bringing about meaningful change in our country. Not enough effort is made to

understand the real significance of the arts and the value of integrating them into the general curriculum at all levels. Greene argues that the arts might hold a possible key that can help unlock the imaginations of young people growing up in today's society. It is with the help of imagination that individuals might have the ability to conceive of a better order of things and be prompted to bring about change in their community and wider society.

For a long time the pedagogical significance of the arts has been overlooked. This is largely due to the fact that the arts exist only on the margins of most people's lives - the "margins" being the place for entertainment and for feelings and intuitions that our everyday lives do not have place for and usually suppress. While the arts are there to be enjoyed, as Denis Donoghue says, 'In another way, they are really momentous, because they provide spaces in which we can live in total freedom' (1983, p. 129). Perceptive engagements with the arts have the unique ability to bring people in touch with themselves and their freedom. Speaking about literature, Sartre wrote that:

Since the one who writes recognizes, by the very fact that he takes the trouble to write, the freedom of his readers, and since the one who reads, by mere fact of his opening the book, recognizes the freedom of the writer, the work of art, from which ever side you approach it, is an act of confidence in the freedom of men (*sic.*) (1965, p. 63).

Herbert Marcuse, in *The Aesthetic Dimension*, argues that art can assist in demystifying social reality and expanding the horizons of change toward liberation. He talks of how the arts often function to 'break open a dimension inaccessible to other experience, a dimension in which human beings, nature, and things no longer stand under the law of the established reality principle. The encounter with the truth of art happens in the estranging languages and images which make perceptible, visible and audible that which is no longer, or not yet perceived, said or heard in everyday life' (1977, p.72). Marcuse believes that 'change must be rooted in the subjectivity of individuals themselves, in their intelligence and their passions; their drives and their goals' (1978, pp. 3-4). And subjectivity - a universal potential in all humans - is the

positive force that enables individuals to shift, ‘the locus of [their] realization from the domain of the performance principle and the profit motive to that of the inner resources of the human being: passion, imagination, and conscience’ (*ibid.*, p. 5).

Marcuse debates the thesis that art, functioning as the conscience of society, is able to remind us of purposes beyond ourselves and enables us to transcend the given reality. He submits the following thesis:

The radical qualities of art, that is to say, its indictment of the established reality and its invocation of the...image...of liberation are grounded precisely in the dimension where art transcends its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behaviour.... Thereby art creates the realm in which the subversion of experience...becomes possible: the world formed by art is recognized as a reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality.... The inner logic of the work of art terminates in the emergence of another reason....a truth normally denied or even unheard...another sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions.... The transcendence of immediate reality shatters the reified object and opens up a new dimension of experience: rebirth of the rebellious subjectivity (*ibid.*, pp. 6-7).

It is because of the ability of the arts ‘to make audible that which is...not yet perceived’ that we turn to the arts for help in releasing the imagination. When referring to the arts, I am looking at the ways in which all forms of the arts (be it literature, music, film, painting, drama, dance) have the unique capacity to enable us to *see* more in our experience, to *hear* more, or to *move* in new ways and down alternate avenues. Mark Mason writes, ‘For me the most valuable contribution of art to our struggle for liberation lies in its ability to enable us to perceive the world more carefully, to expand our creative and imaginative capacities into a wider awakesness and a sharper awareness of our world. Art enables us to come to a realization that things need not be as they are’ (1987, p. 4). As Marcuse argues, ‘Art is committed to the perception of the world which alienates individuals from their functional existence...in society - it is committed to an emancipation of...imagination’ (1978, p. 9). It is art that allows the recognition of future possibility, which shatters everyday experience and anticipates a different reality principle.

When encountering a work of art, we may be able imaginatively to make it an object of our own experience and encounter it against the background of our own lives. Sartre makes a significant point about the role of art in awakening the imagination. He tells us: 'The work is never limited to the painted, sculpted or narrated object. Just as one perceives things only against the background of the universe...each painting, each book, is a recovery of the totality of being. Each of them presents this totality to the freedom of the spectator. For this is quite the final goal of art: to recover this world by giving it to be seen as it is, but as if it had its source in human freedom' (1949, p. 57).

When persons are released to attend to the languages and the images in works of art, this will lead to the stimulation of imagination and perception, a sensitivity to multiple ways of seeing and making sense of our world and a grounding of such experiences in our own situations. We can think of the subversion of traditional orders of reality accomplished by Cezanne and Picasso when they enabled us to realize the significance of looking through multiple perspectives – as did Monet's changing depictions of Rouen Cathedral. Similarly, as Creber suggests, 'Literature cannot really be separated from the imaginative composition we wish to encourage' (1967, pp. 76-77). Shakespeare's heightened level of consciousness undoubtedly creates a space for the reader to engage with a vision of 'what might be'. Hans Guth talked about how literature does not merely hold up a mirror to reality, but rather, 'it plays off what is real against what is perhaps possible' (1973, p. 28).

It is this 'creation of the possible' that awakens our imaginative capacities. Literature, paintings, works of music, or dance performances - when made accessible - all have the potential to invoke new experiential possibilities. And the more we are able to perceive, the wider and more complex becomes the field over which our imagination can play.

But the arts will never make any real difference if people rush by paintings, skim through works of fiction or go into reveries in concert halls. Without actual contact and real involvement, the works in the various domains become mere commodities. As Greene suggests, it is '*informed*

engagements' with the arts that are most likely to release the imaginative capacity. The imagination is released and meanings happen in and by means of an encounter and the more *informed* our encounter, the more likely we are to notice, and the more the work is likely to mean. Such informed engagements with works of art involve what Dewey called 'actively attending'. This reminds us of the necessity for the imaginative and perceptual energies of readers to reach towards a poem, a piece of music or a painting if it is to be transmuted into an aesthetic object for the one perceiving it. He argues that 'there is work to be done on the part of the percipient as there is on the part of the artist. The one who is too lazy, idle, or indurated in convention to perform this work will not see or hear. His appreciation will be mere scraps of learning with conformity to norms of conventional admiration and with a confusion, even if genuine emotional excitation' (1934, p. 54). Without attentiveness to the way we *notice*, there would never be the launching of perceivers into the making of meanings, we would never move on to new disclosures and the grounded interpretations that make for Greene's 'wide-awakeness'. Sartre said this clearly with regard to literature: if the reader 'is inattentive, tired, stupid, or thoughtless, most of the relations will escape him. He will never manage to "catch on" to the object....He will draw some phrases out of the shadow but they will seem to appear as random strokes' (1949, p. 43).

Greene specifies that, 'None of our encounters can happen...without the release of the imagination, the capacity to look *through* the windows of the actual, to bring as-ifs into being in experience' (1995, p. 140). And without exposing ourselves to meaningful encounters with the arts, we are inevitably narrowing the possibilities in our search to recover the use of our imagination. In an article entitled, *Towards wide-awakeness: An argument for the arts and humanities in education*, Greene alludes to Alfred Schutz's

...pointing out that human beings define themselves by means of their projects and that wide-awakeness contributes to the creation of the self. If it is indeed the case, as I believe it is, that the involvement with the arts and humanities has the potential for provoking precisely this sort of reflectiveness, we need to devise ways of integrating them into what we teach at all levels of the

educational enterprise: we need to do so consciously, with the clear perception of what it means to enable people to pay, from their own distinctive vantage points, “full attention to life” (1978, p. 163).

4.2 Aesthetic literacy ~ The making of new ways of seeing, perceiving and imagining

Teachers [need] to realize that youngsters who see different...have something to say about the way things might be if they were otherwise. Maxine Greene (1995, p. 34)

We can hopefully agree that part of our goal as educators is to *teach for openings* that enable youngsters to move forward creatively and imaginatively with the desire and courage to become initiators of change in their society. With this in mind, it would seem necessary for us to intensify our ways of seeing and perceiving and our attentiveness to the concrete world around us - with all its ambiguity, its dead ends and its open possibilities. ‘And attending, as Dewey and Freire have helped us see, is not merely contemplating. It is to come to know in ways that might bring about change’ (Greene, 1995, p. 68).

It is with an *informed attending* to the arts in mind, that Greene proposes the notion of an aesthetic literacy. If the arts are to assist us in developing in young people the ability to see from alternative perspectives, then it becomes essential that we learn to use them in the appropriate way. Too much time is wasted as educators struggle to define what constitutes art and what does not, which forms of art should be used in schools and which should not. But perhaps, as Morris Weitz believes, no theory completely defines art once and for all, especially considering the fact that new forms are constantly challenging what we have “known” and taken for granted about the artistic-aesthetic. Rather than pursuing this controversial debate, he proposes that, we should treat *art* as an open concept and concern ourselves with thinking about *how* the concept should be used, what should we be looking for in art and how should we look for it? Weitz goes on to say: ‘To understand the role of aesthetic theory is not to conceive it as a definition,

logically doomed to failure, but to read it as summaries of seriously made recommendations to attend in certain ways to certain features of art' (1959, p. 155). This is how teachers ought to read it - not for the sake of becoming aestheticians but for the sake of discovering and learning the modes of attending associated with aesthetic literacy and how these alternative perspectives can enrich our lives as they teach us to see more and to take more into account.

'Art', as Marcuse claims, 'breaks open a dimension inaccessible to other experience' (1978, p. 72). Being enabled to see from new angles, we are provided with a standpoint from which to attend to other experiences whose nuances and patterns might remain obscured without such a vantage point. Writing on the philosophy and theory of aesthetic education, Ralph Smith reiterated this notion when he said that 'works of art at their best afford a fresh outlook on the world that enables us to see the familiar in an unfamiliar light and to perceive connections among things in light of which we organize and reorganize our experience of reality' (1991, p. 144). In the words of Joseph Conrad, 'My task which I am trying to achieve is by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel - it is, before all, to make you see. That and no more, and it is everything' (1967, p. ix). Merleau-Ponty wrote of Cezanne's ability to make people see by saying that, 'Cezanne, in his own words, "wrote in painting what had never been painted, and turned it into painting once and for all"...The painter recaptures and converts into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness' (1964, pp. 17-18). Discussing modern art, Meyer Schapiro spoke of the multiple new orders being created before the eye of the beholder, permitting him or her, if perceptive enough and free enough, to see forms never before imagined or conceived of. Art is not only a representation of reality, but a "*re*-presentation" of that reality. It is this *re*-presentation which challenges us to see "reality" differently.

Schapiro continues by saying that, 'Only a mind opened to the qualities of things, with a habit of discrimination, sensitized by experience, and responsive to new forms and ideas, will be prepared for enjoyment of this art' (1978, p. 232). In saying, 'will be prepared' he seems to suggest that there appears to be an obligation for classroom teachers to empower young people

to open their minds, to respond and to discriminate. Greene clarifies this notion when she points out that, 'none of the arts makes itself naturally available for understanding and enjoyment. The visions so many critics describe, the dimension the artistic-aesthetic promises to "break open", can only be made accessible through some mode of aesthetic education, some stimulation of aesthetic literacy' (1991, p. 151).

One can argue convincingly that aesthetic experience is a unique form of human awareness that serves individuals in ways that other forms of awareness do not and that contributes to the actualization of worthwhile human potential. As Smith goes on to say, 'A life bereft of aesthetic capacity is only partially fulfilled and it is a serious indictment of societies and their educational systems if they permit the young to pass through schooling without helping them to realize a significant part of their humanity' (*ibid.*, p. 145). Recognizing the basic capacity of all human beings for aesthetic experience, both Dewey and Whitehead, addressed the idea of aesthetic education. Since then, many other philosophers of education have been intrigued by the educational possibilities of the aesthetic domain. Greene devoted much of her scholarship and teaching to aesthetics and her arguments for grounding general education in the arts. In her article *Aesthetic Literacy in General Education*, Greene argues 'that aesthetic experience should be given central place in general education; that such experiences require a distinctive mode of literacy and that classroom teachers and general educators, working in co-operation with art teachers and practising artists, are potentially capable of enabling students to learn how to learn to be literate in this way' (1981, p. 119).

In many schools today the arts are seen to have very little social or pedagogical significance, yet, in all cultures the arts occupy a significant portion of everyday living. While there exist numerous qualitative differences in the way that people respond to different forms of arts - be it with sensitivity or sophistication, there is, in most communities, a growing curiosity and openness to the arts. However, in many schools, at least outside of the art, drama and music studios, these same arts are treated suspiciously and few educators, as Greene notes, 'are willing to entertain the thought that the students presently in the classroom will one day compose the

audiences for the exhibitions and performances proliferating throughout the culture' (*ibid.*, p. 116). As Harry Broudy (1972) points out, little is done to empower these students to approach such art forms with an awareness and an understanding that will enable them to make informed choices among them, to cherish what they encounter in an enlightened way. Teachers of the arts find their subject relegated merely to the "creative" domains of the curriculum where children are given the opportunity to express themselves in an emotional and creative manner. Little attention is given to help students engage with the complexities of a finished work of art and any visits to museums, concerts or dramatic performances are dealt with as extra-curricular activities. In few ways are they integrally related to classroom life or to the child's life outside of the classroom. Greene claims that teachers try to justify this by arguing that 'classrooms are intended for cognitive instruction or for the teaching of competencies' (1981, p. 117). Seeing the arts as non-cognitive modes of communication, there would naturally, in their view, be no way of measuring the outcomes of teaching aesthetic awareness and also no way of teaching and cultivating aesthetic sensitivity.

For most educators, the arts are perceived merely as a vehicle for the expression of feeling. Few are convinced that the arts have anything to do with the pursuit of meanings, believing that the arts exist in a completely separate domain. This is perhaps why the artistic-aesthetic is so often dismissed as being "ornamental and therapeutic" and often disposed of as "frills". This tends to happen as much in primary education as in higher and even tertiary education where the localities for painting, sculpting and composing are kept well apart from those of inquiry and research. As Greene stipulates:

'Little is done, on this or any other level of education to nurture the aesthetic impulse in an ambience of aesthetic objects, or to relate creative exploration to the cultivation of aesthetic attitudes. Little is done to empower students to perceive aesthetically, to become discriminating in their encounters with the arts, to develop vocabularies for articulating what such encounters permit them to see or hear or to feel' (*ibid.*, p. 118).

Somehow the imaginative and the emotional seem to occupy an exclusive world from the pursuit of mastery of the structures of knowledge. This, however, falsifies the nature of the arts and obscures their significance for human experience. 'Cognitive learning is depersonalized and technicized in the absence of aesthetic concerns' (*ibid.*) and one quickly forgets the endless variety of ways there are for making sense of the world and the connections that exist among the cognitive, the perceptual, the emotional and the imaginative. The task that lies ahead not only involves educators' learning more about how the arts should be dealt with in education, but it involves looking critically at what has been learned and can still be learned concerning the possibilities that the arts hold for interpreting experience and learning and making sense of the world around us.

If we are to formulate new ways of seeing, perceiving and imagining in education, then what Greene proposes is that a form of aesthetic literacy be developed and taught in our schools. By using the term *literacy* in this context, she is suggesting that there are certain interpretive skills and 'modes of "knowing how"' involved in fully realized encounters with the arts. It is also to suggest that the discrimination, sensitivity, and responsiveness associated with such literacy contribute to an understanding of the world around' (*ibid.*, p. 120). Like verbal and numeric literacy, aesthetic literacy teaches us to become familiar with specifiable languages and acquaints us with new ways of seeing. With this heightened awareness of what exists around them, students, in turn, are able to develop fresh ways of thinking about the world and expressing what is thought. Aesthetic education does, however, differ from what we traditionally know as art education and art appreciation. While teachers of the arts are invaluable to the development of the young, their task has usually been seen to create opportunities for self-expression and creativity - be it in the form of dance, drama, music, or the exploration of raw materials in the art studio. Here the focus is usually to bring into being new objects, enactments and happenings. Art appreciation while also tremendously valuable, in its simplest form tries to acquaint students with the structures of different art forms, their styles, their languages and their histories. Often such art forms are studied and introduced as "givens", to be properly named, admired and appreciated. Little attention has been given to the intensity of the response and the position of

the beholder, how he or she perceives the work and how their awareness of the work might be heightened. Such experiences, while forming a fundamental foundation for aesthetic literacy; need to be incorporated into the live context of aesthetic concern as students learn, ‘what it feels like to live in music, move over and about a painting, travel round and in between the masses of a sculpture, dwell in a poem’ (Reid, 1969, p. 302).

No-one can be completely “trained” in this sort of awareness, and aesthetic literacy is not the kind of attainment that can be separated into discrete “competencies”. What is needed, as Greene argues is, ‘A kind of aesthetic education...that provides certain fundamental insights, certain ways of proceeding; but its emphasis must be on releasing learners to attend in such a fashion that they are moved to go further on their own initiative, to begin teaching themselves as they go and uncover (through repeated readings, viewings, hearing) particular works, and as they move more and more deeply into the province of the arts’ (1991, p. 152).

4.3 The implications for aesthetic education

The implications for aesthetic education are considerable. Not only ought young persons to be provided with a range of experiences in perceiving and noticing. They ought to have opportunities, in every classroom, to pay heed to colour and glimmer and sound, to attend to appearances of things from an aesthetic point of view. If not, they are unlikely to be in a position to be challenged by what they see or hear; and one of the great powers associated with the arts is the power to challenge expectations, to break stereotypes, to change the ways in which persons apprehend the world. Maxine Greene (1991, pp. 156-7)

The implications for the development of an aesthetic education depend primarily on the teacher and her willingness and ability firstly to become perceptually and imaginatively involved with several of the arts and secondly, to become a critic. By a critic, I am referring to what one writer called, a person ‘who affords *new* perceptions and with them new values’ (Isenberg, 1977, p.

411). Such a teacher would preferably be an individual who, as described by Merleau-Ponty, was able to keep their own questions open, to break with “created structures”, and to move beyond (1967, pp. 160-166). What then can such a teacher do to enhance students’ opportunities to achieve aesthetic literacy?

Aesthetic education involves intentional and deliberate efforts to foster increasingly informed and ardent encounters with art works. Teachers need to begin by exposing learners to works of art, be it a musical piece, a drama or a painting, that engage them in posing questions with respect to their own projects and their own lived situations. Such works will hopefully move learners to think about their own thinking and to risk examination of what is supposedly taken for granted.

The teacher functioning as critic must be someone perceptive enough to enhance perceptual acuity among students. This means posing questions that make the experience itself more reflective, more critical and more resonant. She should attempt to assist students to discriminate details and discern emerging forms. This will often involve urging learners to attend to the appearances of things around them in unaccustomed ways, or breaking with habitual modes of seeing and sense-making, and moving imaginatively beyond the work. As Greene clarifies, teachers might bring into the field of attention ‘attributes of objects and events that may be made to appear intrinsically interesting and expressive when heeded in a certain way. Not only may this provoke certain persons to heightened attentiveness, it may introduce them to the idea of the qualitative, an idea focal to aesthetic literacy’ (1991, p. 153).

Qualitative perceiving is essential to aesthetic literacy and education. For a long time it was thought that perceiving entailed a passive taking in of shapes, images or sounds that would later be organized and ordered into a certain pattern to give the work meaning. It has now come to be understood that we grasp the work as a whole, fused with whatever meaning is imparted to it and against the backdrop of our own past experiences and the expectations that those experiences have raised. Our task, according to Dewey, is to restore the links between great art

and everyday experience (1987, p. 206). The object or event becomes a work of art when it is treated as an object made for a certain kind of perceiving and when those who attend to it are capable of a special sort of apprehending, of noticing and of *personal* grasping. As John Berger has illustrated, the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe: our perception of an image depends upon our way of seeing (1972, pp. 8-10). The more often and more attentively the work of art is viewed, the more of its qualities and attributes are likely to be disclosed.

This type of attending also involves recognizing the role of perspective and vantage point. As Greene points out, 'To recognize...that there are always multiple perspectives and multiple vantage points, [and to realize that] no accounting, disciplinary or otherwise, can ever be finished or complete. There is always more. There is always possibility. And this is where the space opens for the pursuit of freedom' (1988, p. 128). The point is that such perspectives do not open up spontaneously. The capacity to perceive and to attend in an informed manner has to be *learned*. Enabled to look at things imaginatively and from unusual angles, students are encouraged to pose questions relevant to their life plans and their living and being in the world. 'Once this occurs,' writes Greene, 'new perspectives will open on the past, on cumulative meanings, on future possibilities' (1978, p. 165).

Greene goes on to say that 'to "do" philosophy in this fashion is to respond to actual problems and real interests, to the requirements of sense-making in a confusing world. It may also involve identification with the lacks and insufficiencies in that world - and some conscious effort to repair those lacks, to choose what *ought* to be' (*ibid.*). Dewey, like Greene and Marcuse, also sees the positive potential for change in this: 'Every individual brings with him [or her]...a way of seeing and feeling that in its interaction with [a work of art] creates something new, something previously not existing in experience.... A work of art...is recreated every time it is aesthetically experienced' (1987, p. 215). Without imaginative awareness, however, we are unable to transform what is perceived. Without imagination there could be no image creation on the part of the beholder and neither could there be the transformations that engagements with

the arts allow. Greene reflects on works such as Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* or different characters in *Death of a Salesman* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and how, when countered imaginatively, these works ought to evoke the capacity to transform, '...to build imaginary worlds and in the course of doing so, worlds alternative to the worlds of everyday. Doing so, we may recognize the sense in which we all stand against a world of possible forms. It is imagination that puts us in relation to such possibilities, when imagination is stimulated by engagements with the arts' (1991, p. 156).

CHAPTER FIVE

*South African education ~ Moving towards change: Aesthetic literacy and
South Africa's Curriculum 2005*

Critical thinking, rational thought and deeper understanding will be central principles of the new education system...to break down class, race and gender stereotypes. For the first time ever, high quality education will be available for everyone - irrespective of age, gender, race, colour, religion, ability or language...There is lots of potential among South African citizens. Curriculum 2005 unlocks this potential. Soon all South Africans will be active, creative, critical thinkers living productive and fulfilling lives. These are the types of citizens who will lead South Africa to great heights. (Curriculum 2005 - Lifelong Learning for the 21st century, issued by the National Department of Education, Feb, 1997)

The language of OBE and its associated structures are simply too complex and inaccessible for most teachers to give these policies meaning through classroom practices....The knowledge and experience that I have accumulated lead me to the conclusion that outcomes-based-education will be an unmitigated failure in South African classrooms. (Jonathan Jansen, 1997, p. 2)

South Africa's new Curriculum 2005 - underpinned by an outcomes-based-education (OBE)-seems to rest on the notion that it can change the inequalities that exist within the present education system. The fact that the old apartheid curriculum needs to be changed is indisputable - yet whether Curriculum 2005 will be able to transform the legacy of the old system is another question. There is an overwhelming scepticism among many involved in the reconstruction of South Africa's education as to whether or not this new curriculum is the answer to our problems. Along with numerous others, Jonathan Jansen, the dean of the Faculty of Education and director of the Centre for Education Research, Evaluation and Policy at the University of

Durban 'Westville, is one such sceptic. He claims that the language of innovation associated with OBE is somewhat abstract and idealistic in nature and although it recognizes the problems that need to be confronted, he is doubtful as to whether this approach will succeed in South African classrooms.

If we are to look at the development of an aesthetic literacy for the multicultural South African classroom, then it is important to take a closer look at the framework within which South African teachers are going to be working. We need to ask how Greene's ideas on the imagination and aesthetic education can or cannot be incorporated into this structure. Is there a way that we can integrate her ideas into the curriculum? Are they perhaps already there and just needing to be developed? For example, does this approach begin to work towards promoting an *education for freedom*? Do its motivations really lie in unlocking the potential of our young? Does this curriculum have the capability to create 'active, creative, critical thinkers living productive and fulfilling lives'? And, educated in such a way, can we develop citizens 'who will lead South Africa to great heights'?

I believe that Curriculum 2005 does offer an enormous amount of room for positive and restorative steps to be taken in education. Yet, while opening many doors for new opportunities, innovations and reconstructions, Curriculum 2005 still leaves many doors unopened and many questions unanswered. Unfortunately, some of the doors that have remained closed, are the very openings that could help develop 'active, creative and critical thinkers'.

Greene's notion of an *education for freedom* entails:

A conception of education orientated to the kinds of learning that may enable persons to break with channeling, to affirm themselves as fully conscious, critical beings...not only to recover themselves as persons, but to apprehend cultural change as possible and act to remake their world (1995, p. 170).

As illustrated above, this notion of education and freedom could be of immense relevance to educators in South Africa. It proposes taking the cognitive action known as *praxis* - 'action and reflection of men [and women] upon their world in order to transform it' (Freire, 1970, p. 66). If we can agree that an educational move in this direction is worth taking, then it would be of great value first to assess briefly the new curriculum and its broad goals and aims, and then to point out where this curriculum provides the types of positive openings necessary for such a conception of education. More importantly, in this study, it seems necessary to seek out the areas in which the curriculum tends to limit possibilities and close doors - some of the very doors that Greene would argue provide the openings without which young people might struggle to become the 'active, creative and critical thinkers' who will initiate change in our society.

Firstly, I will provide a brief overview of the aims of the new curriculum: where does it come from, how has it come into being, and where does it hope to take us? I will then move on to explore the positive openings and opportunities that the curriculum provides for the arts in education. Finally, I will look at some of the weaknesses of the curriculum with regard to acknowledging the importance of imagination in education and its stimulation through a form of aesthetic literacy. Having looked at this, I will discuss in the final chapter several of the issues that might arise should we attempt to implement some of Greene's ideas into Curriculum 2005, and more particularly into teaching and learning in our *multicultural* classrooms.

5.1 Situating Curriculum 2005

Global transformations in production paradigms and in the production of knowledge have impacted on the policy process and formulation of South Africa's new Curriculum 2005. The rampant proliferation of information in contemporary society points to the impossibility of learners' appropriating this content. OBE therefore shifts the emphasis of education to the appropriation of generic and flexible skills for negotiating this plethora of information. It is because of the nature of our changing society that Emilia Potenza, coordinator of the

Benoni/Brakpan Teaching and Learning Unit of the Gauteng Department of Education, believes that 'OBE tries to make schooling as relevant to real life as possible. It starts off with a simple question – what do people need to be productive, independent, constructive members of society?... They need skills, and they need to explore and develop their own values and attitudes' (Potenza, 1998, p.52)). It would be difficult to argue with this shift in emphasis. Yet as we develop youngsters to become 'productive, independent, constructive members of society', what are we really preparing our youth for, and for what reasons are we doing this? Out of what and from where has this new curriculum emerged and where does it hope to take us?

With the demand for transferable skills and *useful* knowledge in the work place, Curriculum 2005 has shifted the previous educational emphasis on content to a focus on generic skills. 'It is basing curriculum design, content and delivery on the assessment of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed by both learners and society' (Dept. of Education, March 1997, p. 17). The emphasis of the new curriculum is now on outcomes and skills which learners can take from one context to another. The outcomes are future-orientated, publicly defined and learner-centred, and provide the sources from which all other education decisions flow. With a transformation in the way we view knowledge, teachers and trainers will become mediators rather than transmitters of knowledge, whose role is to set up learning situations that will produce the desired outcomes. Learners will become active in the learning process and responsible for their own learning and thinking. More so than before, parents and communities will become involved in the education of their children and, wherever possible, assist and participate in the learning process. As we witness a move in business and industry towards collaborative teamwork, so this is reflected in the classroom; accordingly, the learning of such skills has become important. Learning in the new curriculum has become centred around the learner who is frequently actively involved in co-operative group activities with other members of the class.

As these changes come into place, it is useful to try and understand some of the reasons why they have emerged and for what purposes they are being implemented. Castells highlights that ‘a networked, deeply interdependent economy has emerged that has become increasingly able to apply its progress in technology, knowledge, and management [to production]. Such a virtuous circle should lead to greater productivity and efficiency, given the right conditions of equally dramatic organizational and institutional changes’ (1996, p. 67). These institutions would naturally include the school and other sites of learning. The introductory paragraph of Curriculum 2005 briefly states the reason for the restructuring and development of the new curriculum. It reads:

The curriculum is at the heart of the education and training system. In the past the curriculum has perpetuated race, class, gender and ethnic divisions and has emphasised separateness, rather than common citizenship and nationhood. It is therefore imperative that the curriculum be restructured to reflect the values and principles of our new democratic society. In view of the country’s history and its legacy of inequality, it is important that the state’s resources be developed according to the principle of equity, so that they are used to provide essentially the same quality of learning opportunities for all citizens (Draft Paper, 1997, p. 5).

What is primarily in view in the outcomes-based approach is ‘the social project of maximizing the citizen/learner’s flexibility, opportunities, mobility and access. The programmes are ‘learner-paced’ and ‘learner-centred’ (HSRC, 1995, p. 21): the learner determining her own educational fate, maximizing her occupational opportunities, and becoming a fully participating citizen in all spheres of social, political and economic life, is the guiding ideal’ (Muller, 1997, p. 3). As is evident in the above extract from the policy document, the primary goal of the new curriculum is to bring equity, and of paramount concern is the need to produce a curriculum that ‘reflects the values...of our new democratic society’. This means that the driving forces now become equity and access. In the initial document produced by the Department of Education (1997), entitled *Curriculum 2005 - Lifelong Learning for the 21st century*, in a somewhat lofty manner, the introductory paragraph also refers to this motive:

All South Africans want a prosperous democratic country, free of discrimination and violence, and to be able to compete internationally. But this is a dream that everyone needs to work towards. For many, this means being empowered so that they are able to participate as active citizens (1997, p. 2).

Despite the idealism of this statement, what it does point out is the hope of creating active, self-regulating citizens who are able to enhance South Africa's ability to become internationally competitive. As Muller suggests, 'The social project of egalitarianism and empowerment is linked to the skill needs of the national economy, usually also seen in the light of the global economy and global competitiveness' (1997, p. 4). In a recent article, Professor Bengu (S.A. Minister of Education), writes:

Moreover, it is quite clear that learning at the end of the 20th century can neither be narrowly vocationally orientated for those already working, nor narrowly knowledge based for those in general, further or higher education. This is so since the large-scale restructuring of the economy and society demands learners and citizens who are mobile and flexible, who engage in self-led expansion of their performances, while working in groups, teams, organisations and communities (*Sunday Times*, 15.06.97).

To compete competitively in the global economy means that we require a well-qualified population and this means workers with flexible, generic and constantly upgraded skills (Young, 1996, p. 1). Muller points out that 'outcomes-based frameworks allow previously disadvantaged learners to redeem their under-qualified competencies, (recognition of prior learning) and permit recurrent and multiple re-entry for purposes of reskilling (lifelong learning). In fact, outcomes-based frameworks are often put forward as the pedagogical reconciliation of personal, social and economic goals' (1997, p. 4).

It is quite clear that, in one way, Curriculum 2005 will certainly be aiming to prepare children for '*Lifelong Learning in the 21st century*'. Yet, equipping the young with generic skills that can constantly be upgraded to improve their performances in the work place, will not

necessarily help produce the ‘active, creative and critical thinkers’ that the curriculum also hopes to encourage. While the new curriculum proposes a drastic improvement on our previous educational structures, there still seem to be several problematic areas that need to be considered. OBE as a curriculum policy is lodged in problematic assumptions about the relationship between curriculum, society and the economy. OBE policy claims in South Africa are proposed to be associated with, stated as a prerequisite for, or sometimes offered as part of the solution to economic growth. In a recent article on OBE published by the *Cape Times* we read that,

On the one hand, there is the intention of gearing education toward science and technology and skills-based education which is explicitly indicated in the NCHE documents.... On the other hand, [there is] the absence of an intellectual layer capable of providing an alternative conception, and further exacerbated by the weakness within the mass movement itself.... These twin features have meant the land-slide victory of a market driven conception of education (02.06.97).

Jansen (1997) draws our attention to this critique of Curriculum 2005. In the following extracts he points out that:

South Africa’s inability to generate an economic growth rate to sustain all of its redress needs is largely due to the lack of relevant skills.... [The] present education and training system is designed to meet the needs of an outdated and narrowly Taylorist specification and this renders the economy incapable of competing with workforces that are trained to be ‘self-directed, innovative and reflective’ (Mahomed, 1996; following Tyers 1996).

It is believed that the economy must grow at approximately 6% in order to create sufficient jobs to drastically reduce unemployment levels in the country, ie. In order to absorb school leavers and the present unemployed. South Africa’s economy is however growing at a rate which is around 3%. In order to change this, transformation of the labour market is seen as being a step in the creation of growth. This would require clear change in the nature of the South African education system. Hence a move towards an outcomes-based approach to education (Unofficial Department of Education Document, undated A).

Allied to this vision of South Africa as a prosperous...internationally competitive country, is the vision of its people as literate and productive human beings (Official Department of Education Document on OBE, undated B).

Equally, OBE is argued as facilitating human resources development and potentially contributing to a vibrant economy (the National Curriculum Development Committee: *A framework for Lifelong Learning*, September 1996).

For those involved in South African education, we are more aware than ever before of the difficulties of reconciling the socio-economic demands being made on schools with the needs of children who are striving to survive in and make sense of a not always hospitable world. Given such a preoccupation, it follows that many children might be conceived of as human resources rather than persons. Often they are spoken of as raw materials to be shaped and moulded to suit market demands.

While recognizing the danger of this type of thinking, it is still important that we take advantage of the many positive aspects of the new curriculum which aim to enable young people to take initiatives in the learning process, to become independent learners and ultimately practitioners. These aims hope to equip youngsters with the necessary skills to cope with the constant shifts, tangents and instabilities that will manifest themselves in their lives and work. Yet, paradoxically, in this age of computers and other technology, increasing numbers of people will be assigned to work stations where automatic responses are required and where the consciousness of agency is denied. Already many individuals in numerous work environments recognize these changes taking place in unprecedented ways. However, none of the young people coming out of our schools should expect to lead purely robotic, conforming or mechanical lives. As Greene emphasizes, 'They must not be resigned to thoughtlessness, passivity, or lassitude if they are to find pathways through the nettles, the swamps and the jungles of our time. Nor can they be left to the realm of separateness and privacy that makes community so difficult to achieve and alienates the fortunate from those who remain tragically in need' (1995, p. 35).

5.2 The possibilities and limits of Curriculum 2005 with respect to the arts and aesthetic literacy

When assessing Curriculum 2005, many positive features appear that work towards developing independent thinkers who are also able to work co-operatively with one another. The South African *critical outcomes* which are adopted by SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) form the backdrop to this document, and are the broad, generic cross-curricular outcomes which underpin the assumptions of all *specific outcomes* in all learning areas. In a discussion document issued by the S.A. Ministry of Education (1997), it is stated that ‘These outcomes will ensure that learners gain the skills, knowledge and values that will allow them to contribute to their own success as well as the success of their family, community and the nation as a whole’ (p. 13). The critical outcomes stated in this document propose that learners will:

1. Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical thinking
2. Work effectively with other members of a team, group, organisation and community
3. Organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively
4. Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information
5. Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic, and/or language skills in various modes
6. Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others
7. Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation (1997, p. 13).

Along with these *critical outcomes*, each of the thirteen fields of learning has *specific outcomes*

that refer to the specification of what learners are able to do at the end of a learning experience. This includes skills, knowledge and values that inform the demonstration of the achievement of an outcome or a set of outcomes.

No one could easily dispute such educational outcomes. Yet if our concern in this study is the development of the imagination and its cultivation through the arts and through aesthetic education, then it becomes important to examine this aspect of the curriculum more closely. While the critical outcomes mention aspects closely related to our idea of educating with the role of the imagination in mind (for example, critical and creative thinking, communicating using visual and symbolic skills and working together with other members of a group or community), they do not contain a commitment to the development of the imagination. I have argued that the primary method for releasing the imagination is through the arts and a form of aesthetic literacy in the classroom. A natural progression would thus be to take a closer look at the learning area of 'Arts and Culture' that Curriculum 2005 has introduced.

Arts and Culture are a crucial component of developing our human resources. This will help in unlocking the creativity of our people, allowing for cultural diversity within the process of developing a unifying national culture, rediscovering our historical heritage, and assuring that adequate resources are allocated [equitably](RDP, 1994, p.9).

This forms the opening quote of the section on 'Arts and Culture' in Curriculum 2005. It talks about developing our human resources, unlocking the creativity of our people, allowing for cultural diversity with an end to unifying national culture, rediscovering our heritage, and paying attention to redress needs. These, without question, are noble goals. But exactly *how* they will be achieved is still in question. This quote is then followed by the underpinning principles for this learning area, part of which state that:

Arts and Culture Education and Training invests in creative growth and development related to the needs of learners and the communities in which they live. It prepares learners for the world of work, as well as for the social and political participation in a dynamic and rapidly changing global society

(Dept. of Education. Draft Statement, 1997. p. 177).

An emphasis is placed on contextualizing the arts and culture within society, and working actively to preserve, develop and promote indigenous arts and cultural practices: ‘Arts and Culture are an integral part of life, embracing the spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional aspects of human society. Culture embodies not only expression through the arts, but also modes of life, behaviour patterns, heritage, knowledge and belief systems’ (*ibid.*, p. 178). With this emphasis comes the hope that through this learning area, ‘learners will develop insight into the aspirations and values of our nation, and effective participation in the construction of a democratic society’ (*ibid.*, p. 179).

The preamble to the *specific outcomes* affirms the integrity and importance of various art forms including Dance, Drama, Music, Visual Arts, Media and Communication, Arts Technology, Design, and Literature. It proposes learning *in* and *through* the arts as well as stating the hope of integrating them across the curriculum. No-one can argue that this attention to the arts is not a vast improvement on our previous curriculum that relegated the arts to a purely extra-curricular activity. Curriculum 2005 opens the door to the arts in a way that South African educators have not witnessed before. There is now formally the space, freedom and flexibility that teachers need in order to teach imaginatively, but still, the role of the imagination and aesthetic literacy seems to be denied its rightful place.

While Curriculum 2005 affirms many of the functions of the arts, awakening the imagination is not one of them. Cultural expression and communication still tend to be the primary concern and reason for using the arts in education: ‘The Arts are at all times concerned with expression and communication’ (*ibid.*). The term ‘communication’ is referred to as literacy and attention is given to visual, spatial, kinaesthetic, movement, aural and oral literacy. While creativity and expression form a major part of what the arts offer, limiting their role in this way might be overlooking what is specifically *unique* about the arts. It might be disregarding the *artistic-aesthetic* – the unusual and specific nature of the arts to provide the ability to look from

unaccustomed angles, to see more from alternative perspectives and to open up the world to critical, imaginative and untapped possibility. It is *aesthetic* experience that enables us to break with the given, to imagine, and within those imaginings to transform possibility into reality. Dewey called this the artistic-aesthetic, or 'art as experience': 'Active engagements with diverse works [and] active attempts to realize them as objects of experience might counteract the *anaesthetic*, the humdrum, the banal, the routine' (1934, p. 272). The importance of aesthetic literacy is not acknowledged in Curriculum 2005, and no clue or tangible direction is given to show *how* 'learners will develop insight into the aspiration and values of our nation, and effective participation in the construction of a democratic society' (Dept. of Education, Draft Statement, 1997, p. 177). *How* will this happen, and *how* will the 'Arts and Culture' provide the openings needed to encourage the young to participate in the construction of a democratic society in our country?

It becomes clear that Curriculum 2005 does, in a very real way, provide new openings for the arts and culture in education. However, 'openings' are all that these are, and it is up to us as teachers to find ways to move through these openings and take full advantage of the opportunities that the arts can offer education. If we were to give Greene's ideas recognition in our curriculum, we might discover new and unique ways of moving through the openings that lie before us. But in order to teach with Greene's ideas in mind means that we need to dispel the question mark that hangs above the role of the imagination and aesthetic education in our new curriculum.

So perhaps when looking at Curriculum 2005, still more attention needs to be paid to ways in which youngsters can develop into individuals who are able to counteract 'thoughtlessness, passivity,....separateness and privacy' (1995, p. 35). This would possibly mean acknowledging Greene's conception of education orientated to opening the world to *critical* judgement by the young, to their *imaginative* projections and in time, to their *transformative* actions (1995, p.56). This type of education might begin to open the way for the making of a democracy in our country. As the Draft Paper of the new curriculum reads, 'It is imperative that the curriculum

be restructured to reflect the values and principles of our new democratic society' (1997, p. 5).

Such values and principles do not include 'separateness and privacy', but rather involve the coming together of diverse individuals who are moved towards new relationships, new modes of self-definition and new beginnings arising from an emerging awareness of both difference and possibility. Dewey said that 'a clear consciousness of a communal life constitutes the idea of democracy' (1954, p. 148). Like freedom, such values have to be achieved by persons offered the space and openings in which to discover what they *recognize together and appreciate in common*. Not only do teachers and learners need to tell and choose, they have to look toward untapped possibility - to light the fuse and to explore what it might mean to transform that possibility. 'Once they are open, once they are informed, once they are engaged in speech and action from their many vantage points, they may be able to identify a better state of things - and go on to transform' (Greene, 1995, p. 59).

Greene argues that to bring about *transformative* action by the young, we need to open their world 'to critical judgement [and] *imaginative* projections' (1995, p. 56). As I have already pointed out, coming to an awareness of *possibility* and *alternatives* depends very heavily on our ability to imagine. Imagination and its role in education cannot and must not be overlooked. If the arts, and in particular a form of aesthetic education, might provide the best method for releasing the imagination then we need to take advantage of the openings that Curriculum 2005 provides in this area, but still work to find ways of developing the imagination through aesthetic experience.

In Curriculum 2005 the openings are there but the direction and methods are not. The arts and aesthetics in a multicultural classroom are vastly more complicated and complex than the new curriculum acknowledges. Perhaps as educators it is in this area that we should be mindful of the signposts that some of Greene's ideas provide. Given this direction we might be able to find the openings, the opportunities and the methods needed to implement successfully an *education for freedom* in South African classrooms.

CHAPTER SIX

Moving forward and beyond in South African education: The arts and aesthetic literacy in the multicultural classroom

*At the heart of what I am asking for in the domains of the teaching of art and aesthetics is a sense of agency, even of power. Painting, literature, theatre and film - can all open doors and move persons to **transform**. Maxine Greene (1995, p. 150)*

In South Africa, it is obvious that we need to develop persons willing to transform, willing to accept and to initiate change in their society. In education, we should be developing individuals who are able to conceive of a better state of living, imagine other possibilities, look at things from alternative perspectives and seek out openings through which they can move and *transform*. At a time of incredible change and unease, young people are, as never before, feeling the overwhelming pressures exerted on them by our society in all its plurality and multiplicity. The youth find themselves bombarded from all angles with the values presented by the influx of international media. They find themselves affected by the rapid spread of information technologies and consumerism while also facing the future turmoil presented by the political, environmental, economic and social unease now existing in our country. Few adults seem brave enough to contemplate the challenges that lie ahead of their children. Are we as teachers willing to confront these challenges? And in doing so, are we able to understand the ways in which we should be preparing youngsters to become successful and confident individuals within their society. I believe, as I have articulated, that a major prerequisite for coping with the ambiguities and anxieties of our present day lies in our ability to imagine. By this I mean our ability to imagine alternate modes of living and being in this world, and different ways of seeing and perceiving what is around us. This means that we learn to empathize with the points of view of others different from ourselves; it means we might come to see situations from new and unique

angles that open the way for transformation and change. Without imaginative youngsters - people able to surpass the given – we cannot really begin to face the difficulties and the obstacles that lie before us.

Perhaps now, more so than ever before, radical changes should be taking place in what we are teaching our young and the ways in which we are teaching it. There is a need to be looking for methods to counteract unreflectiveness and passivity in our society and to find a means of combating ‘thoughtlessness’ and isolation. We should be striving to create individuals who have the ability to look at their society critically and through this, make informed choices and decisions. As Arendt said, ‘We need to *think* what we are doing’ (1958, p. 5), and that means, ‘we need to teach self-reflectiveness originating in situated life, the life of persons in their plurality, open to one another in their distinctive locations, engaging with one another in dialogue’ (Greene, 1995, p. 126). Youngsters should be learning to overcome the fears that surround them and not be afraid of coming together and confronting one another, dealing with the problems created by difference and taking advantage of the opportunities that arise out of diversity.

If, as South Africans educators, we are to teach with an education for freedom in mind, then we must encourage the young to conceive of a freedom that involves coming together. Such a freedom does not seek release *from* the obstacles and challenges that lie ahead, but rather looks from alternative angles to find openings that enable individuals to confront the difficulties and constraints that lie before them.

It is with these thoughts in mind that Greene’s ideas on the importance of the imagination, its role in community and its development through the arts and aesthetic literacy, speak to the needs of South African education. Having briefly examined various aspects of Curriculum 2005, it becomes clear that, while numerous openings and spaces are being made for the arts, there is still a need to find and develop openings for imagination working through aesthetic literacy to form part of our curriculum. This needs to be formulated in a unique way to suit and meet

the needs of every South African child in our multicultural classrooms.

6.1 Teaching for imaginative and aesthetic openings in the South African classroom

The possibility of an alliance between (the exploited groups in society) and art presupposes that men and women administered by monopoly capitalism unlearn the languages, concepts and images of this administration, that they experience the dimension of qualitative change, that they reclaim their subjectivity, their inwardness. Herbert Marcuse (1978, p. 37)

Greene's ideas on teaching for openings can prove to be of immense value in our education system which, for so long, has closed doors to so many people. If we are to move forward *and beyond* in education, and in particular in the development of an aesthetic literacy in our classrooms, then perhaps, to begin with, what is needed in a country still wrought with inequality and exploitation, is a change of consciousness. Mason writes, 'Our political struggle against monopoly capitalism as it erodes our already limited democracy, sense of community, and authentic free choice, must of course be accompanied by a change of consciousness that would include "a sensibility, imagination and reason emancipated from the rule of exploitation" whose methodology is possibly not adequately translatable into the language of political and economic strategy. Perhaps art in its transcendence of the verbal can offer an enhancement of this change of consciousness' (1987, p. 7). Berger echoes the claims to the ability of art to speak to us in new ways where words have been inapt:

Within the language of images we could begin to define our experiences more precisely in areas where words are inadequate....Not only personal experience, but also the essential historical experience of our relation to the past: that is to say, the experience of seeking to give meaning to our lives, of trying to understand the history of which we can become active agents (1972, p. 33).

If we are going to think about becoming ‘active agents’ in the making of *our own* history in South Africa, it is important that we examine some of the more specific opportunities and problems that arise out of the uniqueness of our South African situation. The context in which most educators now find themselves is one of change, instability and unease. Along with trying to implement the new curriculum and the outcomes-based system of teaching and learning, teachers are facing the challenges of educating in large multiracial, multilingual and multicultural classrooms. To many teachers, such an environment is completely foreign, and the challenges and difficulties confronting them seem quite overwhelming.

It is within such a context that we would need to find ways of developing Greene’s ideas on the imagination and aesthetic education. Curriculum 2005, as I have already clarified, does provide new spaces in the realm of the arts and culture. It is, however, up to us to find ways of filling those spaces in a positive and productive manner. Perhaps what is needed is an application, an incorporation and a recontextualization of Greene’s ideas in the South African classroom. This means taking into account our context of multiplicity and diversity, and within this, formulating ways of cultivating the imagination through an aesthetic literacy that involves *all* participating in the learning process in our classrooms. This is not an easy task and entails a re-evaluation of our assumptions about what constitutes art and aesthetic experience in different cultures. We need to question how much of our categorizing of art is based on our particular cultural pool of ideas and values, and the art forms we were raised with.

This task seems daunting and perhaps even overwhelming, but if the arts and aesthetics are to be incorporated into South African teaching then it becomes important to acknowledge and learn to understand how they function in the life and community of *every* child whom we teach. But, as numerous problems arise, so too, a multitude of possibilities and opportunities emerge. While struggling to overcome the problem of embracing all cultures into a form of aesthetic education, many openings arise for learning about and understanding other cultures. In the following section I will begin by outlining some of the issues and problems that should be confronted when thinking about aesthetic experience in the multicultural classroom. I will then

move on to explore some of the possibilities that a multicultural aesthetic education could bring about for learning to understand and empathize with those different from ourselves.

6.2 The arts and aesthetic education in the multicultural classroom

Art is as old as the human race and it is as much part of man as are his eyes or his ears or his hunger or his thirst....We have never, as far as I know, come across a race...that was completely without some form of artistic expression. Van Loon (1938)

When looking at Greene's notion of the arts as a vehicle for releasing the imagination, it may be argued that such a mode of stimulating the imagination would exclude certain racial groups, in particular underprivileged groups or those disadvantaged by poverty. Some claim that engagement with the arts and any form of aesthetic experience is an exclusively 'middle class' activity and perhaps, for a long time this has been a major factor contributing to the exclusion of many different cultural forms in art education.

As a cultural mosaic and cultural pluralism have together become the dominant motif in our society and its education, equal currency and status have to be given to all people and their cultures. This in no way excludes the way in which we incorporate the arts into the general curriculum. If we are to make the arts accessible to all pupils in our classroom, then we need to make a concerted effort to dispel the prevailing definitions and interpretations of what people perceive "art" to be. Dominant groups in society have generally determined "what art is" and "what culture is"? They have also determined the criteria for defining what is acceptable "civilized art" and what is "primitive art". Unfortunately, this practice has tended to limit the domain of the arts to the point of making art the sole property of a small number of selective individuals who are classified as writers, dancers, poets, artists and dramatists. Art appreciation and aesthetic experience has in the process become an expression of "high culture" to the extent that it is often believed that only the so-called "educated" person has the powers of determining

the criteria of art interpretation and appreciation. To become an artist then involves being initiated into the values and life-style of that exclusive group known as artists.

Such views have in the past corseted the way in which the arts have been integrated and used in the school curriculum. Along with this, the use of the school as a pool of selection for artists has operated under the constraints of this exclusionary perception of art. In an article entitled, *Arts Education, the Curriculum and the Multicultural Society* (1980), Horace Lashley argues for the inclusion of the art forms of ethnic minorities and different cultures into the curriculum. As Van Loon suggests, the arts form a fundamental part of all cultures; it is only this exclusionary attitude that has categorized and classified the arts into acceptable or unacceptable forms - and often this perception has been based on "racial worth". Curriculum 2005 and, in particular, the learning area of 'Arts and Culture', acknowledges the need to include the art forms of all cultures in our teaching and learning. Yet, as we begin to learn and appreciate the arts of other cultures, there is still an overtone of ethnographic curiosity and not straightforward art visualization and appreciation as used in viewing, for example, the works of Michelangelo, Rodin or Picasso. Lashley comments that, 'Art schools have done a disservice to our changing society by not readily responding to our societal changes.... The fact that we live in a multi-racial society is of little significance to the curriculum of art schools and the fact that our society has changed and is changing and that the artist is as much a generator of change as a recorder appears to have little significance to the policy makers in arts education' (1980, p. 31).

The exclusivisation of the arts has resulted in the separation of art from ordinary people. Despite this situation, the arts, along with their unique ability to release the imagination, are of concern to us all. As Stendhal (1971) has argued, 'The arts follow civilization and spring from all its customs, even the most baroque and ridiculous'. They are a part of all people's lives. As educators, we have become responsible for this social dichotomy since we have not made the arts education curriculum sufficiently relevant to the lives of *all* the children we teach, and nor have we attempted to remove the high culture ethos that has pervaded arts education. Lashley

emphasizes this point: 'Arts education in schools has thus created a situation of alienation from aesthetic experience rather than enhancing young people's arts discriminations and aesthetic involvements' (1980, p. 32).

If the arts are to become an integral part of our multicultural education, then the art of *all* children and their communities needs to be integrated into every aspect of arts education without discriminating against influences from the environment of different children. In the past, schools have failed to take advantage of the enormity and diversity of cultural and artistic experience that different groups of individuals can bring into one classroom. Multicultural arts education programmes can provide authentic voices, stories and histories for all students by encouraging individuals from ethnically diverse backgrounds to speak artistically for themselves, explore works of artists from all cultures, understand the complexities of history, and honour and respect cultural differences in aesthetic experience and attitudes. In valuing the arts that children bring into the classroom, we are in fact valuing part of their very own ethno-cultural self-expression and self-image as well as the children themselves. Lashley concludes his argument:

The school must act as an incubator "hatching" new art forms for a multicultural society as well as preserving existing ones. It is expected that schools will form a focal point for catalyzing the various art forms that children can introduce within the school so that the school can fuse them into some new art form that is relevant to the...experience of all children (1980, p. 35).

6.3 The problems and possibilities

Just as the meaning of art depends on and interacts with the context of society, so too does contemporary art education. The aesthetic, structural, and language codes and conventions operating within particular social and historical frames...must be reckoned with in art education practices. Ronald Neperud (1995, p. 169)

Cross-cultural study of art can be a rich avenue for helping students enlarge their cultural perspectives, be more aware of their primary culture in relation to others, and see art as central to the sociocultural as well as aesthetic life of people. June King McFee (1995, p. 190)

If we are to begin to negotiate our way into some form of aesthetic education in multicultural classrooms, then understanding the link between art and culture becomes crucial. Perhaps, to begin with, teachers need to be culturally sensitive – they need to be aware of the meaning of culture, its impact on how students learn, what they already know, and how they are being affected by the forces of change. With the diversity of cultures presented to us in the average South African classroom, there is more change and reaction to change than ever before. It is how we deal with the complexities of these changes that may determine whether or not we are able to incorporate successfully the arts and aesthetic education into our multicultural curriculum.

As the contemporary world changes rapidly, so too, culture never remains static. There is increased individual and group mobility due to mass transit, worldwide migration and numerous other factors - few places in the world exist untouched by modernization with its products and its media-projected images. With the interconnectedness of communities, many societies in the world are not only more multicultural than ever before, but in a state of continual change. As cultures are affected by change in the direction of increasing hybridity, so our identities are constructed in terms more multicultural than before.

Such changes inevitably affect the various aspects of culture - one of them being art. Every culture has some form of art, even though the members may not have a concept or word for it. But it does form one of the major communication systems in most cultures. McFee defines art and the making of art as:

Those human activities which purposefully and quantitatively interpret, invent, extend and imbue meaning through organized visual form or enhance the form and meaning of objects. These activities

are conceptualized as processes and products of what we call art (1995, p. 179).

Geertz (1983), in his analysis of the place of art in culture stresses that, along with being a means of communication and symbolizing, art is primarily a means of *knowing*. Yet, while realizing this, he emphasizes the need to understand that many artists are at variance with their cultures. Often they choose to reflect upon underlying assumptions or structures beneath the surface realities. They learn to separate themselves from the common perspectives and function as cultural critics. We thus have to extend Geertz's definition to include art as a means of analysing, dissecting and reorganizing what is known. 'Art can be a new synthesis of the artist's creations revealing new levels of meaning' (*ibid.*, p. 180).

Trying to comprehend aesthetic experience in other cultures is particularly complex. We need to acknowledge the fact that art, and how people perceive it, is intricately tied up with culture. As McFee helps us understand, 'Each cultural group has a somewhat unique repertoire of aesthetic values and attitudes' (1995, p. 189). This is, as Geertz (1983) points out, perhaps largely due to the fact that people in different cultures define themselves differently as persons and the artist's sense of self affects his or her art of knowing. As we inquire into cultural experience with the visual arts and aesthetics, it becomes important for all people, perhaps Western in particular, to break out of their own cultural constructs and try to comprehend how people from other cultures define the self and the self in relation to reality and to the group.

In his, *The Aesthetic Experience: An anthropologist looks at the visual arts* (1986), Maquet describes art as 'socially constructed reality'. He identifies different realities of art in a multicultural society and he too challenges our categorizing of the aesthetic experience of different people and shows how culturally learned constructs affect an individual's experience with a work of art from her own or another's culture.

While this might appear remote information to a classroom teacher, individuals carrying these cultural differences are sitting in our classrooms trying to comprehend a structure or a sense of

reality very different from their own. Children in a multicultural classroom may represent many different ways of knowing, have different constructions of reality, behave differently in relation to art, and vary widely in their aesthetic concepts and attitudes.

McFee points out that 'if we try to understand the artist's message from another culture without some comprehension of the artist as a person, and in some relation to a culture or cluster of cultures, we can hardly interpret the artist's message or respond to the cultural traditions of artistic form' (1995, p. 181). There is a growing awareness among art educators that both art and aesthetics follow cultural patterns: Chalmers (1987) argues that students need to comprehend art in its social context to understand others' art, and in the process become aware of the functions of art in human experience universally. Neperud (1988) emphasizes that cultural groups vary widely because of differences in what they have seen and heard, and in the environments in which they have learned to see. This, he suggests, is a significant factor in aesthetic responses.

If we are able to learn and see from different points of view, using the kind of imaginative seeing and perceiving of which Greene speaks, then we might find it easier to come to a place of understanding aesthetic attitudes different from our own. As Greene specifies, 'It may well be the imaginative capacity that allows us to experience empathy with different points of view, even with interests apparently at odds with ours' (1995, p. 30). In her article entitled, *Art Education in Context* (1988), Jones explains that learning the subject matter from multiple perspectives, allowing for the differing orientations of students, and recognizing the socio-cultural context of both the subject matter and the students, are necessary to educate people in a democracy. In, *Cultural Literacy in art: Developing conscious aesthetic choices* (1987), Boyer posits that in multicultural communities, a sequence of experiences is needed in developing awareness of one's own culture through analysing personal experiences, followed by exploring the social and historical influences that affect art in one's own community, and then by looking at aesthetic attitudes in other cultures.

Acceptance of new conceptions of art such as that of Geertz - that art is a means of knowing - of Maquet's concept of art as a construct of reality, will hopefully change attitudes towards art by educators. Forms of art, art making and aesthetic attitudes represent processes of knowing and constructing meaning, and thus are a vital part of education. Teachers need to realize that there are many different culturally based aesthetic attitudes and forms to be responded to in the multicultural classroom. Questions such as which culture's arts should be taught to whom, and how, need to be answered. Representatives of a diversity of cultures are now present in our classrooms, and teachers must be aware that each child brings his or her own cultural artistic and aesthetic attitudes as they have been learned, as they have been adapted to the dominant culture and other subcultures, and as he or she has responded to the art forms in the culture of mass media. What also needs to be taken into account is that 'Not only children from minority cultures but all children are affected by changes in their socio-economic experience - changes in location, parental situation, access to and type of television programmes, and visual environment, and changes in the dominant culture itself' (McFee, 1995, p. 189). The nature of our society, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, suggests just a few of the pressures, uncertainties and changes that also need to be taken into account when teachers are attempting to meet learners in the context of their lived experiences.

So the problems of teaching and using the arts and aesthetics in the multicultural classroom are undoubtedly there. However, teachers need to find ways to overcome these difficulties and more importantly, to take advantage of the possibilities that a multicultural aesthetic education opens up. As teachers, we need to try and find an answer to the question that Greene proposes:

How can we create classroom situations in which significant dialogue might be encouraged once again. the live communication out of which there might emerge some consciousness of interdependence as well as recognition of diverse points of view? (1995, p. 177).

The answer to this question might lie within aesthetic experience and the arts and their unique ability to release the imaginative capacity. And it is this imaginative capacity that allows for

multiple, alternative perspectives and ‘diverse points of view’ to be discovered. As Peter Abbs points out, ‘Through aesthetic activity we half-apprehend and half-create a world of understanding, of heightened perception, of heightened meaning’ (1991, p. 246). In Deweyan tradition, there is an emphasis on the devising of situations in which preferences might be released. Preferences differ from unreflected-on desires or impulses, but refer rather to the idea that if youngsters were enabled to identify alternative possibilities and to choose for themselves, they might have reason to investigate whether the world is as predefined as it is sometimes made to seem. Encounters with diverse others and with the arts and, in particular, with the aesthetic aspect of the arts, have the unique ability to open the world outwards. Students can be given the opportunity to affirm and name their local worlds by means of their encounters, and then reach beyond those worlds towards what they do not yet know. As McFee clarifies,

Cross-cultural study of the arts can be a rich avenue for helping students enlarge their cultural perspectives, be more aware of their primary culture in relation to others, and see art as central to the socio-cultural as well as aesthetic life of people’ (1995, p. 190).

Greene highlights that, ‘The focus should be one that dislodges fixities, resists one-dimensionality, and allows multiple personal voices to become articulate in a more and more vital dialogue’ (*ibid.*, p. 183). We may have reached a point in education where we are charged with initiating such a dialogue and bringing such a space into existence. Arendt says that the reality of such a space will rely on

the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can be devised. For although the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those present have different locations in it....Being seen and heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position....Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear (1958, p. 57).

CONCLUSION

I am convinced that through reflective and impassioned teaching we can do far more to excite and stimulate many sorts of young persons to reach beyond themselves, to create meanings, to look through wider and more informed perspectives at the actualities of their lived lives.
Maxine Greene (1995, p. 172)

Are Maxine Greene's arguments on aesthetic literacy and the imagination pertinent to contemporary developments in South African education?

If teachers are willing to ponder the opening of wider spaces for dialogue and change both in and out of their classrooms, then incorporating Greene's ideas into South African education becomes a very real possibility. However, as Dewey said, 'Like all other possibilities, this possibility has to be actualized; and like all others, it can only be actualized through interaction with objective conditions' (*ibid.*, p. 297). This means that we need to confront the problems, the deficiencies and the inconsistencies of our changing society and, *within* this environment, work towards our conception of what education *ought* to be. Greene proposes the notion of educating for freedom. This points towards an education that provokes individuals to reach beyond themselves in their intersubjective space and 'become empowered to think what they are doing...to share meanings, to conceptualize [and] to make varied sense of their lived worlds. It is through education that preferences are released...perspectives opened and possibilities disclosed' (1988, p. 12). We have to move away from the notion of a negative freedom *from*, to a concept of a freedom *for*, associated, as it was for Dewey, with the *power to act and the power to choose*, with the 'capacity to become different' (1931, p 293).

Supporting Greene's ideas on education and freedom means that we must also acknowledge the strength of her argument for making the imagination and the stimulation thereof a fundamental part of education. It is our own, as well as the imagination of our students, that will provide the capacity to invent new visions of what might and what ought to be in our deficient society. It

is the imagination that ‘provides the ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise’ (Greene, 1995, p. 19) and, in summoning up an alternative reality, enables us to break with what is given and move forward to transform the present state of things. As individuals begin to see themselves as initiators and agents of change, they might come to see themselves existing *with and among others*, with the power to choose in a light of possibility and a space of freedom.

As we work towards the building of a democracy in South Africa, Greene’s thoughts on the imagination and the expanding community have equal relevance. In responding to the diversity of our multicultural classrooms, we should use our imaginations to enter into the world of other people and to discover how the world looks and feels from their vantage point. Greene says that, ‘It may well be the imaginative capacity that allows [individuals] to experience empathy with different points of view’ (*ibid.*, p. 30) and in so doing, enables them to build bridges among themselves and in time, come together and reach out to repair.

But conditions have to be created if the potential of these ideas is to be actualized, and this is where Greene calls on the arts and aesthetic experience. She says, ‘It is my conviction that informed engagements with the several arts is the most likely mode of releasing... imaginative capacity and giving it play’ (1995, p. 125). The arts offer opportunities for people to release themselves into their own subjectivities and thereby recover themselves in some original spontaneity. It is the artistic-aesthetic that allows for new ways of seeing, perceiving and imagining and, while opening windows in the walls of the mundane or the ordinary, the arts are able to present imaginative possibility that previously might not have been realized. However, conditions for this type of awareness need to be consciously and deliberately created in the form of an aesthetic literacy. Greene stipulates that teachers need to mediate qualitative perceiving of the various arts, followed by meaningful dialogue between individuals who, from their distinctive vantage points, are able to pose their own questions in critical reflection and contemplation.

In our multicultural classrooms, this dialogue needs to involve *all* learners. As Geertz articulates, ‘The hope lies in the possibility of our developing a vocabulary in which our many differences can be formulated, a vocabulary in which we can give a credible account of ourselves to one another’ (1983, p. 161). As South African educators prepare to educate amongst multiple voices and multiple realities, this is perhaps where our hope does in fact lie. It is, after all, from each particular standpoint that we become aware of the newcomers who throng, as never before, through our classrooms, our playgrounds, our streets and our communities. Our education system is presently experiencing immense changes, many of which form positive openings through which we can move and work towards Greene’s notion of *educating for freedom*.

If we are able, in a unique way, creatively to take advantage of these openings and recontextualize Greene’s within Curriculum 2005, and, at the same time, hear all the voices in our multicultural classrooms, then we might begin to prepare the ground for the opening of new ways of seeing, perceiving and imagining in education and ultimately for the making of a democracy in our society. To conclude with the words of Maxine Greene:

It is to attend to the plurality of consciousnesses – and their recalcitrances and their resistances, along with their affirmations, their “songs of love”. And yes, it is to work for responsiveness to principles of equity, principles of equality, and principles of freedom, which still can be named within contexts of caring and concern. The principles and the contexts have to be chosen by living human beings against their own life-worlds and in the light of their lives with others, by persons able to call, to say, to sing, and – using their imaginations, tapping their courage – to transform (1995, p. 198).

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