Language and Art in Early Childhood: An Examination of Form, Content and Social Context

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ABSTRACT

In order to present a systematic review of the literature the author dissects the structures of language and art into three components: syntax, semantics and pragmatics (or simply: form, content and social context). Among the topics discussed are: children's linguistic and graphic development, language and art making instincts, subject matter as a reflection of interests and visual narrative and art as representations of knowledge and emotion. The literature defines both language and art as communication systems that utilize symbols (verbal and visual) to express meaning and suggests that young children use multimodal forms of expression (e.g. talking and drawing or painting and singing) in order to more fully express their ideas and feelings, as well as to communicate personal and cultural narratives. The author raises the issue of the significance of context in the interpretation of young children's language and imagery and how children use language and graphic symbols in social situations.

Introduction

Dissection of the structures of language and art into three components (form, content and social context) is an appropriate and valuable method for investigating young children's verbal and graphic production. A basic understanding of language acquisition and artistic development is useful when considering the human instincts that drive these modes of expression or communication.

Specialized functions of language can be observed in young children's artistic processes. Visual and verbal narratives reflect children's values, interests, and knowledge about the world around them as well as their emotions and concerns. Considering social context is crucial in understanding the significance of young children's language during the art making process. The literature defines both language and art as communication systems that utilize symbols (verbal and visual) to express

meaning and suggests that young children use oral language as an important part of their art making activities.

Language Acquisition: A Theoretical Journey

In the last half-century, theories of language acquisition have evolved from one sided or highly focused in one area to a more eclectic or holistic view. In the 1950's and before, it was widely believed that children's oral communication skills were learned (as opposed to being innate). It was not until the 1960's that this belief was challenged. "The nature-verses-nurture argument in speech and language became heated during the 1960's and early 1970's," according to Hulit and Howard (2010), "when theorists called nativists or biological-nativists suggested that children are genetically predisposed to talk" (p. 17). The nativist view claims that oral language is a human instinct that is innate or biologically based and has little to do with environmental factors. Nativists focus on the commonalties of how language is acquired regardless of cultural or other environmental influences. The theorist most closely related to the nativist view is Noam Chomsky. While Chomsky was certainly interested in the entire breadth of language, his primary focus was on language form or structure. Chomsky appreciated the elegance of language structure and realized that all languages are equally complex. By virtue of membership in the human species, infants' brains are prepared to learn language. This 'language instinct' as Steven Pinker calls it, represents nature's contribution to language development (Golinkkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 1999, p. 7).

Behaviorists stress the importance of environment. Hulit and Howard (2010) explain that the behaviorist view the child "as an empty vessel to be filled with the experiences provided by the important people of his life" (p. 22). The theorist most closely associated with the behaviorist interpretation of speech and language development is B. F. Skinner (1957). Skinner viewed language (as he would any other learned behavior) in the context of the principles of operant conditioning, where reinforcement and punishment shape the behaviors of the learner.

It is important to note that while these are widely opposing views, neither perspective completely discounts the other; it is mainly a difference in emphasis. According to Hulit and Howard (2010), "those who believe language is learned recognize that the child must have the right anatomic equipment, and must be ready to acquire language in terms of cognitive, perceptual, and neuromuscular maturation. Their emphasis, however, is on environmental influences" (p. 17). On the other hand, those who believe the capacity for language is innate and universal among humans cannot deny that environment plays some role in language acquisition. The simple fact that all human beings do not speak the same language is a strong argument of the opposing side.

As it is with so many nature-nurture debates over time the extreme views of both sides move from the outer edges of the continuum to more moderate viewpoints. "There is now a general understanding that what the child brings to language development genetically is important, but so is the environment into which he is born" (Hulit & Howard, 2010, p. 7).

A Holistic Approach to Language Acquisition

Jerome Bruner (1983), like many linguists, has adopted an eclectic or holistic approach to thinking about speech and language. Using, what is now generally accepted as the three major components of language by theorists and practitioners: syntax, semantics and pragmatics (or form content and use), Bruner examines the manner in which young children acquire language. This "compromise view," as Hulit and Howard call it, is the result of theorists exploring the middle ground between the extreme nativist and behaviorist viewpoints. Hulit and Howard (2010) refer to this middle ground view as social interactionism. "According to the social interactionist interpretation of speech and language development, both biological and environmental factors are important in the acquisition process, although not necessarily equally" (p. 38). It is important to note that the interactionist view places emphasis on the interaction between the young language learner and the experienced language user.

Language in Early Childhood

In order to examine the specialized functions of language during young children's artistic processes, it is important to first understand the various functions of language in the everyday communication of human beings. It is also beneficial to have a foundational understanding of the elements and basic structure of language, and a general understanding of the manner in which language is acquired.

The Three Facets of Language

According to Bruner (1983), syntax, semantics and pragmatics are "the three facets of language" that children must master in order to become "native speakers." Bruner asserts that these three facets cannot be learned independently of one another. The terms, simply defined, are as follows: 1) Syntax pertains to the rules that govern language, the order or arrangement of the elements of a language; grammar. 2) Semantics refers to meaning in language, the signs and symbols of a language; and 3) Pragmatics deals with language in social contexts, and how it affects behavior. I herein apply these three terms to the process of art making and refer to this adapted conceptual framework as the Three Facets of Language and Art. This adapted conceptual framework will aid in the presentation of a systematic review the literature.

Syntax: The Development of Form.

Syntax (or form) is the most basic of the three aspects of language. It provides the tools for the beginnings of graphic and language development, when elements and principles of form are learned. Without syntax, semantics and pragmatics cannot effectively occur in language. The literature on the development of form is vast and plentiful in the fields of linguistics as well as art education, but it is only of peripheral interest to this review.

Before children can tell stories with words, write poetry, or sing songs, they must learn to put words together to construct sentences. The way children learn to do this is by

discovering the rules of syntax for their native language (often making up their own rules). As Bruner noted, "the infant's rules of grammar are often not the same as those used by adults around him" (p. 17). Children ultimately use form to make meaning, which brings us to the topic of semantics, the central focus of this review.

Semantics: Making Meaning.

It is necessary for children to master the syntax (or grammar) of their native language in order to effectively communicate meaning (the semantic aspect of language). Bruner (1983) suggested that, "it seems highly unlikely in the light of our present knowledge that infants learn grammar for its own sake. Its mastery seems always to be instrumental to doing something with words in the real world, if only meaning something" (p. 17).

"Spoken language," according to Bruner (1983), "can be divided into two main areas--receptive language and expressive language"(p. 4). Receptive language refers to the comprehension of language, and expressive language is the use of language to express thoughts, feelings, needs, dreams, etc. When you say to a child, "Where is the kitty?" and the child points to the cat, this is a demonstration of her comprehension, or level of receptive language.

There are other relevant aspects of children's language, which relate to making and interpreting meaning. Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek (1999) asserted that, "infants use language for more than just material ends, that they start to communicate and then to talk because they want us to understand what they are thinking. (They) want to create a 'meeting of the minds' " (p. 74). This communication, whether verbal or graphic, often takes a narrative form in early childhood, particularly as the child approaches school-age.

I would like to expand on the common definition of narrative by citing Gallas (1994), who argued that "because narrative is sometimes so narrowly viewed as having to do with stories and storytelling, and thus is often confused with fiction, it is sometimes thought of as only an aesthetic or literary experience" (p. xiv). In her research, Gallas (1994) found that children use "personal narratives that attempt to order and explain their world," and that these narratives "if uncovered and honored in the context of the classroom, can become powerful vehicles for thinking and learning" (p. xiv).

Danko-McGee (2006) described some of the narrative dialog that took place between parent and child at The Family Center in the Toledo Museum of Art. Museum educators set up interactive learning centers in an effort to link these experiences with artworks in the exhibit. These conversations helped to build their vocabulary as they used descriptive language, sometimes modeled by their parents (Danko-McGee, 2006, p. 34).

Pragmatics: Language in Social Contexts.

One of the main purposes of using language in social contexts is to influence the behavior of others (Bruner, 1983). Before children become adept at influencing others

with words, they must first acquire language.

The emphasis on children's language acquisition as part of their growing communication capabilities entails that learning language is a process in which two partners actively take part. According to Gillis and Schaerlaekens (1985, p. 427), it is in the interaction that "the child gets to know the words, that the child is presented with information about their meaning" and that the child is informed about the adequacy of her use of these words. Thus the child's language use in social contexts plays a crucial role in the acquisition process (Mulcahey, 2009). This process begins in infancy, but continues throughout childhood.

Dyson (1989) developed a category system based on the work of Halliday (1973) and Tough (1977) with five major functions of language:

> 1. Representational language: language used to give information about events and situations, real or imaginary.
>
> 2. Directive language: language used to direct the actions of self and/or others.
>
> 3. Heuristic language: language used to seek information.
>
> 4. Personal language: language used to express one's feelings and attitudes.
>
> 5. Interactional language: language used to initiate, maintain, and terminate social relationships. (p. 386)

Various studies related to art education and language arts focus on spoken and/or written language during the art making process. (Barroqueiro, 2004; Cocking & Copple, 1979; Duncum, 1986, 1989; Dyson, 1986, 1989; Gallas, 1994; Heath & Wolf, 2005; Hubbard, 1989; Kellman, 1995; Thompson, 1990, 1995, 2002; Thompson & Bales, 1991). A goal of one such study (Barroqueiro, 2004) was to document and analyze the various functions of language in preschool and kindergarten children's art making events, using Dyson's category system, "The Five Major Functions of Language." The purpose of this study was to illuminate the skillful manner in which young children use language and art in conjunction with one another as symbolic media and as tools for social interaction.

Dyson (1989) also referred to the multiple worlds of children's talk and writing during their journal time. They consist of an imaginary world, the children's ongoing social world, and the wider experienced world of people, places, objects, and events. Dyson described in detail the nature of these worlds and how the children move back and forth, negotiating between the three.

In the social world of the classroom, Gallas (1994) observed that, "important texts are obtained through rich dialogues that children so eagerly engage in with one another" (p. xiv). In Gallas's own classroom, a young girl who was having difficulty writing in her journal benefited greatly from the experience of sharing in regular large group discussions. Gallas observed that in order for this child to write stories, she must first

tell them as a 'public text.' Gallas's observation supports the idea that when young children use language in social contexts, the interaction itself becomes a tool for learning.

In one study, Danko-McGee (2009) examined documentation of the 'voices of the children' during a session of dramatic play in the 'Home Area.' "Children's responses to the environment were recorded by [university] students, who sat in an obscure corner of the family center and observed" (p.13). Carefully chosen objects were used as props in a learning center. The author describes the scenario:

> The children were observed working very hard on setting the 'dinner table' and preparing a 'meal', while others selected and coordinated outfits to wear. One child took on a British accent and obsessively modeled several mismatched outfits for the adults around her. "Isn't this stunning? I have one in pink and blue," as she twirled about in her princess inspired ensemble. Two other children 'eating dinner' engaged in conversation said, " You must eat your apple and chicken before I give you pie." The pretend food allowed them to be 'adult-like.' (Danko-McGee, 2009, p.13)

The most vivid examples of the impact of language use and social discourse on learning can be found in the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. Language and social interaction serve many functions at the Reggio schools: as a means of developing and communicating theories, as a way of thinking about process, and as a support for their many other 'languages,' such as drawing, painting, and three-dimensional constructions.

Lev Vygotsky's writings emphasizing communication and language in learning have been extremely influential in the development of the Reggio Emilia Approach. Malaguzzi (1993a, p. 6) stated that Vygotsky "reminds us how thought and language are operative together to form ideas and to make a plan for action." Hewett (2001) explains that "children's communication through language, any of 'the hundred languages of children' (Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1993, p. 6), is considered essential to bringing meaning to knowledge within the Reggio Emilia Approach" (p. 97). According to Malaguzzi (1993b, p. 10) "[the Reggio Emilia Approach] has gone beyond Piagetian views of the child as constructing knowledge from within, almost in isolation." Instead it emphasizes relationships and the social construction of knowledge (Malaguzzi, 1993b) within the context of collaboration, dialog, conflict, negotiation, and cooperation with peers and adults (Edwards, et al., 1993). Within Reggio Emilia it is believed that "only as children articulate to others that which they believe to be true do they come face-to-face with errors in their thinking" (Staley, 1998, p. 21). Again, we see that language and social interaction are essential tools for learning.

Art in Early Childhood

Meaning: The Semantics of Art

Children's representational work or visual images in art that 'refer to' and mean, can

be thought of as the 'semantics' of art. I consider the semantic aspect of child art to be the content of a work of art, its subject matter, the denotations and connotations of imagery, as well as the children's interpretation of their own artwork (Pitri, 2007). The semantic aspect of art making (the meanings in art) cannot be completely separated from the syntactic aspects of art (the rules of art-making). Form and the techniques required to achieve form, are tools for making meaning. For example, Eisner's (1976) interest in technique had "to do with the expansion of the child's freedom to use the arts as expressive vehicles." Without the techniques required in mastering form, "children's thoughts, feelings and images," according to Eisner, "are destined to remain undeveloped" (p. 14).

Subject Matter: A Reflection of Interests.

According to Lark-Horowitz, Lewis and Luca (1967), children are often influenced by the circumstances under which they make their drawings:

> Because of this, investigators have classified children's drawings into four distinct categories: spontaneous drawings, made on their own initiative as a play activity; free or voluntary drawings, made on request but with the children choosing their own subject; directed pictures for which the topic is proposed; (and finally,) copied or to-be-completed drawings. (p. 28)

Works, which are copied or to-be-completed (e.g., the typical trace-cut-and-paste holiday projects we see in many classrooms) reveal the least about a child's interest in subject matter. They demonstrate little more than a child's hand-eye coordination or neatness. Directed artworks, because of their nature, are not ideal for showing children's subject matter preferences, however these works often demonstrate children's technical abilities and/or the quality of instruction. Of these four types of art making, spontaneous and free (or 'voluntary') art making are clearly the most significant for understanding children's interests in subject matter.

Children choose subjects for their art for various reasons. Dalton (1991), intrigued by the energy children pour into their spontaneous drawings, addressed differences in subject matter preferences between boys and girls. Fein (1975) analyzed one girl's lifetime fascination with horses as subject matter for drawing, while Fahey (1990) examined the effects of popular culture on children's image making.

Visual Narrative.

Hardy (1975) claimed that, "narrative imagination is a common human possession" (p. viii). By the same token, Zurmuehlen and Kantner (1995) contended that "preschool children making art often accompany their mark making and constructing activities with narratives, at times to themselves as audience, then addressing and not infrequently engaging in dialogue with responsive teachers, observers, or caretakers" (pp. 6-7).

Even without words, images tell stories and reveal layers of information (Ashbaugh, 2010; Driessnack, 2005; Gross & Hayne, 2002; Wright, 2003). Because "children's

narratives are not naturally confined to the spoken or written word," Gallas (1994) broadened the definition of narrative to include "much broader realms of communication and expression: dramatic play, movement, songs, drawings and paintings" (p. xv). While Duncum (1993) cataloged and described ten types narrative found in children's drawings, Kellman (1995) asserted that personal narratives "enable children to illustrate the specifics of their lives and the particulars of time and place" (p. 19). According to Kellman, "these images, by their description of a child's world, make clear the preoccupations and life circumstances of the child artist" (p. 19).

Moreover, when children respond to artworks, their own, their peers or adult-made artworks, their interpretations often come in narrative form. One museum education program in Toledo, Ohio capitalizes on this natural tendency in children by playing a storytelling game in which "children focus on a painting in the museum and are asked to tell a story about the painting" (Danko-McGee, 2004, p. 38). The author described this process where the facilitator begins with 'Once upon a time':

> then selects a child to continue the story. Each child has an opportunity to tell a small segment of the story before choosing another child to take over the role of narrator. Teachers serve as role models for young children through the use of rich language as they describe qualities in an artwork being viewed and provide their own interpretations. This process assists young children with language development and to learn that different interpretations of artworks exist (Danko-McGee, 2004, p. 38).

Art Represents Knowledge.

At the preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, children use "graphic languages" (Rinaldi, 1991) to record their ideas, observations, memories, and new understandings in a wide variety of ways, including through artistic means. The Reggio Emilia experience demonstrates that young children can use a variety of graphic media to communicate information and concepts learned during their project work (Wright, 2003). According to Katz (1994), observations of the children at work reveal how these graphic languages are used to "explore understandings, to reconstruct previous ones and to co-construct revisited understandings of the topics investigated" (p. 20).

Feldman (1996) looked at various types of understandings or knowledge as they relate to art. As art educators, we concern ourselves primarily with what Feldman referred to as "know-how knowledge," which is defined as technical knowledge, the logic of tools, materials and processes, the rules and methods of creating form: what I have referred to as the syntax of art. However, when considering the semantics of children's art, we deal mainly with what Feldman called "propositional knowledge" and "knowledge-through-art." These deal with the meaning in the child's art that originates either from outside of the child artist or from within. Propositional knowledge or "know-that knowledge" contains only logical constants and has a fixed truth-value. It takes the form of statements that can be ascertained by the probative methods of history or science, (i.e., factual knowledge).

"Knowledge-through-art" encompasses art experience that generates knowledge

within the knower, as opposed to knowledge on paper or knowledge in a computer memory. Feldman asserted that knowledge-through-art has less to do with facts or information and more to do with our awareness. The oral language and written texts of young children are valuable sources of information to the observer, in terms of content and the communication of these various types of knowledge (Feldman, 1996, pp. 99-105). Early childhood is the time when written texts can take many forms. Often it is difficult for an adult to find meaning in young children's scrawls. Clay (1982) noted that:

> somewhere between three and five years most children become aware that people make marks on paper purposefully, and in imitation, the children may produce scribble writing, linear mock writing or mock letters. The linear scribble that fills the lines of a writing pad, has for the child, all the mystery of an unfamiliar code. It stands for a myriad of possible things but does not convey a particular message. (p. 48)

Often children combine scribble writing with drawing. Through this process of 'faux writing' young children gain an awareness of the communicative power of written and drawn symbols.

Art Represents Emotion.

Throughout his life's work, child psychiatrist, Robert Coles, was not only interested in what children think, but also what they feel. Coles (1995) saw children's drawings as messages and metaphors. He searched for firsthand understanding of children's inner lives. Simple portraits of parents and friends, homes and neighbors, and visions of hope were his guide to children's unspoken feelings:

> Drawing is a wonderful way for children to come to terms with what they think and feel and see—they sit back and draw a picture and in that picture is a story, a wordless story, that has all kinds of plots and subplots. (Coles, 1995, video).

When Coles observed children in a classroom environment he listened carefully and watched closely, seeing children through the lenses of a therapist. He interpreted what he saw and heard using his vast knowledge of child psychology and his many years of experience of working with children. Coles (1992) claimed that so much of children's inner lives are revealed through their drawings, that they express things through drawing that they would never actually say in words:

> Indeed to sit with a child, with a classroom full of children does not by any means, assure a spell of sweetness and light. To the contrary, there is a seriousness and an anxiety that commonly accompanies children at work as artists: what to draw, and how to draw it well? Additionally some children, with good reason, worry that they will (to modify the expression) draw too much-- let slip some aspect of their life, their thoughts, that ought best be kept out of everyone's sight, their own included. (p. 56)

While Coles eloquently, even poetically, pondered the plight of children and the visual and verbal expressions of their life situations, he admitted to us (and to himself) the

subjectivity of his interpretations: Coles (1969) remarked that he believed "that pictures and words can live side-by-side and add to one another and make for a slightly larger, slightly fuller approximation of the truth, or at least some truths--there being millions of them anywhere and everywhere" (p. 58).

Where Coles might be thought to stray into over-interpretation, Gardner (1980) introduced a note of caution to this discussion, noting that those who have attempted to figure out the 'meanings' or even the 'meaning' of children's art have often gravitated toward "a one-sided and therefore misleading view of children's work—a view oblivious to the variety of processes that such work may in fact entail" (p. 13). Criticizing the narrow views or interpretations of certain investigators who treat children's art as simple reflections of a child's affective state, Gardner (1980) argued against the school of thought that subject matter serves as a "royal road" to the child's unconscious concerns.

One study by Wesson & Salmon (2001) facilitated the drawing and sharing of emotionally laden events in the children's personal lives. The authors examined the effect of drawing on young children's verbal reports of their emotional experiences. Children were either asked to draw and tell (or to just tell) about a time when they felt happy, sad, scared or angry. Children given the opportunity to 'draw and tell' reported more than twice as much information as children asked to tell only. Furthermore, the increase in information reported did not occur at the expense of accuracy. These findings suggest that drawing may facilitate young children's ability to talk about their emotional experiences in a more expressive and detailed manner. In addition, the authors found that developmental changes in drawing skill, per se, may define the conditions under which drawing will be most effective.

Claire Golomb (2004) was interested in when and how children come to depict feelings in their drawings. Golomb saw child artists as affectively motivated human beings who approach drawing with feeling, fantasies and wishes (Fox & Berry, 2008). Golomb (2004) asserted that children sometimes "focus on drawings as representations of inner world feelings" (p. 128). Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) claimed that sometimes a child may become engrossed in art and "the product may have real depth of feeling and completeness." The child becomes "truly involved in portraying meaningful and personally important things" (p. 59).

Art in Social Contexts: The Pragmatics of Art

Both language and art are communication systems that utilize symbols (verbal and visual) to express meaning. Given this to be true, both language and art have capabilities for expression or communication, separately and in conjunction with one another (Edwards, 2010, McArdle, 2007).

According to American Heritage Dictionary, communication is the exchange of thoughts, messages or information as by speech, signals, writing, or behavior. Expression is defined as the act of conveying, or representing in words, art, music or movement; to set forth in words; state; to manifest or communicate. Also, to make known the feeling or opinions of (one's self), as by statement or art; to convey or suggest a representation of; depict. And finally, to represent by a sign or a symbol; to

symbolize.

In addition to communication and expression, what purposes do art and language serve in the social world of the child? How does social interaction and the language used in this exchange influence the artistic development of young children? Walsh (1993) argued that, "development occurs in the interactions between the child and others... When our inquiry involves the development of children's artistic selves, we should not only be looking within the child, but at the world into which the child is growing" (p. 10).   It is often in this interaction that young children learn the most about artistic expression and graphic representation (Callahan, 2000; Heath & Wolf, 2005; Thompson, 2002; Clay, 1982). Children are presented with informative feedback about their artwork from parents, teachers or peers, which in turn may challenge them to change their way of working or to rethink their imagery in order to communicate more effectively. According to Thompson and Bales (1991), "research suggests that critical comments levied by other children often seem to stimulate and focus subsequent drawing activity" (p. 47).

While studying early childhood art classes, Thompson and Bales (1991) discerned patterns of social participation. They noted that children "contributed ideas and information, suggestions and support, as they responded to the work of those around them. They formed communities within each class, stable ateliers devoted to common interests or transitory subcultures grounded in mutual admiration" (p. 45). Thus it seems that children's social ability can play a crucial role in the learning process since their environment provides them, in interaction, with some of the building blocks for graphic representation (Hoppenfeld, 2005). This type of interaction invariably involves talk, although it can and does often occur in silence.

The literature suggests that young children use oral language as an accompaniment to, and as a directing force for their art making and other activities (Barroqueiro, 1994, Cocking & Copple, 1979; Dyson, 1986, 1989; Gallas, 1994; Golumb, 2004; Hubbard, 1989; Loop, 2009; Thompson, 1990, 1995; Thompson & Bales, 1991; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978).With young children's emerging graphic ability, their imagery often requires the support of words to effectively communicate their intended meanings. Forman (1994) asserted that, "the power of words keeps the objects contextualized and connected to other meaningful experiences" (p. 10). Forman (1994, p. 10) noted that, "the verbal medium allows children easy access to their memories." He explained that "so many of our memories are retrieved through a remembered word, a phrase [or] conversation." Forman recognized that the spoken language also includes fantasy as well as reality, which he says includes "those wonderful theories that children have about how something works, intuitive theories that may never work in the physical world, but nevertheless have a logical reasonableness within the confines of their own frame of thought" (p.10). During projects in the Reggio classroom, Forman observed that:

> during the verbal outpouring children reach a point where they need to communicate an idea more clearly, either to themselves or to others. They draw their thoughts on paper and then discuss their drawing with peers. Sometimes the children draw what they know; sometimes through drawing [and sharing these drawings] they discover gaps in their knowledge, and often they repair their theories first by changing their drawing and then by adding a verbal

explanation. Drawing and speaking work together to help children deepen their understanding. (p. 10)

The obvious relationship between semantics and pragmatics cannot be ignored when examining young children's art because meanings are so often revealed through social discourse.

Conclusion

In this review of literature, while consulting the experts, I tentatively dissected the structures of language and art into the three components of syntax, semantics and pragmatics (or simply: form, content and social context) However, it is important that I maintain that, as Bruner (1983) stated, "these three facets of language [and of art]... are obviously not and logically could not be learned independently of each other... [They] seem to be learned interdependently as one actually observes the process in real life (p. 18)." The literature reflects the importance of the semantics of child art or the meanings that are revealed through visual and verbal language: subject matter as a reflection of interests, visual narrative and art as representations of knowledge and emotion.

Also of great importance to this study is the pragmatics (or social context) of language and art in early childhood. The literature defines both language and art as communication systems that utilize symbols (verbal and visual) to express meaning. Given this to be true, both language and art have capabilities for expression or communication, separately and in conjunction with one another. Many researchers assert that young children use oral language as an important part of their art making activities.

It is apparent that the semantic and pragmatic aspects of child art are closely related because meanings (semantics) are so often revealed through social discourse (pragmatics). With young children, the social aspect of art making--specifically, their oral language--discloses meanings that their visual representations alone are not able to convey because of limitations in graphic development. I have described how this phenomenon has been observed and utilized as a teaching tool in the schools of Reggio Emilia, an important model in early childhood education. The significance of context in the interpretation of young children's language and the manner in which children use language in social situations were also addressed.

Suggestions for Further Research

This article is mainly a review of foundational literature but also touches on more recent works of those interested in the relationship between art and language in early childhood. It is not a comprehensive review nor is it an up-to-the-moment account of the latest research. However, I believe it will serve to continue the ongoing dialog of educators and scholars who are interested explore the complementary symbol systems of visual art and written and oral language in early childhood.

I encourage early childhood and art educators to further investigate the language and artistic processes that communicate young children's perspectives on life, their

interests, their learning and their understanding of the physical world that surrounds them on a daily basis.

I invite researchers to see through the eyes of young children by listening to their narratives and observing their image making. How do young children describe their world with words and pictures? What meanings do they derive from the visual images that surround their daily life? As the literature suggests, young children's artistic experience and the language that surrounds the art making process can reveal insights into the serious business of making meaning. Young children's graphic and verbal texts make their thinking visible to an attentive audience. I offer a challenge to the research and teaching communities to contribute to this particular area of inquiry.

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About the author

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Dr. Barroqueiro has served on the Editorial Review Board for Visual Arts Research, at the University of Illinois, for over a decade. She regularly presents at national and regional education conferences. (e.g., National Art Education Association (NAEA); Illinois Art Education Association (IAEA); National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC); and Illinois Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

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