

EDUCATION AS AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE: ESCAPING
ABSTRACT OPPRESSION THROUGH PERCEPTUAL INTERACTION

A Dissertation

by

Scott Hunner Weddington

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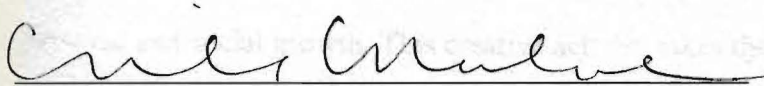
Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership
Reich College of Education

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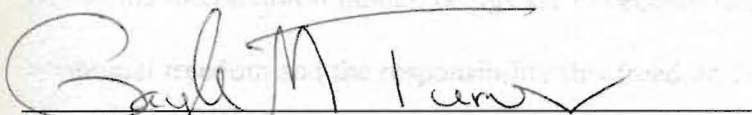
Scott Hunner Weddington

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Approved by:



Michael Marlowe, Ph.D
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee



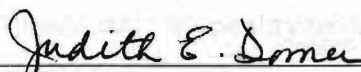
Gayle Turner, Ph.D
Member, Dissertation Committee



Michael Dale, Ph.D
Member, Dissertation Committee



Alice P. Naylor, Ph.D
Director of Doctoral Program



Judith E. Domer, Ph.D
Dean, Graduate Studies and Research

ABSTRACT

EDUCATION AS AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE: ESCAPING ABSTRACT OPPRESSION THROUGH PERCEPTUAL INTERACTION

Scott Hunner Weddington, B.A. Appalachian State University

M.A. Appalachian State University

Dissertation Chairperson: Michael Marlowe, Ph.D

Education is the manifestation of human beings engaged in creative activity for personal and social growth. This creative activity takes the form of perceptual interaction between the self and other. I argue that education must be conceived in terms of perceptual interaction if human beings are to become increasingly conscious of their existential freedom and the responsibility this freedom entails. It is through this increased consciousness of freedom and responsibility that human beings improve their abilities to select and satisfy personal desires while also accommodating these desires and the means by which they are attained to the communities they are a part of.

In making this argument for a new conception of education, I draw theoretical foundation from John Dewey's aesthetic theory. The characteristics that Dewey believes mark the relationship between artist and work of art as well as the relationship between perceiver and work of art are tantamount to the characteristics I believe mark the perceptual interactions between self and other within the realm of education. Intellectual responsibility, hospitality to diverse perspectives, care given to the process engaged in, emotional investment, vulnerability and immediacy mark an education as aesthetic

experience. The ends to an education conceived of as aesthetic experience are manifest in a continual unfolding of growth for the betterment of life.

Education as aesthetic experience is not the prevailing theory currently guiding classroom practice. I argue that a life based upon perceptual interactions with others is blocked by forces I call “abstract oppressors”. Abstract oppressors are ideas created by human beings but abstracted from their human connection although it is only through human creative activity that these forces came into being and maintain their power over human beings. These abstract oppressors gain the power to assign existential roles to individuals and to justify the action or passivity imbued within these roles. Once a static role is accepted, the need and desire to engage with diverse others is limited. Thus, perceptual interaction between human beings is limited and the ability to create and sustain growth and freedom is also limited. I argue that such limitations between human beings allow oppressive relationships to evolve and be maintained.

Ultimately, I arrive at a paradox where in order for abstract oppressors to be perceived, perceptual interactions are necessary yet where abstract oppression is present, the need for perceptual interaction is limited. I argue that this paradox can be escaped through educational experiences that open spaces where students are allowed to view life from new perspectives. If students are to take advantage of these spaces motivation is required. I contend that teachers can provide such motivation through introducing discomfort to the classroom. In this way, beliefs and values are challenged as absolutes and the possibility of alternative realities is released.