

# Book Reviews

## Why Our Schools Need the Arts

By Jessica Hoffmann Davis. New York: Teachers College Press, simultaneously with Reston, VA: National Art Education Association, 2008. ISBN 978-1-890160-39-5. Member price: \$20.00

When I attend the National Convention of NAEA, I find value in listening to leaders in the field, in sharing ideas with colleagues and practitioners, and in experimenting with my own ideas about arts in today's schools.



What I also find interesting is how open and inviting the audiences are to my notions of arts-based leadership practices for school leaders and supervisors of instruction. The audiences of art teachers and professors seem

to respond, "We get it!" But the frustrating side of this wonderful experience is that often I am not reaching the audiences that are in position to make policy decisions, to change traditional supervisory practices that disserve arts instruction, or to create board policy that communicates the central role that arts play in the human condition. However, I have recently found hope in how to communicate art value to this other audience.

In her work, *Why Our Schools Need the Arts* (2008), Jessica Hoffmann Davis has provided

arts advocates with a handbook for reaching beyond "advocates already working hard to make the case and secure a place for the arts" to the "arts education skeptics and individuals who are deeply concerned about education but have yet to consider carefully what the arts provide" (p. 4). And most importantly for me, the author has forced a paradigmatic change from what the arts can do for test scores (i.e., math and English) to the teasingly interesting question as to how "your teaching of math ... will improve the line quality of Bobby's charcoal drawings." Thankfully, Davis has kept us from falling into the trap of finding value in the arts only in connection with something else, like standardized test scores.

Davis' work is different and stimulating on several fronts. For the arts advocates, the very people who are receiving the *NAEA News*... the ones who get it... she offers a fresh approach to advocating for the arts. If we want to advocate for the arts, what might that entail? What are some Do's and Don'ts? How might we, as advocates, prepare for the predictable challenges to arts as central theme in schools? Or, as Davis helps us remember, "If experiencing and coming to know one's humanity through art is not as important an exercise as filling in the blanks on a multiple-choice tests, its time for us to review and revise our values and not compromise the teaching of art by asking it to be taught to the tests of other domains" (p. 47-48).

Along with providing the arts community with innovative approaches for promoting arts instruction, Davis' work also serves as a useful device for educating, informing, and enlightening the crowd of parents, administrators, board members, and community

leaders whose daily decisions come to bear on arts instruction in schools. Her writing is easy to read, free of jargon, and entertaining. But Davis' narrative is particularly powerful in its clarity of purpose as to why arts instruction is important for promoting imagination, for focusing on emotion, for considering ambiguity, for promoting inquiry and reflection, and for celebrating engagement and responsibility. What I find central to everything is her argument that arts in our schools are essential "to the education of compassionate, thoughtful, and responsible human beings" (p. 51). You know and I know to imagine anyone disputing an enterprise that offers such an outcome would be inconceivable.

Readers introduced to Davis' writing will have acquired a compelling argument to be made to leaders and policy makers who do not recognize the power of the arts in our schools.

Do the arts matter? Of course we know that the arts matter, and Davis' work helps advocates make unapologetically this value obvious to others. The arts matter enough to be central in school cultures and they matter in ways that often escape simplistic or formulaic measurement and assessment. And now, thanks to Jessica Hoffmann Davis' writing, readers will have an enriched vocabulary, a litany of examples, and a renewed vigor for making the case for those "who just don't get it."

Reviewed by Zach Kelehear, Program Coordinator and Associate Professor, Educational Leadership and Policies, College of Education, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

## Seeing Red: A Pedagogy of Parallax: An Epistolary Bildungsroman on Artful Scholarly Inquiry

By Pauline Sameshima. Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2007. 355 pp., hardcover.



Reviewing a bold, brave and a creative scholarly book is challenging, requiring not only the understanding of ideas and concepts presented, but also the spirit of the work. In most instances writing a book review seems pretty straightforward, including an

**introduction** or beginning, such as:

The author creates a personal-developmental journal, embedded with experience based in the arts (i.e., the novel, poetry, visual arts, dance) as art-informed research which has transformative potential in shaping pedagogic actions. This process and work reflects and then models an embodied aesthetic wholeness that aims to enhance receptivity and willing engagement in learning; develops skills in seeing relationality within the ambiguous; acknowledges the importance of multiple textures of research and presentation; and supports a holistic-ecological-based transformative pedagogy.

**outlining the main concept:**

Through multifarious ways of knowing such as the artistic, poetic, storytelling, and autobiographical, the reader is challenged from such perspectives as a form of parallax to further attend to the relationship and dialogue first within the novel, and then of teacher and learner within such an "embodied aesthetic wholeness." A basic premise and challenge for the author is to root such a work in the context of private learning situated in love and to remain being a responsible researcher.

(The following is just one creative and unique twist in a book that is continuously fresh and challenging.) Choosing the format of an epistolary bildungsroman or novel, the author meticulously emplots her story like a mystery or archeological excavation where, in 2010, a doctoral student finds an incomplete dissertation on disc written by a person who disappeared in 2005. The doctoral student aims to lovingly resurrect this work, editing it for presentation with particular emphasis to Julia's (the missing doctoral student) journals and love letters to Red, her dissertation mentor. In addition she finds Julia's artwork and creations situated in her unfinished dissertation. Gradually the doctoral student, who is now the editor of *Seeing Red*, begins to piece together Julia's work that draws on the reflections found in her journal, her artwork and performances, and on Julia's theoretical conceptions such as what "embodied aesthetic wholeness." (Embodied aesthetic wholeness in the context of a human living curriculum is where learning is embedded in the memory of the impulses of the body—and where the aesthetic, ethical, and political are intermeshed.) In conclusion to her book, there is an open call for submissions to help edit the sent and unsent letter from Red to Julia. These collectively written letters aim to craft Red and give multiple perspectives of who he is and another collaboratively created text should be the outcome of this. The story and emplotment of *Seeing Red* allows for artful or vagabond wondering of the mind and reiterates how classroom or pedagogic life in such openness makes powerful connections of mind and body.

**premise and important evidence:**

A contradictory tension is evident in this book between creative ways of knowing and the complexity of how such knowing is framed within the boundaries of research and pedagogy.

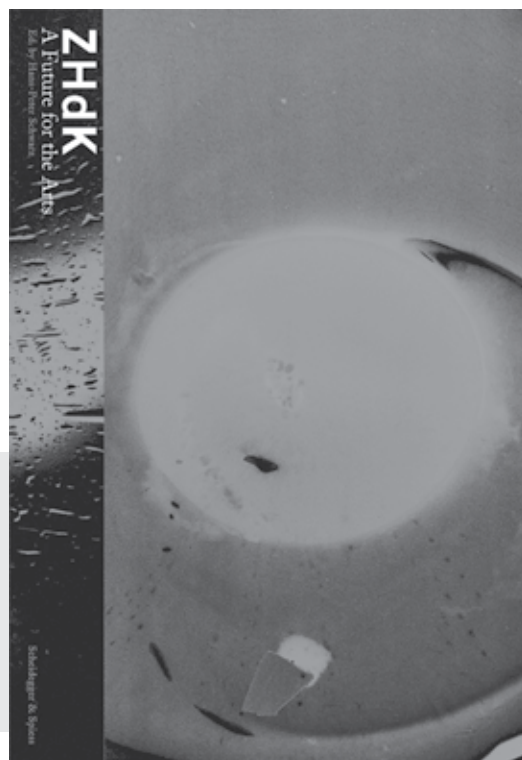
**and then bringing the review to some evaluative conclusion:**

Not since Beittel and then Eisner in the 1970s first challenged the more traditional forms of art education research, embedded in quantitative and strict reasoned discourse, but where alternative forms of artful-qualitative and holistic research is possible, have we seen such evocative, groundbreaking, and meaningful work. Sameshima's work not only follows the style of an "epistolary bildungsroman" of scholarly research, and the type of ordinary research first envisioned by Beittel, but also seems to push its boundaries into new directions in postmodern and futuristic ways. Sameshima thoughtfully does this through structure that contains a range of art forms, while continuously addressing feelings, ideas, and examining how all of this relates to praxis and curriculum. The reader follows and can dialogue with her lived experiences and love letters to her mentor, or what one may come to realize if they so choose, her alter-ego, and place their own ideas about truth and meaning within the crevices of the text in an evocative and indeterminate way. The reader, as with the viewer of art, is understood to be complicit in the text by developing contemplative and interactive stances in giving meaning to the work. Sameshima respects the reader, and parallels this to the teacher-student dialogue where such a stance has transformative potential for both teacher and student. Living contemporaneously means that even through dialogue there are no easy answers, and uncertainty is a constant in an

Continued on p. 23

New from

## Verlag Scheidegger and Spiess



### ZHdK—A FUTURE FOR THE ARTS

Zürich University of the Arts Inaugural Publication

Edited by Hans-Peter Schwarz

In August 2007, Zürich's illustrious art schools, which were previously separated by discipline, merged to form one of Europe's most multifaceted and significant art education centers: Zürich University of the Arts. To mark its founding, *ZHdK—A Future for the Arts* recounts the history of the previous schools, examines the importance of their well-known alumni, and sets forth ambitious goals for the newly formed institution.

CLOTH W/CD AND DVD (PAL) \$105.00

DISTRIBUTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS • www.press.uchicago.edu