

RESOURCES IN PRINT

Framing Education as Art:

The Octopus Has a Good Day

by Jessica Hoffmann Davis

Teachers College Press, 2005

ISBN: 0–8077–4577–4

\$24.95 paperback

HYPERLINK "http://www.tcpres.com" www.tcpres.com

Reviewed by Jill Randall

Reading the title of Jessica Hoffmann Davis's new book, *Framing Education as Art: The Octopus Has a Good Day*, you might think this is a "lighter" book about arts in education. Don't be deceived by the title! Looking inside you will find rich text about the artistic process, arts education in various settings, and a powerful take on the ongoing conversation about the power of the arts and arts in education in children's lives. This book is one of the best-written books about arts education this reviewer has ever read. Many books on arts education reference the same research documents and speak in the same voice— trying to justify why we are worthy of having a job teaching the arts. *Framing Education as Art* has a clearly different voice.

A Teaching Artist and cognitive developmental psychologist, Jessica Hoffmann Davis founded and directed the Arts in Education Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Fresh and reassuring to read, this is the perfect book for a "Teaching Artist" (teacher AND artist) to read and reflect upon, for Davis deeply explores the topics of art, the artist, the child as artist, and arts in education. Teaching Artists reading this book will find themselves continually reflecting upon their own art practice as well as on teaching the arts.

Framing Education as Art is divided into 5 clear chapters, with the fifth chapter revisiting the previous four:

1. "The Artistic Process" looks at the tension between art as a means for communicating feelings and emotions versus "art as a process of thought" (42).
2. "The Child as Artist" looks at the similarities between child and adult art

as well as comparing the child and “the artist.”

3. “The Arts in Education in School” looks at the tension between justifying the arts in schools versus celebrating the arts in schools.
4. “Arts in Education in the Community” reviews education in art museums and in community art centers.
5. “Framing Education as Art” takes all of Davis’s ideas from the previous chapters and poses the idea of non-arts subjects in schools learning from the ARTS, versus the common practice of artists feeling they need to justify the arts and make them fit into an existing educational scenario and setting simply to make the classes happen.

As Davis writes in the introduction, “the time has come to stop packaging the arts in the same tight wrappings that arguably work for other subjects and instead find new ways for other subjects to package themselves in the generous colors of the arts” (7).

While the entire book is rich with questions and research, four topics in particular will be of great interest to Teaching Artists.

1. Eight possible ways that the arts can take place within an educational setting.
2. The power of art to explore culture, eloquently stated by Davis in one of the clearest descriptions I have ever read on this topic.
3. Museum education and community art center education.
4. Turning the typical “why arts education” conversation on its head, Davis boldly and without apology reiterates her points about the arts, arts learning, what students learn and do, and how this all can inform general education.

While explaining where the arts exist in a school setting is seemingly a simple task, Teaching Artists continuously struggle with describing their role within a school setting. Chapter 3, “The Arts in Education in School,” contains Davis’s own description of eight ways that the arts can be a part of schools. In her own terms—Arts Based, Arts Infused, Arts Included, Arts Expansion, Arts Professional, Arts Extras, Aesthetic Education, and Arts Culture—Davis describes the many possible ways that the “octopus” of arts education can take form in schools. Davis’s descriptions are clear and thorough and will be a good reference tool and conversation starter. Davis then continues to speak of the “the wheel of culture” (here she means “culture” in terms of: the individual student; families, schools, communities; nations, races, and ethnicities; and universal humankind) and she proceeds to give a very clear description of how the arts can celebrate and connect different cultures (107).

In Chapter 4, the author describes, in detail, two other settings for arts education: the art museum and community art center. As many Teaching Artists find work in these “out of school” settings, this chapter will be of specific interest. Davis again poses many pertinent questions, and looks at the tension and differences between these two settings.

The author completes the book with an incredibly powerful and empowering chapter entitled “Framing Education as Art.” Davis boldly asserts the power of the arts in our lives, the skills learned, the knowledge gained, and how these details can inform the subjects such as math and science taught in schools. What can schools learn from the arts? What a wild idea. How long have artists—and Teaching Artists—done a song and dance to prove that they are worthy of working in a school setting, that the arts can improve test scores, and that the arts can possibly connect to every subject taught in school? Davis’ skilled arguments addressing these points are brilliant—especially as she infuses them with an incredible optimism.

I encourage Teaching Artists to read this entire book, and to read the final chapter several times. The next bold step is to share this with the schools and teachers with whom we work, and to have a real dialogue about this topic. This is scary, new territory to move into, but it is the necessary next step if arts education is to continue successfully. My only hesitation about this conversation—and the creation of the “artful teacher”—is that this conversation and actions thereafter can only happen if the teachers know firsthand the power of the arts, the skills involved, the processes, etc. How many teachers have art as a part of their life? How many teachers would describe themselves as “artists?” These are a few of the other big questions to consider in this conversation.

Like an octopus, *Framing Education as Art* spreads out in many directions, but does come full circle by the end to create a whole. Arts education indeed is a big, fluid, constantly moving creature traveling forward.

Jill Randall is a dancer, Teaching Artist, and arts administrator. She is Director of Education for the Institute Program at the Julia Morgan Center for the Arts in Berkeley, California.

HYPERLINK "mailto:jill@juliamorgan.org" jill@juliamorgan.org