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A stylized graphic on a purple background. It features a thick yellow path that starts on the left, curves down, and then leads into a white and black striped archway structure that appears to be a bridge or a gateway. The path continues to curve away from the archway towards the bottom right.

# WAIKATO JOURNAL OF EDUCATION TE HAUTAKA MĀTAURANGA O WAIKATO

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## THE MUSICIAN IN THE CLASSROOM: SYLVIA AND A PEDAGOGY OF ARTISTIC KNOWING AND MEANING-MAKING

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**ABSTRACT** *The arts were a central and important part of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's pedagogical approach. This paper examines the contribution that Sylvia's writing about the value of arts education in the curriculum can make to current classrooms. Her ideas about dance are outlined and her views on how music (other arts) can be linked to other areas of the curriculum described. It is argued that there is much of relevance for today's teachers and schools in Ashton-Warner's beliefs and practices about artistry and creativity in young children.*

### KEYWORDS

Artistry, creativity in the arts, organic learning

Sylvia Ashton-Warner had a desire to express her musical artistry at various times during a school day, which often meant leaving her infant classroom in the care of an assistant teacher or Keith Henderson, her husband and principal of the school. We are told of her insistence on a personal space where she could go to write, play music, and paint. While some find Sylvia's prioritising of personal time and space at odds with social norms, for an artist this seems perfectly logical and within the bounds of what most dedicated musicians require in their lives. As a musician, I sense that Sylvia knew that if one is to sustain a passion for the arts, sacrifices must be made, even if this impacts on family, students, friends, or day to day domestic duties. She tells us this in *Teacher* (Ashton-Warner, 1980) when she claims that "there's no such thing beneath the heavens as conditions favourable to art. Art must crash through or perish" (p. 23). "Crashing through" could almost have been a motto for Sylvia, for her belief in her teaching ideas was as strong as her desire to make music and nothing, it would seem, could stand in her way.

Along with the selflessness of being an artist – whether musician, painter, poet, dancer or writer – comes a selfishness, a withdrawal into creativity, that might suggest that such a person is not kind or caring. Certainly some commentators suggest she was not, but this simply does not match up with the dedication that she gave to her pedagogical practices in the infant room as she sought to make a bridge between the pā (village) and the school. She taught her children as a preparation for life based on their own experiences and refused to be blinded by the whims and fancies of the education system, which is, after all, merely a system.

The arts are constantly seeking an equitable space with other learning areas in the curriculum and the holistic examples Sylvia gave us, where she seamlessly integrated music and reading for instance, pre-figure recent curriculum strategies

that seek to find compatibility between areas of knowledge. In the case of music, this should be simple, for music has had a long association with mathematics, in particular from the time of the classical Greeks through to the Middle Ages. The strong associations between music and language began in the Middle Ages and has continued through to the present day. But in educational strategies of the last three centuries, the division of the rational and emotional has meant separating the mind and body and their areas of knowledge, such as music and language, which then struggle against each other for an adequate place in the curriculum.

In this article I adopt the fundamental beliefs of Sylvia Ashton-Warner who, as an inclusive educator, believed ideas should flow like any other organic arrangement in nature, spreading out into a harmonious pattern. Herbert Read, in his Preface to Ashton-Warner's *Teacher* (1980), claims that "to create is to construct and to construct cooperatively is to lay the foundations of a peaceful community" (p. 11). As an example, Ashton-Warner saw spontaneous dancing as an "abstract organic pattern of behaviour" (1980, p. 196) and the value of spontaneity is stressed in these words from *Teacher*:

Life has an inner dynamism of its own; it tends to grow, to be expressed, to be lived. The amount of destructiveness in a child is proportionate to the amount to which the expansiveness of his life has been curtailed. Destructiveness is the outcome of the un-lived life. (Erich From, n.d., in Ashton-Warner, 1980, p. 100)

To move Sylvia's musical ideas forward into present and future classroom practices and to celebrate her work, I underpin this discussion with the notion of multiple ways of viewing literacy and learning, for I believe this is what she practised in her classroom.

## LANGUAGE AND MUSIC

Both spoken language and music can be viewed as the elaboration of thought realised through sound. Music describes a moment, feeling or event in its own unique way, just as words are strung together to describe these in ways peculiar to language. Spatial, gestural and expressive characteristics are not imagined resemblances, but realities inseparable from our body's comprehension of music or language. There is a synergy which occurs when the body responds to or creates music, one which is tactile, visual, and auditory; its perception is fundamentally synesthetic, the achievement of the whole body. Musical perception is not a mechanical, unthinking process but rather what Bowman (1998) refers to as "the bodily enaction of meaning" (p. 273), involving both the mind and body.

The music listener experiences various musical intuitions beyond the basic core features of pitch, duration, dynamics and timbre, and these form a sort of universal music grammar. This suggests links between language and music through the existence of structures for groupings and phrasing. Pitch matters, because it derives from a specific range in the overtone series valued by a particular society or culture. It is delineated through patterns of tension and release; this is similar to the role of punctuation in written language and expresses varying degrees of closure.

Perhaps we mis-categorise music in many ways; after all, the basic characteristics of language are mirrored in our ability to understand music.

The voice might be seen as our most embodied producer of organised sound. Music tends to respond to the same series of cognitive and emotional influences as those that pass through the speaking voice. Thus, music is an art of intoned meaning. Cultural, popular and art music all depend on intonations that are rooted in society and in this sense might be viewed as forms of social text. The intonational features, such as pitch, tempo, stress, timbre, syllable duration and register, are musical features. All are there to add expressive meaning, so that merely studying pitch variations as abstract phenomena in music or speech is meaningless, for they should be heard as expressive qualities.

Music makes available greater flexibility and potential for these features, increasing the palette of expressive qualities. We cannot consider musical features which have the same notes as being identical, and the same mistake can happen in the analysis of language, for the identity of each figure can best be approached through the intonational vocabulary used and the signification of each. This is what makes Sylvia Ashton-Warner's use of key vocabularies, links to the pā and her original waiata (songs) so unique and artistically aware; the concepts of key vocabularies as defined by Ashton-Warner can be linked to the creative imagination, whether reading and writing or singing, composing and moving, for her methods encourage an organic education that draws on personal and poetic expression. Both language and music share similar experiences of the inner and outer world as described by Sylvia Ashton-Warner and embrace learning that is informed by the body, or what is generally called embodied learning.

## **WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT LITERACY**

In education there is a growing awareness of the need to move beyond narrowly defined explanations of literacy to those that capture the complexity of actual literacy practices in contemporary society. Nowadays, to be literate means taking account of the literacy practices associated with, for example, the arts and computer-based technologies, and to recognise that print-based reading and writing are now only part of what people have to practise in order to be literate. All of this, I suggest, was anticipated in the teaching practices of Sylvia Ashton-Warner. Quite how she would have reacted to the digital/computer age is difficult to gauge, but we do know that she held the belief that for her infant room in the country, simple, organic or natural materials were better than manufactured or bought ones. In effect, Sylvia Ashton-Warner celebrated being human and the necessary corporeal dealings with the world associated with this condition.

Today literacy might include dimensions such as the social, cultural, technical, aesthetic, political, commercial and geographical, as well as various means of transmission, such as music, icons or gestures, which themselves produce meaning. Literacy is no longer just a set of cognitive abilities and skills, and requires recognition as a social activity embedded within larger social practices, contexts and technologies, just as Ashton-Warner taught it. We can also no longer assume that orally based thought and expression is pre-logical or illogical. This is

significant for the history of Māori and other groups for whom the oral was the main form of communication, even in the recent past, and it has implications for education. This aspect was not overlooked by Ashton-Warner, who tended to link the initial oral ideas to the written and not the other way around.

We think in sentences but we see in single images ... A Māori child notoriously speaks in what I call "one-worders". But from one Māori to another these one-worders *are* complete sentences. For the Māori mind is essentially artistic in character. I mean that besides being powerful in imagery it is chaotic in operation. An image is represented by a single spoken word but its associated meaning is supplied by expression, gesture, intonation, cadence and above all, *touch*. (Ashton-Warner, 1980, pp. 138-139)

In recognising that meaning is supplied by expression, gesture, intonation, cadence and touch, Ashton-Warner identified the relevance of embodied knowing in her classroom programme. Touch is a way that humans give recognition and acknowledgement to one another, implying that throughout human evolution there has been an increasing dialectic between the hand and the brain, thus highlighting the importance of the hand as the agent behind agency. Gestural signs are inherent to humanity; spoken language complements these, specifying or accentuating what is gestured or felt. In our daily human interactions we often make a note of a posture or gesture as we read the bodies of others. Gesture can offer a key to the values and assumptions of a society, a factor often overlooked in historical and cultural studies.

Both touch and gesture are essential to musical expression and to embodiment in relation to musical space and time. For example, in music we speak of fast and slow tempos, high and low notes, pauses and momentary silences as sighs; these are also the result of embodied cognition. Tonality represents a movement of the body and music becomes a corporeal action in time and space. The ways in which we see or hear things are part of our embodied experience, prior to any mental representation, and these are based on our previous experiences and future expectations. The body brings together our actions, senses and thoughts; it is not some physical object off to one side of thinking and knowing. To strengthen both the cognitive and embodied links for the children in her classes, Ashton-Warner organised her day around the concept of breathing out and breathing in. Breathing out tended to involve more embodied forms of practical knowing and exploration, and breathing in their application in representational and communicative ways. She seemed to understand the relationship between the biological, emotional, cognitive and cultural processes and included cultural topics such as imagery, the effects of reading aloud, rhythm in the arts and language, and the effects of laughter in her teaching, because laughter can liberate and relax as well as hurt and destroy.

### **APPROPRIATING SYLVIA**

Beginning in the 1930s and running through to the early 1960s, Sylvia Ashton-Warner practised her groundbreaking work with infants (new entrants to school), both Māori and Pākehā (European New Zealander), the former in particular.



Although her own childhood was spent in relative poverty there was always a piano to play. She was one of nine children, all of whom seemed creative in one way or another thanks to the tutelage of a dedicated working mother. In fact, Ashton-Warner's main interests when young were music, painting and writing and other creative pursuits and these lasted throughout her life. She appears to have adopted different persona to suit particular contexts, for example, as Mrs Henderson, Mary or Sylvia. She also had a tendency to re-interpret events. Perhaps these were simply the actions of a mind that had to be constantly engaged in creativity. Perhaps they were her inventions as metaphors to stimulate her imagination. As an author, musician and painter Sylvia must have known the meaning of interpretation, and perhaps she re-interpreted herself to suit the context of a specific performance, for it seems to me that her life was lived as a constant performer. She was, after all, an artist.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner tells us that when she teaches people she “marries” them (1980, p. 209), and she explains this through an orchestra that she began with her young students (her infants). She believed that in order for the children to do what she wanted they had to be like her, they had to be a part of her. A good performance meant the orchestra being *one* thing, like a single organ and that “physically they had to be near each other and to me” (p. 209). She would arrange the seating to face the audience, so that each child was visible, but by the end of the song “there they would all be, married all over me” (p. 210). But she also learned performance art from her Māori children, for the accepted European tradition, such as not singing from the throat and facing out into the auditorium, was ignored by them. But as a reflective artist/practitioner in the classroom she was open to Māori perspectives, and this was demonstrated when she both heard and saw the youth club sing a lament at the tangi (funeral) of the “Wharepatita’s twins”, for she tells us:

They were too shy to face the gathering, so instinctively, they turned inward into a ring, seeing only one another. As for me, I learnt this particular lesson once and for all. I know it now. (1980, p. 210)

The musical culture of children takes many forms, for children contain their own subculture – or little personal culture – determined by their intellectual, social and emotional growth. As described by Ashton-Warner, we continue to learn if our minds are open to the experience so that in observing and hearing the “youth group” she learned not only things about performances and practices in Māori contexts, but she informed her own musical preferences as well. Patricia Shehan Campbell (2001) tells us that children’s “songs, rhythmic rhymes, and spontaneous musical utterances are drawn from the influences of their environment, including the repertoire of their siblings, friends, and the media” (p. 218). Campbell adds that “the natural flow of the transmission and learning processes appears to be more holistic than atomistic in style” (p. 218), just as it was in Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s classroom.

In the introduction to *Teacher* (1980), Dora Russell comments that “[Sylvia’s] youngsters make things, knit and sew, wash and iron, sing and dance, play basketball, draw and paint and model, play the piano, with only the vaguest

allocation of time for each activity. It all seems to be going on at once” (p. 9). In a recent Ministry of Education research paper, Holland and O’Connor (2004) describe this type of setting as it appears in contemporary arts classrooms in New Zealand as “structured chaos”. In this sense her pupils were on the way to ‘becoming’ and using their organic strengths to assert their presence in a chaotic world.

Like music, language carries its own rhythm and cadence, and for Ashton-Warner the *Janet and John* readers (O’Donnell, Munro, & Warwick, 1949) worked in opposition to the everyday uses of language, a clash between organic and inorganic vocabulary. In music education many standard resources used in teaching children to compose or listen are organised in much the same way, with stock theoretical assumptions and results that sound unlike music, which stems from imagination, culture, or emotion. Indeed, Ashton-Warner saw readers such as the *Janet and John* series as being in opposition to her own concept of key vocabularies – vocabularies drawn from the children and their life experiences – demonstrating a difference between something that comes through the creative vent and something that approaches from the outside.

In appropriating Sylvia Ashton-Warner as a teacher, I will now view her practices from the perspective of individual empowerment (which I will call the individualistic), as well as her organic and artistic modes of teaching and learning. The individualistic is so named because of Ashton-Warner’s commitment to the individual key vocabulary for infants. She believed that children have a private key vocabulary which, once found, can launch them into reading.

### THE INDIVIDUALISTIC

As a music educator, I can see links between a language-based key vocabulary and one that is music-based. Children carry inside them their own key music vocabulary of rhythms and tunes and these often reflect a cultural or sub-cultural bias. The emotional significance of the rhythms and songs children make up relate to the power content of their own vocabulary and Ashton-Warner suggests that a child that is regarded as a backward learner often contains the potential to express him or herself freely and emotionally through music. The more intelligent child is often more cautious, not wishing to be wrong or to expose his or her musical feelings, but often more than willing to expose his or her technical prowess.

In Ashton-Warner’s classroom the children chose their own words and she would write these on a card for them. Those remembered words often made their way into autobiographical writing, not through the teacher’s instruction to “write about” something or other, but because of Ashton-Warner’s belief that “a child’s writing is his own affair” (1980, p. 54), that is, his or her own passion. The potential of such practices for the music lesson is great, for example, using rhythm or beat in association with real-life events. If a teacher has the competence to write down the rhythm or little melody the child sings, a repertoire of musical fragments will soon emerge. Even better would be to encourage the children to invent notations as they try to represent their original creations. This relates to the work of Marie Clay (1975) and invented writing, for children come with multiple ways of representing

and this encourages the child's thought both *in* and *on* action. Alternatively, the teacher could audio-record the child's personal motifs and sonic explorations and, with new digital sequencing technologies, these could be pieced together to form a musical narrative that could even be used alongside spoken language. It would not be inappropriate for some modifications to occur in the repeating of these musical motifs because many cultures reproduce their music heterophonically (with slight variations). The term *heterophony* was first coined by Plato in response to the cultural variations he perceived in his time.

Ashton-Warner tells us that "the whole exercise of creative writing, the reaching back into the mind for something to say, nurtures the organic idea and exercises the inner eye" (p. 55). The relationship of this to music is profound, although we might replace inner eye with inner ear in music's case. For Ashton-Warner, beauty is not halting growth or overlaying the frame of an imposed culture, beauty is the shape of organic life. One can see links between Ashton-Warner's key vocabulary and what, in his work with adult literacy in Brazil, Freire (1972) would later call "authentic thought-language". Authentic thought-language is generated when we question and respond to our historical and cultural reality. This concept strongly relates to the children in Ashton-Warner's class and their experiences at the pā, the social and cultural struggles and triumphs that the children encountered and which subsequently came to be reflected in their own personal key vocabulary.

The key vocabulary, and its musical equivalent, demonstrate representation as construction and reflection. For music, how can we move something in action to something held in time (something on action) upon which we can reflect? Here the children's invented notations are useful, for it can be false to assume, for example in music, that traditional music notation implies the ontology of being musical.

### THE ORGANIC MODE

Education for Ashton-Warner requires an instinctive organic quality that represents life and not just theories or correct ways of doing things. This requires patience in a teacher who has the wisdom to "listen, watch and wait until the student's individual line of thought becomes apparent" (Read, in the preface to Ashton-Warner, 1980, p. 12). Sylvia fought the sameness that she claimed the media pressure people towards – for we should celebrate difference or the exceptional rather than the same – and she favoured lifting the lid off to see what is there and to reveal the organic shape. She sought to encourage the child to dance or make music as freely as he or she could draw or speak. Indeed, in many ways she behaved in life in the same spontaneous, free and exploratory ways that she herself encouraged in her infant classroom.

Organic, then, for Ashton-Warner (1980), means "that way of growth where the strongest thing pushes up ahead of the less strong ... In speaking of a child's mind I mean the strongest impulses push up, irrespective of whether or not they should, at a given time ... I call it the abstract order because the pattern it makes is so mixed up, so unpredictable. That's how I come to relate the terms *abstract* and *organic*. They are associative. *Natural* includes them both" (p. 197).

In music a child's strongest impulses might lean towards being a performer, or perhaps a creator of music, a composer. Some children might prefer to listen, to construct their own interpretations of their world through the music they hear. We listen for more than structure; we hear accent, tone, timbre, resonance, intonation, and sound itself. In the mind's eye and ear we can evoke visions that are sonorous and we can be shaped and formed by listening. Jean-Luc Nancy (2007) reminds us that we should listen with all our being, for to listen is not merely to understand. The children are not just hearing, they are listening with their senses and creating meaning. Making an idea grow as we create our own music can be an organic process, for only the individual knows which idea he or she will use. From the idea come the choices or possibilities we can see as we develop the idea in as many ways as we choose, until finally we decide to select those that best suit our musical story at a given time. The making up of music also encourages the children to invent their own notations or representations as they move from sound to symbol.

The actions of the organic performer are forms of knowing. Performance requires cultural actions and personal judgements in action. As we get better at making music we often look to rehearse in order to improve our originally spontaneous performance and we may even reflect on this as a form of preparation. Performance not only requires reflecting-in-action, it becomes a form of knowing-in-action. Both performance and composition require many forms of thinking and knowing, from practical to abstract. They engage our consciousness, take our attention, make us aware, touch our emotions, make us think, encourage us to remember and reflect, and we carry these out with intention. Therefore, knowing-in-action is a dynamic process drawing on the abstract through organic processes.

### **THE ARTISTIC MODE**

The expressive or poetic aspects of language are usually taken for granted, even though these reflect how we interpret and conceptualise our world as well as the language we use to shape that world, whether through key vocabulary or technical jargon, Māori or English. The poetic appears to have been an essential part of the teachings of Sylvia Ashton-Warner and whether expressing through language, painting, music or dance, all of these actions are interrelated and interact with each other. The roles of musical and linguistic behaviour are not arbitrary cultural conventions. They reflect varying degrees of consciousness and cooperation. Artistic responses define a culture and express values, environment, and ways of seeing and hearing the world.

Almost everything about the way Sylvia Ashton-Warner organised her teaching day was artistic. The artist reveals. As mentioned previously, she grouped her sessions under alternating states she called "Breathe Out, Breathe In, Breathe Out, Breathe In" (1980, p. 101). For example, with the first "breathe out" session organic developmental work such as conversations, creative writing, singing, working with clay, creative dancing, and quarrelling occurred. "Breathing in" followed with work on the key organic vocabulary, organic reading, organic discussion. The second "breathing out" involved the Golden Section because Sylvia Ashton-Warner was very fond of this concept, a concept that not only underpins

nature, but art, music, dance, literature, science, and much more. She describes the Golden Section as “the division of a distance in such a way that the shorter part is to the longer part as the longer part is to the whole” (1980, p. 75) and originates in the Greek concept of *phi*.

The Golden Section is evident in mathematics (geometry in particular) and science and for Ashton-Warner the Golden Section “is the ideal proportion”, adding that “in the infant room it cannot be explained, but it can be felt and drawn, every day” (p. 75). The principles of the Golden Section also form a part of music structure and the divisions are often represented by the way the music reaches its climax and then tapers off. The proportions, called divine proportions in the Renaissance Period, are said to be aesthetically pleasing and are in evidence in painting, architecture and book design as well as in nature.

By allowing a mixture of domestic life skills, such as washing dolls’ clothes, with arts pursuits, the students learned through organic processes that living life itself is artistry and that beauty is the shape of organic life. For Ashton-Warner (1980, p. 55) the whole exercise of creative writing, the reaching back into the mind for something to say, nurtures the organic idea and exercises the inner eye (and ear). Profoundly, she adds: “At last I know: Primer children write their own books” (p. 59). Musically the same teaching practices could be applied but this time the children could express through sound. Instruments or found or natural sounds could be used or, if preferred, forms of vocalese – the singing of lines using pitched nonsense or scat-type syllables – might be applied to project the expressive intent.

Arguably, traditional views of cognition and the implications of these views for the goals and content of education have marginalised the arts in recent years. Yet Sylvia Ashton-Warner placed the arts at the centre of learning as her infants worked practically on language and other forms of knowledge within relevant contexts. She demonstrated what education might be at its most effective. Hearing, as focused listening, is an achievement and not just some task within the sequence of a lesson. We listen for sonic qualities and meaning and not merely for the purpose of attaching scientific labels such as the elements of music. Listening is thinking!

Howard Gardner reminds us that language is not the only route for making sense of the world. He says:

Children learn to use symbols, ranging from gestures of the hand or movements of the whole body to pictures, figures of clay, numbers, music, and the like. And, by the age of five or six, children not only can understand these various symbols but can often combine them in ways adults find so striking. (Gardner, 1982, p. 88)

The pathway has been cleared for the arts, and Sylvia Ashton-Warner began this still not widely recognised task over fifty years ago.

I will now align the documented teaching practices of Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1980) with those using music as the key focus. Table 1 presents my comparison of the individualistic organic and artistic modes in language and music.

**Table 1. Comparison of the individualistic organic and artistic modes in language and music**

| <b>A model representing the modes of individualistic organic and artistic in language</b>   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Individualistic</b>  | <b>Organic</b>   | <b>Artistic</b>  |
| Spontaneity<br>Individual key vocabulary<br>Tension between organic and inorganic<br>Daily writing and music making something close to the children<br>A child's writing is their own affair<br>Words and gesture – especially prominent in Māori representations   | Instinctive<br>Tone<br>Creative<br>Flow and settling of ideas<br>Life has an inner dynamism/frame<br>Personal strengths pushing through<br>Organic behaviours, e.g., spontaneous dancing   | Music, painting and dance combined with language<br>Golden Section<br>Beauty is the shape of organic life<br>Sense of flow and cadence   |
| <b>A model representing the modes of individualistic organic and artistic in music</b>  |  |  |
| <b>Individualistic</b>  | <b>Organic</b>   | <b>Artistic</b>  |
| Spontaneity<br>Key vocabulary – rhythm, pattern, metre, tempo, pitch, timbre, harmony<br>Expression and intonation – exploratory singing and drumming<br>Tension between organic and inorganic<br>Gesture and embodied knowing<br>Cultural preferences<br>Stylistic preferences<br>Inner dynamism – spontaneity | Instinctive<br>Creative<br>Flow, testing and settling of ideas<br>Tone and tonality<br>Organic – spontaneous and/or instinctive musical behaviour<br>Strengths/preferences pushing through | Beauty – shape of organic life<br>Golden Section – concepts of structure<br>Spontaneous vocalese<br>Spontaneous improvisation – rhythms or tunes.<br>Sense of flow and cadence |

**CODA**

It is significant that Sylvia Ashton-Warner spent most of her career teaching infants at small schools in the country and yet could come up with innovative practices, many of which are not yet realised in contemporary classrooms. The breathing out

aspects of the day might imply play, but this is not just play as a mindless activity: play teaches us to interpret and it animates our imagination. The opening up of the educational space to the realisation of potential and possibilities allows children to express and excel through actions and reflections that draw on their own strengths and experiences. The Ashton-Warner model is clearly spatio-temporal (related to space and time) in organic ways that move between the passing present (such as through singing our own creations) and that which is stopped in time (the symbolic representations we might use to help us recall these). This in itself demonstrates a useful model for action and reflection.

Eisner (2002) tells us that “humans are meaning-making creatures” and that “meaning is not limited to what words can express”; for while “some meanings are ‘readable’ and expressible” other meanings demand alternative forms through which they are represented. “The arts provide a spectrum of such forms... through which meanings are made, revised, shared, and discovered” (p. 230). In her infant classes Ashton-Warner recognised that the artistic development of the individual is not an automatic consequence of maturity. She seemed to value what it means to have the freedom to live artistically. Working with infants may even have appealed to Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s creative sensibilities, for, like the children, she could explore, invent, destroy, shape and present with spontaneous passion. This is also the mark of the artist, whether writer, painter, musician, or teacher.

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