



# International Journal of Education and Teaching

Publisher's Home Page: <https://www.svedbergopen.com/>



Research Paper

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## Somaesthetics for Children: The Double-Barreled Body and Contemplative Practice

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### Article Info

Volume 1, Issue 4, December 2021

Received : 10 August 2021

Accepted : 19 November 2021

Published : 05 December 2021

doi: [10.51483/IJEDT.1.4.2021.30-36](https://doi.org/10.51483/IJEDT.1.4.2021.30-36)

### Abstract

This paper is to suggest somaesthetics for children as a way of Philosophy for Children (P4C). Somaesthetics, a pragmatism project, focuses on the body and its experience as a springboard for understanding and improving ourselves and the world. Somaesthetics for children is examined on two dimensions. Firstly, it can provide abundant philosophical resources such as a doubleness of the body. Somaesthetics goes beyond the choice of mind-body dualism or monism understanding, highlights ambiguity of the body. The body has an innate contradiction that cannot coexist at first glance. Doubleness should be one of the philosophical themes to understand the self and the world. Secondly, as practical somaesthetics for children, contemplative practices were suggested. They have philosophical meaning from the viewpoint of somaesthetics considering (1) it inform us of our feelings and help us to control them, (2) it gives us better control of our actions, and (3) it helps to retrain our habits.

**Keywords:** *Somaesthetics, Philosophy for Children (P4C), Contemplative education*

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### 1. Introduction

'Philosophy for Children' (P4C), proposed by Matthew Lipman in the 1970s, is an attempt to realize inquiry-based education through critical practices as an alternative to standardized practices in traditional education (Lipman, 1980, 2003). According to Lipman, traditional education is based on the transmission of knowledge, where knowledge is something unambiguous, unequivocal, and an authoritative teacher conveys that information through the educational process. In contrast, P4C as an attempt to reconstruct educational practice; education is the outcome of participation in a community of inquiry, where the knowledge is rooted in the ambiguous, equivocal state of children about the world. Fallibilistic teachers, in contrast to authoritative teachers, facilitate and encourage children to think, reflect, and judge (Lipman, 2003). Lipman insists that the educator of P4C should take lessons from the philosophy on Socrates; 'thinking', 'dialogue', 'interest', and 'logical and empirical reasoning' (Lipman, 1980).

The significance of P4C can be considered in two aspects. The first is the aspect of *education*. Nowadays, educational problems such as Lipman pointed out are prevalent in both East or West. The entangled valuation between educational idealism and relativism (Tomano, 2011), pursuit of betterment, the intention to make students gain something which could connote violence (Kono, 2015), and the alienation of 'I', the subject of learning (Ergas, 2016) are pointed out as the limitations of modern education. P4C has the potential to overcome the problems of modern education since it keeps

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aloof from standardized education practice and focuses on *exploring* rather than *becoming* to cultivate one's ability to think.

The second is the aspect of *philosophy*. It is a re-understood or critical view toward philosophy itself through teaching philosophy in elementary school, which was for a long time the exclusive domain of professors and students in the academic world of universities. Lipman and Van der Leeuw, on the one hand, respect the traditional academic framework of philosophy, on the other assert that we should think about the philosophical issues that underlie our lives, namely 'philosophize', by changing the terminology and expressions, and using the materials that are rooted in the lives of children (Lipman, 1980; Van Der Leeuw 2007). This ground-breaking philosophical practice, furthermore, has the potential to provide a perspective on criticism of philosophy.

'P4C' requests to doubt the premise that philosophy is taught in a specific place such as the philosophy department or the literature department in the university. Philosophy was initially concerning human life and happiness and to realize it, and P4C encourages the return to the origin that has been lost in the long history of philosophy (Van Der Leeuw, 2007).<sup>1</sup>

The implication to philosophy derived from P4C is a reminder of the vision of pragmatism whose mission is to improve human life.

On the other hand, there is a concern that the significance of P4C, which could bring a shift to education and philosophy, could be confined by its curriculum. A part of this concern can be found in the remark of Van Der Leeuw who pointed out the shortcomings of P4C teaching manuals developed by Lipman. The manuals "tend to transform doing philosophy into classical teaching again" (Van Der Leeuw, 2007). It should also be noted that *thinking* and *knowledge*, which are the main points in P4C, should not be treated in a limited way.

For example, the *body* is deeply involved in *thinking*, an action of the mind. There is a view that the body is not only involved in emotions but fundamentally intertwined even with abstract thinking, such as comparison, distinction, reasoning, and judgment (Johnson, 2017). Besides, especially in research on artificial intelligence, there is a disagreement between 'absolute theoretical knowledge' that has been pursued in traditional science and actual 'life knowledge.' It is confronting to clarify the characteristics of 'human knowledge' such as empirical, heuristics, embodied, tacit, situated knowledge with so-called objective scientific methods (Nishigaki, 2018).

Based on the importance of the body in thinking and knowledge, and as a place where human life is performed, somaesthetics, a novel attempt of philosophy, will be considered. The purpose of this paper is to propose 'somaesthetics for children' as a form of 'P4C'.

## 2. Somaesthetics

The starting point of somaesthetics lies in 'pragmatist aesthetics', the attempt of Richard Shusterman to overcome the limits of analytical aesthetics. Pragmatist aesthetics posits that an artistic and philosophical approach to one's way of life and the body is an indispensable element of life "both as a medium of aesthetic self-fashioning and as a means of aesthetic pleasure" (Shusterman, 1997). Shusterman is aiming to alter the body, or *soma*, through somaesthetics; nevertheless, philosophy and aesthetics have been neglected in its importance.

Somaesthetics is a critical, ameliorative study regarding the body, its use, and experience, that is, the body is a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation and creative self-fashioning. Shusterman proposes three dimensions of somaesthetics; analytic, pragmatic, and practical. It has a solid foundation in theoretical philosophy and an analytical dimension. Furthermore, it is a unique philosophy because it contains a practical dimension of *doing*.

This paper will examine the significance and possibility of 'somaesthetics for children' in two dimensions; theory (analytic somaesthetics) and practice (pragmatic and practical somaesthetics). Firstly, the body dealt with by analytic somaesthetics can provide rich philosophical themes. Shusterman asserts that when we cease the critical judgment of the body and recall philosophy's central aims—knowledge, self-knowledge, right action, justice, and the quest for the good life—the philosophical value of the body becomes apparent. One of the significances of somaesthetics for children proposed in this paper is the re-understanding of the body's concept, especially the ambiguity of the body. As we later see, Shusterman points out several facets of this ambiguity. While a simplistic understanding of the body, that is, mind-body dualism or monism, is generally prevalent, somaesthetics informs that the body has more complex ambiguity, contradiction, and duality and is not a concept that can be easily understood. This is a problem that requires *awareness* rather than solving.

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation is from a commentary by Higuchi Satoshi who translated Van Der Leeuw (2007) into Japanese.

Secondly, another possibility of somaesthetics for children that needs to be noted is contemplative practices. We will examine whether these practices can function as a part of 'P4C' through some examples of how it works.

### 3. Doubleness of the Body

The first thing that comes to mind regarding doubleness is "the body is the subject as well as the object", a notable discovery of phenomenology. In addition to this, Shusterman summons doubleness in various aspects (Shusterman, 2012). For example, the body not only gives us freedom but also constrains our actions. Strength and weakness coexist in the body, and both homogeneity and heterogeneity of the human condition are manifested in the body. In other words, the body unites us as human but at the same time divides us into a particular gender, ethnicity, and individual. Based on this variety of doubleness, the body is a fundamental element in somaesthetics in the sense that it is both a means and an end to improve us, a bodily being. What Shusterman is saying on ambiguity or doubleness is that there is an innate contradiction, in which seemingly impossible facets coexist and coincide in the body.

Shusterman criticizes the humanities such as literature, history, and philosophy that have excluded body. In other words, the doubleness reflects the main themes of the humanities, such as society, culture, norm, ethics, knowledge, and existence. For example, Shusterman is questioning whether rational reason, which humanities aim at, can overcome social problems such as racism. Shusterman answers that the "deep prejudices that are somatically marked in terms of vague uncomfortable feelings aroused by alien bodies" (Shusterman, 2012) are blended in the problem so that we should first consciously notice those senses and try to control the bodily dimension ahead of rational measures. This attempt is the central theme of somaesthetics.

Also, he claims that we should be attentive of the rigid stance of Humanities in which the body is treated as the means to achieve ends such as mind, intelligence, and thinking. There is a tendency that the 'means-end' framework has become rigidly the 'inferiority-superiority' framework. He posits that the "means or instrumentalities used to achieve something are not necessarily outside the ends they serve; they can be an essential part of them" (Shusterman, 2012) and proposes somaesthetics as a new type of Humanities to overcome sharp dualism.

Though the field of humanities was first introduced in contrast to theological studies termed divinity, humanist thinkers do not seem content to be human; they secretly want to transcend mortality, weakness, and error and to live like gods. Because bodily life does not allow this, they focus on the mind (Shusterman, 2012).

This attitude toward doubleness inherits the idea of Pragmatism. It is related to the concept of *experience* that Dewey and James cite.

Dewey's thought, especially on the concept of experience, is a significant opportunity that led to the body of somaesthetics. To describe one of its points, Dewey quotes James's words 'double-barreled' (Dewey, 1984). Dewey's double-barreled experience means the experience both as a process and objective or a verb and a noun. Experience connotes 'subject-object', 'thing-thought' at the same time, which are frameworks that have no dominance relation but a phase of experience. However, Dewey criticizes that traditional philosophy has been sharply divided between the dimensions of subject and thing (primary experience) and of object and thought (secondary experience), has made "contrast between gross, macroscopic, crude subject-matters in primary experience and the refined, derived objects of reflection" (Dewey, 1984), and assigned superiority to the latter. James also pointed out the problem of the opposing relation of the double-barreled term, such as experience. Philosophy, trying to make terms verifiable and concrete, replaced double-barreled terms with single-barreled ones such as 'thought' and 'thing' (James, 1912).

James, Dewey, and Shusterman assert that the doubleness of experience and the body should not be confronted, instead it should be accepted, along with the 'come and go' between them. It is to start from the 'rough, gross, macroscopic' primary experience heading to 'sophisticated, refined, derived' secondary experience, and going back to primary once again with an advanced viewpoint by which the whole process is a guide to a new way of total experience. Similarly, for the body, the bodily experience is refined and adjusted by reciprocation between the bodily background (habitual behavior) and the foreground (conscious introspection).

Doubleness is also a way for Shusterman to understand his own way of life (Botha, 2017). He supposes that doubleness has permeated his life, such as through dual nationality (United States and Israel), a dual major at university, two marriages, and research in two areas of analytical and continental philosophy (Shusterman, 2002a). His commentary on his own academic path illuminates the image of doubleness. It has been "a struggle with the limits that defined this field", philosophy and aesthetics, and he describes himself as a "*Grenzgänger*", "nomad philosopher", and "*passeur culturel*" (Shusterman, 2012). He depicts himself freely crossing the boundaries of academic doubleness or multiple domains.

Rather than doubleness coincidentally governing a way of life, we should understand the bodily self and its life are essentially double-barreled. Philosophy should deal with doubleness as a point of view from which to understand the self and the world. It should be an active topic in a P4C class. Doubleness, as a viewpoint, is just like the binoculars through which we see the world, and before that, it is how we perceive the world with our two eyes.

## 4. Contemplative Practices

### 4.1. Current Contemplative Practices in School

In terms of the significance of somaesthetics for children in the theoretical dimension, we have considered re-understanding of the concept of the body through ‘doubleness’. In the following, the practical dimension will be examined using contemplative practices as an example.

Firstly, looking at the current state of contemplative practices in schools, it came to the fore in the field of clinical medicine. Since the 1990s when ‘mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR)’ was developed by Kabat-Zinn of the Massachusetts Medical School, ‘mindfulness based interventions (MBIs)’ have been widely applied, mainly in schools, prisons, hospitals and workplaces throughout North America and Europe (Hyland, 2016). Subsequently, interest in contemplative or mindfulness practices continued to grow in primary, secondary, and higher education institutions, mainly in the United States. ‘Mindfulness in Education’ and other contemplative curriculums developed by several U.S.-based institutions and societies such as the Mind and Life Institute or the Garrison Institute have been introduced into schools (Ergas, 2016).

The introduction of new programs “such as mindfulness, yoga, compassion meditation, journaling, and other practices” in the curriculum is often justified by science (Ergas, 2016). An evidence-based approach has endowed contemplative practices with a scientific status, providing generally acceptable effects such as “the positive effects...on the brain, their contribution to nurturing health, their role in improving psychological wellbeing and in enhancing performativity” (Ergas, 2016), and accelerated the spread in schools. Ergas points out the current situation where traditional wisdom of contemplation, which ought to be another pillar, has been lacking due to the emphasis solely on the pillars of science. There is a lack of philosophical questions such as “why are we here? who are we? how ought we live?”

In Japan, although not directly, the introduction of ‘physical release activity (*karada-hogushi*)’ in 1998 to the national curriculum of Physical Education reflects a contemplative mindset in the background. These activities were newly adopted with the aim of integrating the mind and body.<sup>2</sup> It has distinctive features from regular P.E. in that it is not an exercise aimed directly at improving physical fitness or sports skills, instead it relates to mental health (Takahashi, 1999). As an attempt to relate not only to the body but also the mind during P.E., it has some significance as a contemplative practice. However, it has some limitations in that it simplifies the relationship between the body and mind as one and claims, namely, mind-body monism undoubtedly.

In order to consider the possibility of contemplative practices in somaesthetics for children, it is necessary to note the educational value of the practice of somaesthetics. Shusterman writes that somaesthetics (1) informs us of our feelings and emotions and helps us better manage those, (2) gives us better control of our movements and actions, (3) helps us in retraining habits of feelings and movements (Shusterman, 2002b). In other words, regarding somaesthetics practices, it is essential to be explicitly aware of an action, and then this is the starting point for improving the action. The action can be any action in principle—actually, Shusterman often makes an example of the eating issue of somaesthetics. In this paper, I will take the act of drawing as a case of contemplative practice in somaesthetics for children.

### 4.2. Drawing ‘Living Pictures’ - Yi Hochul

Yi Hochul was born in a small rural town in South Korea in 1952. After graduating from a local college of education, he served as an elementary school teacher for about 40 years from 1975 to 2014. His teachings have been introduced through several books, various lectures for children, teachers, and parents, as well as through published works of children and his own such as storybooks. He is one of the most respected teachers in Korea. He has especially worked on writing and drawing. Detailed explanations, instructions, and experiences are introduced with examples in the books such as *Drawing living pictures* or *Writing living sentences*.

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<sup>2</sup> Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2008) *Commentary to the National Curriculum Guidelines: Physical Education*.

As in the titles of these books, the writings and pictures he tried to teach considered living things. To understand the meaning of ‘living’, it should be noted what kind of pictures he thought of as ‘dead’:

One day I looked at a picture drawn by a child, and then I said, the legs were of a robot the eyes were of Western dolls, the smile was one of pretense, the birds were carved wooden birds, and the trees were cotton candy trees. It means that the picture had no life and was schematic. Such a picture with no individuality and little content, or a picture drawn with a fixed concept in one’s head, I call it a ‘dead picture’. However, most children’s drawings are dead pictures (Yi, 1994).

The reproduction of a picture based on a fixed scheme or idea of a child is a ‘dead picture’. The art class in school has become a time to draw such schematic pictures and is merely a place where “various reproductions of dead pictures” (Moon, 2013) take place.

Then, what does ‘living picture’ mean? Moon (2013) gives it in two meanings: denotation and connotation. The former, an explicit sense of the living picture, is to reproduce the object vividly. In the history of art, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, reproduction and mimicking have acquired opposite meaning to creation, and art education in schools subsequently has assigned an unfavorable air to reproduction (Moon, 2013). However, the vivid reproduction of a living picture is to reunderstand the significance of ‘imitation’. It is naturally connected to the connotation meaning of a living picture. Imitation in a living picture does not mean the reproduction of an object like a copier. As Moon (2013) points out, it is not a “how identical the picture is” but a “reproduction that breaks a fixed scheme in one’s mind”.

It is one of the essential principles of contemplative practice to see the world and things as they are, not by the preconceived concepts one has. The points that Yi emphasizes most in his teaching overlap with this. They are: (1) look carefully, (2) draw slowly and elaborately, (3) draw in proportion to the balance, (4) draw large, and (5) use curved lines. He set up a time for children to draw a picture for 20 to 30 min every morning or two a week. First, each student in the classroom acted as a model, and others drew the whole body, then the face; simple things, natural objects were drawn, and later, events in life, emotions. ‘Seeing thoroughly’, above all else, was the most critical issue in his teaching:

For example, in the case of a human face, many of you have ‘round’ as its shape in your mind, so you cannot think that the shape of the face is different for each person... Therefore, to draw such a picture, you must first break the typical ideas in your mind... In order to break the round pattern, you have when drawing a face, at least for the moment of drawing, do not think of a face, rather you should think “there is something visible in front of me. I have to look closely to know the shape” (Yi, 1997).

What Yi asserts about looking closely is to have a clear point of view, putting aside the notion attached to the object as far as one can. Attempting to forget the attached concept, recognizing the object from one’s own viewpoint, and reproducing it in the sketchbook is self-expression that highlights the object once concealed in a “gross, macroscopic, crude” (Dewey, 1984) background. In that sense, Yi’s teaching was not only an art education but could be an education that enriches the way of life. This idea was shared over decades and thousands of miles away.

### 4.3. The Zen of Seeing of Frederick Franck

Frederick Franck (1909-2006) is an artist, writer, and dentist who published more than 30 books on spirituality, drawing, meditation, and Zen, the most well-known being *The Zen of Seeing: Seeing/Drawing as Meditation*. Seeing/Drawing meditation is as good as Zen when elaborately enacted and accordingly combined. What he means by Zen is not as in a Buddhist sect.<sup>3</sup>

The core of Zen’s experience is to overcome the hallucination of self as ego and to regain one’s true self through the insight into the present moment only (Franck, 1973). His more or less riddle-like Zen—get over me and get back myself—needs to be understood through his drawing practices. Franck’s drawing as meditation focuses on seeing. He distinguishes ‘looking’ and ‘seeing’; the former involves classification, choice, and judgment, while the latter should be aimed, which does not involve such identifications. In the first seeing/drawing workshop, Franck made an instruction on seeing:

just sit and relax. Now let your eyes fall on whatever happens to be in front of you... Close your eyes for the next five minutes. Now open your eyes and focus on whatever you observed before... Look it in the eye, until you feel it looking back to you. Feel that you are alone with it on Earth! That it is the most important thing in the universe... you are no longer looking, you are SEEING (Franck, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> To explain Zen, Franck quotes not only from Japanese Zen Buddhist monks, but other scholars, sages, scriptures and artists from various backgrounds. For example, John Scotus Eriugena the philosopher in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Meister Eckhart the Christian theologian of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Zhaozhou Congshen the Chinese Buddhist monk in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Ikkyu Sojun the Japanese poet in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the *Upanishads* ancient Hindu Vedas, and the *Bible*.

After 'Seeing', Then the Drawing Begins:

Now, take your pencil loosely in your hand, and while you keep your eyes focused allow the pencil to follow on the paper what the eye perceives. Feel as if with the point of your pencil you are caressing the contours...don't "think" about what you are drawing, just let hand follow what the eye sees (Franck, 1973).

He calls it 'eye-heart-hand reflex', which does not intervene in the thoughts and judgments about the object and flows from the eyes to the pencil through the hand. Only the vision from the object at that moment is clearly conscious and reflected through the hand.

Like Yi's drawing, Franck's drawing creates an entirely new perspective of looking at things and the world. It aims to break our current state of habituated, automated, and simplified vision (Franck, 1973). Both practices can be understood as practical somaesthetics. First, the process of raising awareness about a particular sensation—in this case, vision—leads to an awareness of oneself. Of course, not all children and participants succeed in 'seeing'. Some of them feel bored or confused. Still, body consciousness could be a starting point for noticing even the bored and confused self. Secondly, these practices guide a new perspective on the world. One participant from Franck's workshop mentioned, "I have grown geraniums for thirty years, but, believe it or not, I never knew what a geranium looked like, how it was made, until I drew one today" (Franck, 1973). This is the creation of a new dialogue between 'I' and the world, and this creation is an ameliorative attempt to enrich our way of life.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper proposed somaesthetics for children as one possible method of P4C, aiming to expand the significance and possibilities of P4C in education and philosophy. The reexamining of the body by somaesthetics gives rich philosophical insight beyond the mere physical bodily dimension. As an example of the theme, this paper dealt with 'doubleness'. Through the insight regarding the body where contradiction coexists, criticisms were suggested of philosophy and other scholarship, which have a biased perspective on the body. Enduring ambiguity and adjusting focus, rather than choice between the two, is one theme that should be practiced in P4C. Also, contemplative practice was proposed as a practical form of somaesthetics for children. It is not a practice with scientific, evidence-based efficacy, but a return to the most fundamental dimension of bodily sense. In this paper, drawing was taken as an example. Somaesthetics, meta-perspective, and meta-act, in a sense, can be an essential axis of P4C, which is also an attempt to guide education from a meta-perspective.

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**Cite this article as:** Jiyun Bae (2021). *Somaesthetics for Children: The Double-Barreled Body and Contemplative Practice*. *International Journal of Education and Teaching*, 1(4), 30-36. doi: 10.51483/IJEDT.1.4.2021.30-36.