

ART RESEARCH AND CURRICULUM  
TO ACCOMPLISH MULTICULTURAL GOALS

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If there were no budget constraints, art education would be nice. Most people agree it's fun to do, and students do enjoy it. But most people also think it's a frill and unnecessary.

As thinking art educators, we must address these issues and the concerns of our policy makers. We must definitively respond to the questions of why we spend all that time, effort, and money teaching art.

Historical Overview

John Adams said,

I must study politics and war so that my sons have liberty--liberty to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, naval architecture, navigation, commerce and agriculture; in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture...  
(1841, p. 68)

In the late nineteenth century, the need for skilled draftsmen and designers prompted a group of industrialists to pressure the Massachusetts state legislature to make drawing a required subject in the schools. They brought Walter Smith to this country to teach and to create a series of drawing books which were based upon stereotypical images.

Around the turn of the century, the virtues of hard work, piety, and loyalty were introduced into the schools through art appreciation of "famous" paintings depicting those themes. It was a form of culture and effort to properly refine the socially elite.

In the 1920's, John Dewey's philosophy of learning through experience gave birth to the concept of creative self-expression. This concept was strongly emphasized by Viktor Lowenfeld in his landmark text, Creative and Mental Growth, first published in 1947. For the past 35 years, this philosophy based on the "new" field of psychology has pervaded the art education field.

Art education is really made up of three distinct but often confused categories: self-expression, observation, and appreciation. (Read, p. 208)

The art education field has been heavily influenced by the concepts of Arthur W. Dow, whose book Composition (1899) placed great emphasis on observation of visual phenomena and the application of this observation to the construction of a design. Although design constructs have played an important role in the final product of art education, the primary thrust has been on the making aspect or process of art.

It is now time to reevaluate that basic question, Why are we teaching art? Is it for skill development, cultural elitism, creative self-expression, developmental growth, or communication and understanding?

### Contemporary Issues

Chapman, Feldman, Grigsby, Lanier, and McFee agree that we tend to look upon the arts with the eye of an elitist group. Neither the History of Art (1962) by H. W. Janson nor Educating Artistic Vision (1972) by Eliot Eisner refer to a female artist, although art is still somehow considered a "feminine" thing to do. Nor does Eisner include a single work by a folk or craft artist, filmmaker, graphic or industrial designer.

Engel (1981) state that art is considered "Something Special" and therefore not for everyone. He does not suggest that the schools should create artists, for that is an impossibility and ridiculous, but that the schools should be charged to create competent visual perceivers. These visual perceivers should be able to respond to our total visual environment: the traditional "fine arts", the creations of mass media, and the utilization of urban spaces. Only then will we be confident that we will view art as necessary for communication both within and between groups. Only then will we create a future of choice, not chance.

The problem has many challenges. We must reach a larger portion of the school population while simultaneously convincing the policy maker of the value of understanding multicultural, visual forms. These forms are not only the means to establishing individual identity, but also the way in which we understand much of what we know about our own culture and others'. America is not a melting pot, but a tossed salad with a variety of cultures existing side by side. The political ramifications are powerful.

In his article "New Directions for Urban Research," Anthony Downs (1976) identifies education and aesthetics in the top ten priorities for social research. His ideas act as a bridge between those concerned with urban problems and those concerned with multicultural art curriculum development. Downs identifies education and aesthetics especially in terms of the effect that mass media has on social change. He recommends policy-oriented, multidisciplinary research with large scale data collection and analysis to illuminate this interaction.

Also concerned with the impact of mass media, Sherman (1980) observes that a reassessment of our conceptualization of art and emotions is essential. The pervasive influence of images from the mass media

demands a thorough analysis.

Hans Gifforn questions the criteria upon which the revision of curriculum ought to be based. He notes that, "we must not forget that school instruction has also been influenced by social groups primarily interested in increasing their personal power or economic advantage." (1978, p. 51) Gifforn concludes that art education is political education as well, strengthening or weakening an individual's inclination and ability to control or change social structures.

The most popular approach to inquiry in art education is through the theoretical framework of psychology. As Johnson notes (1980), this approach does not consider the social context. According to her, what is significant is how people describe life in the world. She recommends three alternative approaches:

1. Symbolic interactionism--the "self" changes through life based on social interactions.
2. Phenomenological Sociology--an inquiry into the life of consciousness to illuminate the things that are taken for granted. This approach depends upon the context of lived experience.
3. Ethnomethodology ( also called "Garfinkeling" for its author)--focuses on the methods by which people accomplish the affairs of everyday life based on practical reasoning in life situations.

Johnson states that any of the above approaches are more appropriate than the traditional psychological framework.

Compounding the complexity of inquiry are the concerns of Chalmers (1981), who states that visual symbols express and convey ideas, emotions, qualities and feelings, but that members of different cultures do not react in the same way to the same stimuli. He states that all art should be considered as cultural artifact, related to the social order in a causal-functional manner.

In his book, Ways of Seeing, Berger states that "seeing comes before words." It is seeing which establishes our place in the world, although we explain our world with words. The relationship has not been settled, but clearly the social context impinges on our way of seeing.

Members of preindustrial cultures appreciate art because of their direct and regular participation. Many of the important day-to-day things these people do are not only functionally useful, but also useful aesthetically. Their conception of value is different from ours.

Perhaps there is much that we can learn from this attitude. If, in fact, a culture is determined by its values, beliefs and attitudes, then every culture must surely benefit from an understanding and an

appreciation of every other culture. McFee (1978) asks some very serious questions about our current values. Is it not time for Americans to begin to benefit from the richness of diversity within our country? Have we nearly lost the specificity of culture by stratifying our society along economic lines? Or has this divisionism brought about new "cultures" based on personal life experiences? Only exploration, research, time and an openness to new experience will lead the way to a society of meaningfulness and fulfillment for each of its citizens.

The challenge then must be to create an art education curriculum which is personally rewarding, relevant to experience, and sound intellectually. In our culture, the dominant features of which are the quest for wealth and upward social mobility, there have been precious few opportunities to express constructively how life feels, what life's special meanings are, and why life is different for me than for you. We need an art education curriculum that will help children to understand art in varied life styles, and thus to wisely shape their own.

According to Chapman (1978), a child's attitudes are well developed by early adolescence and, therefore, each of these purposes must be met in a substantial way during the elementary and junior high school years. We must recognize that our environment is created by human effort. Toward that end, we must emphasize how all of us are in some respects like every other person, like some other people, and like no other person. We must attend to those dimensions of our selfhood that can be shared with others, in order to understand our own uniqueness. We must recognize that the art which we create is influenced by cultural/social forces, and that our perception and response to visual forms is influenced by our cultural values.

In Values Clarification (Simon, et al., 1972), the authors explain their title as a process for selecting the best and rejecting the worst elements contained in various value systems. These choices come about through peer pressure, submission to authority, and propaganda that we encounter through traditional learning approaches, such as moralizing, modelling, or "laissez-faire". The authors identify this sequence of categories in the clarification process:

1. Prizing and cherishing
2. Affirming
3. Choosing from alternatives
4. Choosing in view of consequences
5. Choosing freely
6. Acting
7. Acting with a pattern, consistent and repetitious

They acknowledge an indirect indebtedness to Dewey's philosophy, affirming the substance and richness of his ideas.

Perhaps we should acknowledge that values clarification is a way to identify cultural differences and to assist us in determining what we truly value aesthetically and artistically in our multicultural society.



## The Need for Alternative Approaches

A story is told about Picasso and a conversation he had with a German visitor to his studio. The visitor rhetorically--or perhaps aggressively--asked, "You are the painter who made the picture, Guernica?" Picasso responded, "No! It was you who created it!" This story reminds us of the connections between the individual and society, artistic act and cultural impetus, experience and symbolic transformation. (Kaufman, 1966, p. 51)

In "Why Art Education Lacks Social Relevance: A Contextual Analysis," Bersson (1981) observes that democracy represents the desired goal. "In its declared tolerance of and respect for cultural differences, in its promise of equality of opportunity and popular governance 'of, by and for (all) the people,' the principles of democracy stand as the essential potential force for the democratization of society and culture." (p. 6)

We must begin at home with the programming in our local schools. The visual arts are not a separate entity from other art forms and must, therefore, become interdisciplinary. We must address the issue of teacher resources and staff development, particularly in the study of cultures and subcultures previously ignored in the teacher's professional preparation.

We must build upon some of the efforts of particular school systems and specific individuals. The Richmond, Virginia school system has a Teacher Resource Center (Arts Library) especially equipped with motivational materials for black students. The art supervisor there has a personal slide collection of works by Afro-American artists which he uses for staff development. ( Note 1) The chairman of the Art Department at Norfolk State University has noted the need to generate a list of black artists in the community who would come to the schools to demonstrate. (Note 2)

Hobbs (1981) stated that university art departments seem to be remiss regarding art and social concerns in their professional teacher preparation programs. They have placed little emphasis on the responding process, emphasizing self-expression through studio production. Clearly, teacher preparation programs are a pertinent concern in a holistic approach to multicultural art education.

Learning from some existing programs which are socially responsive is a direction worth pursuing. One such program is RITA, Reading Instruction Through Art, an innovative curriculum for improving visual perception skills. This Title III, ESEA program in New York City has reported remarkable gains in basic skills competencies, particularly in the areas of human communication, reading, writing, and speaking. A second program worth pursuing, and perhaps incorporating into the school curriculum, began in California in 1967. It has involved young people in urban mural design that reflects their cultural background. It has grown nationally, and is a powerful force in community arts programming and volunteer commitment. Another exemplary program is the Urban Arts Project in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It brings students to a place where they can work

directly with artists from many disciplines.

There is no one curriculum which could possibly meet all multicultural concerns. Socially relevant objectives are so wide-ranging, and an expanded definition of art so diverse, it would be simplistic to presume that one curriculum could possibly be a panacea. However, in the American tradition of being challenged to remedy an undesirable situation, I present the following curriculum outline, with the goal of increasing the social relevance of art instruction:

I. Objectives of Multicultural Art Education

1. To understand the visual symbols which maintain the concepts of reality for different cultures.
2. To understand the organization and roles of a given society through its visual forms.
3. To understand how visual forms contribute to our current values, especially through the mass media.
4. To create visual communication forms which respect cultural differences.
5. To increase the aesthetic knowledge of the arts audience of the future.

II. Procedure to Implement Multicultural Art Education Objectives

1. Combine art, music, theatre, and dance into an Arts Department for mutual cooperation and benefit.
2. Develop programs to utilize community resources, both individuals and arts organizations.
3. Provide opportunities for students and adults to interact in the arts, inside as well as outside the schools.
4. Require arts education for all students throughout their years of schooling, as basic to understanding effective communication in our multicultural society.
5. Develop curricula which will meet the intellectual and technical demands of each discipline. In the visual arts, we should give equal emphasis to observation, production, and response.

Conclusion

When we consider what is really basic in a society, we must pause and reflect upon the ancient peoples who drew on their walls in the caves of Altamira and Lascaux. What were they telling us of the world in which they lived? What were they telling one another?

John Ruskin said that we learn of a society through three sources: the Book of their Words, the Book of their Deeds, and the Book of their Art. Though one does not exist without the other, the Book of their Art is the most reliable. (Janson, p. 2)

How and what do we want our descendants to know of our society?

#### Reference Notes

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