

THE BULLETIN

of the Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education

N U M B E R S I X

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of the Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education

EDITED BY HELEN MUTH

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Preface

This is the sixth annual publication of the Caucus. Having begun in 1981, we have the good fortune to be coordinated with the times, six in eighty-six. But, more importantly, this issue of the Bulletin demonstrates that our interests are also coordinated with the times. Aesthetic response is central to a majority of the papers and, appropriately, the socially concerned perspective taken by the authors places the audience, the person or persons responding to art, at the center.

When confronted with the opportunity to make choices, the Appalachian teenagers in Southwind's study considered the aesthetic qualities of form, expression, and production in the context of their own experience and values. Southwind found their responses similar in kind if not in particulars to those of more experienced individuals. She cautions educators to introduce choice as an integral part of the aesthetic response process. In another paper, Hobbs raises the question of what forms or exemplars are to be used to develop aesthetic response skills. He acknowledges the continuing debate over quality but relates his own findings from his teaching experience which reinforce Southwind's findings. People respond to what they know; and when confronted with the unfamiliar, they look for those qualities with which they are familiar and for which they hold value.

Congdon's interest in folk art recognizes that aesthetic preferences do vary with various populations. She reports that most categorization of folk art comes from academia which, thereby, imposes its own bias, creating a sense of elitism in the process. She is concerned that academically trained art educators, in their intention to broaden the range of aesthetic responses their students experience, will focus only on museum art for art exemplars. Congdon ventures that the folk artist/critic may be the more valid resource for art educators to use for developing methodology for aesthetic interaction. She presents a substantial argument that folk arts should be in our curricula both for content and methodology.

The papers by Johnson and Wieder and Gray focus on children's learning. Johnson analyzes children's art knowledge from their actual dialogue. She emphasizes the importance of art teachers as agents of socialization and acknowledges that children do in fact learn what they are taught, whether the content is intentional or not. She highly recommends that art teachers be aware of the complexity involved and

focus on teaching organized and comprehensive concepts. Wieder and Gray see development as an active role engaged in by children. The learner is perceived to be a self-initiating problem solver whose being and becoming are not limited to a recapitulation of the cultural context. They bring our attention to the lack of recognition current art education theory gives to this concept.

The People's Show illustrates the beneficial nature of involving all kinds of people in critical response to art. We might also extend the concerns raised by Stokrocki to include that of an adequately informed art educator. In his presentation on the Feldman Model, Hobbs states that art educators are obligated to be well informed in history, art history, and sociology. To this we might add that art educators need to be aware of the biases they have formed from their more formalized studies and to question their own interpretations not only of art forms but of the scholarly resources upon which they rely.

Boyer's paper, The Pervasiveness of Culture, also relates to the issues raised by Stokrocki's paper. Recognizing that cultural beliefs and assumptions are so internalized in our thinking and behavior, Boyer challenges art educators to identify our own biases. She states that not only must we work to unravel the pervasiveness of culture within educational settings and analyze how cultural attitudes related to art are internalized within a society and how these affect the teaching/learning process, if we are unaware of our own biases, we will be unable to improve upon the development of theories and practice in art education.

The Feldman Model of critical analysis was the focus of a major Caucus panel during the 1985 National Art Education Convention in Dallas. The panel presentations have been somewhat formalized in that each member, including Feldman, has responded with a paper for the Bulletin. An additional section on audience discussion which raised several appropriate questions related to aesthetic response has been included. Editorially, the authored papers have not been changed. Those who attended the presentations in Dallas will recognize the approaches each member of the panel took in discussing whether the Feldman Model could be used for social analysis.

Although I was unable to attend the panel discussion, my editorial observation is that whether the Feldman Model has social application depends primarily on the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the person instituting the model. Perhaps, it should be recognized that different situations call for different emphases. Personally, I have emphasized the descriptive phase when students are just beginning a more objective consideration of art and are not yet familiar with formal concerns. I have used the interpretive phase as the focus when talking with younger children, employing a number of why or could it be questions. I have also been in situations where the person guiding the discussion focused on essentially the formal elements and established interpretive closure based on internal evidence. This is conceivably possible and desirable with some exemplars and some audiences.

Hamblen points out the need to develop alternative formats for art criticism based on learning styles. Perhaps a beginning would be an articulation of the approaches suggested by Hobbs and Anderson in their papers and by the members of the audience in their discussion.

The final paper of Bulletin Six is an informative essay on the social and political underpinnings of art education essentially from within the profession itself though analogies can be drawn to other professions. Hamblen's writing is insightful, and the formal, statistical presentation is almost tongue in cheek.

I have enjoyed being editor of the Bulletin for the last two journals. It has made me aware of the number of individuals who prize the work of the Caucus. We again are indebted to Dean Donald L. McConkey of the School of Fine Arts and Communication, James Madison University, for his support.

Please, note that the Bulletin is available through the Caucus Treasurer.

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