

## DBAE: Viewpoints From a Cultural Literacy Perspective

A panel was organized by Nancy Johnson for the 1988 NAEA Conference in Los Angeles entitled, "DBAE: Viewpoints From a Cultural Literacy Perspective." Invited to participate with Nancy were Karen Hamblen, Laurie Hicks, and Barbara Boyer. Prior to her tragic death this past September, Nancy had begun to pull together the presentations of each of the panel members for submission to *The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*. Nancy's desire to provide a viable alternative to DBAE has been continued through the efforts of Karen Hamblen, who completed Nancy's unfinished manuscript and Laurie Hicks, who coordinated the four papers published herein.

In the first essay, the reader will find no references in Nancy Johnson's paper, however it will become readily apparent that *cultural literacy*, as theorized by Chet Bower's at the University of Oregon acts as the foil for her arguments against the DBAE program; *cultural literacy* herein broadly defined as "an active examination of the meanings, values, and behaviors in a culture." All four presentations question the dominant trend in education to return to a value-free, sequentially based curriculum characteristic of the 1960's when America felt threatened by its loss of leadership in the space race to Russia, the so-called Sputnik fiasco reported in so many introductory texts on curriculum development. At that time the political machinery went to work to introduce new packaged science programs based on the structure of the discipline. One can only wonder whether these same fears of losing prominence have re-emerged, only now Japan has replaced Russia as the measuring stick. With the continued dominance of Japan's resourcefulness in the capitalist marketplace and the growing capitalist fervor of the Pacific Rim, especially China, it is *clear* that the educational system must be mobilized to raise a generation which will compete in a world market. Efficiency of instruction and effective teaching, as theorized by the likes of Madeline Hunter, and the values associated with such approaches - compliance, standardization, meritocracy, testing and evaluation - have once again emerged as high priority. All four papers take issue with the dominant cultural heritage which supports the art(s) from a predominantly white middle class position as theorized recently by Hirsh Jr.'s views on cultural literacy and Bloom's attack on the left-leaning university professors in *Closing of the American Mind*. Such a dominant cultural heritage is now being reinstated by programs such as the DBAE with the support of the Getty Center for Education. All four presentations also argue that a broader approach is necessary and needed to meet the complexity of our multicultural school population, one which extends the conceptualizations of art and speaks to a plurality of cultural positions. Cultural Literacy for Art Education (CLAE) is presented as one such alternative. The members of the panel hope that the four essays which follow will contribute to the critical reflection upon existing educational practice to which Nancy contributed so richly during her lifetime. -*editor*

## Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) and Cultural Literacy Art Education (CLAE)

NANCY JOHNSON

*The foundations upon which knowledge is organized and presented in both discipline-based and cultural literacy approaches to art education are addressed. It is argued that the foundations for these two approaches are a result of conflicting views on the standardization of curricula and the perceived need for achievement oriented evaluation; these in turn are reflective of a fundamental difference in beliefs and assumptions as to the nature of education.*

### Differences in Literacy Between DBAE and CLAE

Cultural literacy as theorized by Chet Bowers at the University of Oregon is an active examination of the meanings, values, and behaviors in a culture. This is the definition of "cultural literacy" with which I will be concerned here, and which I will be comparing with disciplined-based art education (DBAE). It is significantly different from, if not opposite to "cultural literacy," as that term became familiar to us from E. D. Hirsch's best seller of 1988, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, in which literacy means knowledge of the dominant culture. Hirsch's cultural literacy and Bower's cultural literacy have implications for curriculum that have significant differences. I will be discussing those differences in terms of discipline-based art education (DBAE) and cultural literacy art education (CLAE).

In DBAE, knowledge is to be organized sequentially and cumulatively so that it fits with the developmental level of students. The curriculum is to be written in prescriptive terms based on knowledge and thinking of practitioners and experts in related disciplines. Four content areas or disciplines have been mentioned: aesthetics, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics. The curriculum is to be systematically taught throughout the school district with a model program available to guide the practice of all teachers and with university scholars serving as resources for curriculum development. Scholars will work with curriculum specialists and teachers, with the teacher's role being to follow and implement curriculum designed by scholars and curriculum developers. Principals and administrators will review classroom instruction practices.

Eisner has said that most curriculum is evaluation-driven. For DBAE, the art curriculum will need educational objectives which specify

concepts, skills, and information, and which identify vocabulary to be learned at each grade level. Teaching will require continuity, goals, and structure. Student achievement and program effectiveness will be confirmed by evaluation criteria and procedures. Achievement tests will be administered. The foundation for the organization of DBAE curriculum knowledge is based on present school practice, i.e., mainly instructional learning outcomes in testing and achievement as it is done in other subject areas. This approach to art instruction is derived from the works of Tyler, Bloom, and Taba in curriculum construction.

In contrast, in a program for cultural literacy, art education knowledge is organized by topics on themes identified by teachers. The teacher has a central role as the person who will develop the curriculum. The curriculum is to be critically reflective based on the deep codes of our cultural heritage as related to the students' phenomenological world. That's quite a phrase full. I can recall when I first heard about his type of cultural literacy. I had to pick up on the code myself, but I believe I can simplify its meaning a bit. There are two aspects of human existence. The physical existence is a given. We can alter it, change it, create new chemicals and so forth, but we cannot actually make trees. We cannot make clouds, or at least no one has done this yet. And even though we create babies in test tubes, we still haven't been able to create human beings from chemical components.

On the other hand, in the other aspect of human existence, the socio-cultural world, we are able to create our ideas and our thinking. These become patterns that are handed down in various ways by different methods in our society. Society uses schools as one way to transmit culturally devised patterns. It's not something we are born knowing. It is something we have to learn. So the stress here is trying to identify what those deep patterns of thinking are that exist in our society that structure how we think about what we do. Can they be highlighted, looked at, and brought to consciousness and examined?

Apparently there are many deep cultural patterns that could be examined in a cultural literacy art education program. Such a curriculum allows for specific content to be adjusted to the uniqueness of cultural groups and the characteristics of their bio-region. CLAE curricula reflect regional diversity and the teacher's imagination and resourcefulness. The teacher's role is to introduce the student to the community of memory, as Bowers calls it, which is imbedded in cultural traditions. Teachers have the responsibility of contributing to the foundations of communicative competence, that is, in empowering students to raise questions about deep cultural patterns - where those patterns come from, their usefulness today as we go about our business, their need for readjustment and the need to preserve some of them in our customs.

A curriculum for cultural literacy is empowerment-driven rather than achievement-test driven. The individual is to take part in the discourse that shapes the course of social events. Thus, the art curriculum will provide resources and methods for learning how to think about institutions' practices and norms that make up the culture.

## Differences in Organizing Principles Between DBAE and CLAE

The curriculum for cultural literacy focuses on three organizing principles: The first is to utilize the student's phenomenological culture and, sometimes, there is also a tendency to use existential experiences. This means raising questions of "What is my personal experience?" and "What is the meaning of other people's versions of life?" What is it like for me to live? The second way to do this would be to use a historical perspective regarding objectifying knowledge. One of my favorites is objectifying concepts of design. Design consists of elements (line, shape, color, texture, etc.) and principles (rhythm, balance, repetition, center of interest, etc.). Where did all this come from? Prehistoric humans did not go into the caves and say, "Well, you have line here; you have balance there." That's the perspective history can give of how we come to conceptions of design that we use today. The third way would be to incorporate a cross-cultural perspective. How do other people in other societies deal with a particular theme or topic or problem? The general guidelines for learning how to organize curriculum are to be open to new relationships and to how we can develop capacities for negotiation and new creations. Developing this involves one's self and encouraging in others a shared future, and to be involved in a sense of future that takes into account the characteristics of the region which one lives. Bowers has been working with the term "bio-region" and our need to sustain characteristics of large "bio-communities." Evaluation might take the form of testing the students' conceptual understanding against the complexities of their life worlds and coming to see that the foundation for organization is based on cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs.

In contrast to a curriculum for cultural literacy, in DBAE, knowledge is viewed as explicit and factual. It is content to be mastered, not questioned by the student or the teacher. The students are not to create art knowledge, but only to recreate what is known already about art. They will not participate in the naming of art experiences. That will be left up to the experts. Although art knowledge will be modeled upon what the practitioners know and do, the DBAE curriculum will not, however, be knowledge about art as practitioners actually experience it either. More clearly, if the curriculum model is to be based on what practitioners do, one has to look at what practitioners do, what they know, and the skills that they have. A practitioner's knowledge and skills are not neatly laid out, such as in curriculum flow charts where things are all comfortably delineated in observable objectives. The practitioner's life is a very patchy, if-or tentative situation. What is known is on-going, in process. It's not laid down, and it is never finished.

How can we get cultural literacy methods and principles into the curriculum so that the student is also a creator? We are all participants in what we know about art. Rather than naming art content and saying students must know X, Y, and Z, we need to go a step further and allow students and teachers to be participants in the creation of what is known about art. Also, art knowledge at the level of personal knowing and experiencing is not sequentially organized, nor is it systematic. A quick

review of college catalogues, as indicative of how we organize art knowledge, would reveal that there is diversity, uniqueness, and something I call "loose compiling" in the way art is organized. From institution to institution, there is not a particular set model.

Practitioners' knowledge is fluid; it is not static. On cultural literacy art education, the fluidity of knowledge is observed and students are encouraged to participate in the ongoing constructive processes modifying and creating what is known as well as being able to recognize some knowledge as worthy of preservation. In cultural literacy art education the evaluation of curricula is problematic. It does not guarantee a similar knowledge base in each individual, and it does not enable us to compare intellectual performance nationally. Standardization is something that could not happen from a cultural literacy art education perspective.

An issue here is whether or not a nationally referenced achievement test, as favored in discipline-based art education, would determine the curriculum, or whether the local control of schools will, in fact, run the curriculum. The U.S. Constitution leaves education as the responsibility of the states to define and to create guidelines, and for districts to follow them. When Bowers talks about bio-regional, he's making a case for the curriculum to be specific to the region, for the people who live there and use it, as opposed to a national type of curriculum which may ignore regional differences. DBAE is a highly prescriptive approach to knowing about art while cultural literacy art education is reflective and reflexive and defies singular prescriptions for the knowing and experiencing of art.

\*This paper was transcribed by Beverly Wilson, graduate research assistant at Louisiana State University, from an audio tape of a panel presentation that Dr. Nancy R. Johnson presented at the 1988 National Art Education Association Convention in Los Angeles. Dr. Karen A. Hamblen edited the transcribed copy and made revisions for readability on the basis of ideas Nancy Johnson had presented in her articles and other speeches. Since Dr. Johnson's written notes for this panel presentation were not available, references are not cited. Dr. Nancy R. Johnson died September 6, 1988 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Apart from minor revisions through the review process this essay remains intact. Two obvious references are cited below -*editor*.

## References

- Bowers, C.A. (1974). *Cultural literacy for freedom: An existential perspective on teaching curriculum and school policy*. Eugene, Oregon: Elan Pub.
- Hirsch, E.D., Jr. (1987). *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

## The Reality Construction of Technocratic-Rationality Through DBAE

KAREN HAMBLÉN

*The importance of differentiating between a discipline-based approach to art education and the prescribed DBAE curricular structure and goals presented by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts is developed. It is proposed that the Getty's reliance on the characteristics of contemporary general education for the theoretical foundations of DBAE is restrictive and contributes to technocratic rationalism in art education, and disallows the development of cultural literacy.*

It is very important that we make the distinction that DBAE does not have to be any one particular program. However, because of the power the J. Paul Getty philanthropic foundation wields on the pages of our journals, its sponsored conferences, its glossy publications, its planning grants, and so on, DBAE has become almost synonymous with Getty. This is an unfortunate situation, and I think that we all need to make this important distinction when we talk about DBAE. When DBAE becomes synonymous with any one particular institution, its definition and, ultimately, its implementation becomes a closed, predefined situation. Perhaps, this perception is already occurring.

In the Getty version of DBAE it is proposed that there be a written, sequential curriculum that is implemented in designated districts and perhaps, even state wide. This curriculum is to consist of content in the areas of art production, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics. Goals and objectives are to be clearly stated and outcomes are predefined (Greer, 1984; Greer & Hoepfner, 1986).

There are two aspects that are especially important in understanding the nature of this type of DBAE curriculum. First, it has been stated in a number of instances that a primary goal is to have art resemble instruction in the rest of education (Greer & Hoepfner, 1986; Hamblen, 1987). Second, and contingent with the previous goal, are statements by such Getty affiliated individuals as Michael Day (1985) that the main distinction between DBAE and previous art instruction is that DBAE outcomes are evaluated. Although evaluation can certainly encompass a range of methodologies - and Day cites and describes a number of approaches - Greer and Hoepfner (1986) propose that evaluation consist of objective, achievement testing.