

## References

- Apple, M. (1979). *Ideology and curriculum*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Apple, M. (1986). *Teachers and texts: A political economy of class and gender relations in education*. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Art inventory: Tests A-F*. (1985). Salt Lake City, UT: Utah State Board of Education.
- Bennett, W. J. (1987/1988). Why the arts are essential. *Educational Leadership*, 45(4), 4-5.
- Bullough, R. V., Jr., & Goldstein, S. L. (1984). Technical curriculum form and elementary school art education. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 16, 143-145.
- Cornia, I. E., Stubbs, C. B., & Winters, N. B. (1976). *Art is elementary: Teaching visual thinking through art concepts*. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press.
- Day, M. (1985). Evaluating student achievement in discipline-based art programs. *Studies in Art Education*, 26(4), 232-240.
- Greer, W. D. (1984). A discipline-based view of art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 25(4), 212-218.
- Greer, W. E., & Hoepfner, R. (1986). Achievement testing in the visual arts. *Design for Arts in Education*, 88(1), 43-47.
- Hamblen, K. A. (1985). The issue of technocratic rationality in discipline-based art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 27(1), 43-46.
- Hamblen, K. A. (1987). An examination of discipline-based art education issues. *Studies in Art Education*, 29(2), 68-78.
- Hamblen, K. A. (1988). What does DBAE teach? *Art Education*, 41(2), 23-24, 33-35.
- Hirsch, E. D., Jr. (1987). *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Rush, J. C. (1987). Interlocking images: The conceptual core of a discipline-based art lesson. *Studies in Art Education*, 28(4), 206-220.
- SWRL elementary art program*. (1975). Los Alamitos, CA: Phi Delta Kappa.

## Cultural Literacy as Social Empowerment

LAURIE HICKS

*The concept of cultural literacy as a process of becoming socially empowered is developed. A comparison is made between "Getty-ized DBAE" with an approach to art education informed by the development of cultural literacy. How these approaches differ, not only in their design but in the fundamental goals which motivate and guide them is illustrated. An outline is presented of a pedagogical structure around which a cultural literacy approach to art education can be organized and implemented.*

## Introduction

In recent years art education discourse has become a highly politicized and philosophically charged debate over curricular content, sequential programming, and finances. At the forefront of this debate is the concept of an integrated art program which embraces not only the study of studio techniques and expression, but art history, criticism, and aesthetics. This broader based approach to art education has been appropriated and marketed by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts as Discipline-Based Art Education. Support for discipline based approaches to art education continues to grow as art educators, schools and teachers turn to embrace the plethora of discursive literature and programming dedicated to the theory and practice of a DBAE conception of art education. Currently, this conception most commonly embodies the notions and curricular strategies of the Getty Center. These notions and strategies are based on the assumption that art is grounded in four well established and concrete areas of inquiry and knowledge. According to this Getty Center's conception of DBAE, these four areas - studio production, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics - represent self-sufficient and autonomous bodies of knowledge whose content can be clearly and unproblematically defined and articulated. The Getty-ized DBAE wishes to implement a written, sequential curriculum at the district and state levels which would reflect these four disciplines. Since the knowledge and processes traditionally assigned to these disciplines is not seen as problematic by the proponents of DBAE, content is viewed as rational and objective. A result of this view is the standardization of curricular goals, objectives, and learner outcomes (Greer, 1984). Further, this approach supposes that learning can be tested through objective, achievement oriented criteria (Greer and Hoepfner, 1986).

## The Socio-Cultural Constitution of Art

The standardization and objectification of educational content which is inherent in the Getty's DBAE presupposes that education and the knowledge it purports to teach are context free (Hamblen, 1988). This rationalistic approach decontextualizes both the content of art and the process of education; it obscures the fact that art emerges from cultural contexts which inform its production and reception. By decontextualizing art education, DBAE fails to acknowledge that these cultural contexts are humanly authored, and thus fails to make explicit the relationship between art and socio-cultural identity. As such, this estrangement of art and art knowledge does little to help students understand how art is socio-culturally constituted and validated; how our ability to visualize, respond, and visually express ourselves is influenced by our culturally embedded expectations, values, attitudes, and behaviors (Hamblen, 1984). It is this notion that art is socio-culturally constituted that should guide the process of education which informs the cultural literacy approach to art education. From this perspective, I want to argue that there is a broader and more fundamental understanding of art education which we must grasp if we are to work towards the creation of responsible art programs capable of helping our students become active participants in the design and construction of their own futures. Essential to this argument is an understanding of the complex relationship between art as a visual language, culture, and the process of thought. This understanding takes into consideration the social and political nature of artistic expression, and acknowledges its power to both limit and enhance thought and behavior. Such an argument suggests that art education involves not only the study of various art forms and processes from hands-on and historical perspectives but that it includes an understanding of the socio-political forces which influence how art, and its instruction, is practiced.

At first glance this suggestion may not be new to many in the field; discussions of art and culture have long been a part of contemporary art education discourse. However, such dialogue has traditionally been immersed in patterns of thinking which reinforce dominant socio-political notions of what art is, how and why artists create, and what forms artistic expression takes within various cultural groups. Omitted from these discussions are other important questions: What role does art play in the transmission and sustenance of taken-for-granted cultural assumptions? What forms of knowledge and activity does art validate as reality? How accurately do art and art education reflect contemporary human conditions? And most importantly, how do we, as art educators, contribute to our students' ability to understand and address these issues? Also omitted from these traditional discussions is an exploration of the role art plays in our ability to communicate visually an understanding of art as a culturally defined and informed language. Understanding the relationship between culture, language, and the individual is important to the conceptualization of the integrated and comprehensive art curriculum which I am proposing, a curriculum based on a cultural literacy approach to education.

## Four Pedagogical Principles for Cultural Literacy

The cultural literacy approach to art education seeks to break away from the current situation where studio art, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics are viewed, and subsequently taught as isolated areas of knowledge and inquiry within the discipline of art. The ideal curriculum would integrate these areas of study along with other disciplines which contribute to our understanding of the visual arts (i.e., sociology, psychology, anthropology), in such a way as to make clear, in the actual process of teaching, the relationships they have with one another. This integration can be accomplished by organizing the art curriculum around specific themes or issues. By focusing on a series of themes questions may be raised which illuminate the importance of visual imagery and dialogue in the lives of students. Themes that might prove stimulating in this connection include: women as objects, the relationship between human beings and nature, and art as political power. Topics such as these give broad-based access to fundamental existential questions about who we are, what kind of society we live in, and how we relate to other cultures.

There are four pedagogical principles which should structure the treatment of such themes. The first principle is that the educational process should begin with the student's own phenomenological experience of the theme in question. We should start out with images that originate within the culture and everyday experience of students rather than imposing too quickly academic constraints on what counts as legitimate art. We ought to begin with the vernacular of everyday art imagery, rather than with the highly specialized language of the art community. These images can be found in popular magazines, television shows, advertising, films, local environments, and in the student's own visual expression.

The second principle that informs our discussion of themes is that our understanding of the present cannot be divorced from an acquaintance with the past. Thus, we must include an *historical perspective* on the themes we choose to discuss. It is extremely important that our understanding of a history perspective include an understanding of history as a process of description and interpretation. Historical philosopher, É. H. Carr (1961), points out that our view of "history" as reflecting "the facts" and our understanding of historians as being objective viewers of absolute events is problematic. He articulates a view of history as interpretation, as a selective process of recording what is perceived to have happened by the person doing the perceiving. We must learn to demystify the authority we have learned to place on history and help students come to accept historical information, not as a time-sequenced list of facts, but as information which has been selected, interpreted and presented as one perspective amongst many.

The pedagogical purpose of including an historical perspective on the theme being discussed is to encourage students to see their lives as part of a larger tradition. By encouraging this view, we contribute to students' understanding of art as a conveyer of social memory. Philosopher Hannah Arendt (1961) proposes that an understanding of social memory is essential to the development of critical and reflective thought. It is through an understanding of history as a socially constructed memory that we come to understand history as a humanly authored phenomena, one which can be controlled and manipulated.



The third principle recommends that we take a cross-cultural perspective in each of the themes we address. Just as our present situation is the product of an historical development, so also is it the result of numerous cultural influences. As a language, art is one of the agents through which culture is determined and maintained. Since art is one of the means whereby cultural attitudes, values, and modes of acceptable behavior are transmitted, a cross-cultural perspective will serve to expose students to the "multiple realities" of these beliefs as they are represented in the art of various cultures. It is hoped that this view of "multiple realities" will encourage students to reject the notion that all people share the same meanings and world view. It will encourage an understanding of culture as diverse, humanly authored and maintained. Those who lack an understanding of culture as a humanly authored phenomenon are more passively dependent on the values and images of self, conveyed through art than those who have gained a working knowledge of the visual language from a cross-cultural perspective. Part of our task as art educators is to ensure that our students acquire that knowledge.

Three distinct aspects for such a cross-cultural practice may be distinguished. First of all, it requires that we facilitate an understanding of the confluence of cultures which now define what we call "American culture." In this effort, we might study themes which are embodied in the art of various African, South American, and Asian cultures, as well as those found in the art of Native Americans and Europeans. This cross-cultural perspective requires us to set up comparisons between these various cultural settings and their influence on the development of our cultural experience. Secondly, a cross-cultural perspective must not ignore the presence and contributions of various sub-cultural groups to our contemporary visual expression. Thirdly, a cross-cultural perspective must also include an anthropological dimension which investigates not only the artifacts of various cultural groups but moves beyond the artifact into the constituting belief systems out of which it originates. In all these cases, the concern is to develop a sense of culture as something humanly authored and defined. If our art curriculum is to contribute to the critical skills of students, it must help them to see how cultural habits and expectations are socially and humanly inspired, and hence, how they may be changed through self-conscious and informed choices. It must make explicit the "reality constituting" nature of visual communication.

The fourth and final principle overlays the other three. It recommends that our curriculum, and our treatment of selected themes be oriented to the future. Each stage of our treatment of curricular topics should focus on the ways in which art, conceived as a language, is an important implement for personal and cultural change and empowerment. An eye toward the future helps us understand the role we may play in defining our own sense of reality. The wider the range of possible choices we have for visualizing and developing our view of personal reality for thinking and acting and for finding meaning in our daily life experience, the greater our ability to weigh and consider alternative images of our future. A curriculum which encourages speculation on the future would help students visualize and "articulate" scenarios for change. It would also offer the opportunity for students to explore how these changes would or would not

affect their life experience. Most importantly, it would empower students to intervene in the design and construction of their own futures.

I have proposed that a cultural literacy approach to art education would evolve around a series of themes or issues; that it should include the students' phenomenological experience, an historical perspective, a cross-cultural perspective, and an eye on the future. In connection with all of these concerns, I envision three basic goals: a) to make explicit the language of expression - to help students understand how the language of expression is not culturally neutral, that it reflects who we are and what we are capable of thinking; b) to encourage an understanding of the role visual language plays in the development and maintenance of social, cultural, technological, and political contexts; and c) to encourage the questioning of beliefs, values, and behaviors in terms of their origins, development, and future. Unless art educators recognize the importance of understanding the cultural and political dimension of visual arts education, classroom instruction will do nothing more than promote traditional conceptions of art and the technology of artistic expression. Further by limiting the ability of students to conceptualize, understand, negotiate, and communicate the complexity of their life experience, these programs contribute to the inability of students to participate critically and intelligently in the crucial decisions and processes which influence not only their own futures but also the future of the human community. From the cultural literacy perspective, this is the problem with the rationalistic DBAE proposed by the Getty Center.

In conclusion, if we are to encourage students in their efforts to define and communicate a vision for the future which is based on critical and reflexive thinking we must acknowledge the need for a new agenda in art education. This agenda cannot be carried out under the aegis of the Gettyized DBAE program. This agenda must dedicate itself to the development of individuals fluent in the language of visual images, individuals who are visually competent, culturally literate and socially empowered.

## References

- Arendt, H. (1961). *Between past and future*. Cleveland: Meridian Books.
- Carr, E. H. (1961). *What is history?* New York: Random House.
- Greer, W. D. (1984). A discipline-based view of art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 25(4), 212-218.
- Greer, W. D. & Hoepfner, R. (1986). Achievement testing in the visual arts. *Design for Arts in Education*, 88(1), 43-47.
- Hamblen, K. (1984). Artistic perception as a function of learned expectations. *The Journal of Art Education*, 37(3), 20-25.
- Hamblen, K. (1988). What does DBAE teach? *The Journal of Art Education*, 41(2), 23-24, 33-35.