THINKING THE RIGHT STUFF: TYPES OF ACADEMIC REALITY IN ART EDUCATION

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The purpose of this paper is to examine types of academic reality in graduate education and how the accepted ones come to be considered as exclusionary and correct ways to understand the field of art education. It is proposed that socialization processes in graduate programs offer attractive rewards to those who become proficient in the manipulation of selected types of knowledge construction and modes of inquiry. The following aspects are discussed in terms of how they contribute toward the shaping of academic consciousness: (1) socialization procedures of graduate art education, (2) the failure of even reflexive modes of inquiry to make graduate experiences relative, and (3) assumptions shared by art educators and other New Class intellectuals (Gould, 1979). The socialization procedures of graduate art education are discussed within the framework of a social theory of knowledge distribution.

TYPES OF ACADEMIC REALITY IN ART EDUCATION

When I was a graduate student, I had several opportunities to observe candidates who came to our campus to interview for job openings in art education. Part of the interview process consisted of the candidate presenting some of his/her research, preferably with a slide presentation that kept it somewhat entertaining for us. This event was open to anyone who wished to attend; the audience primarily consisted of faculty and graduate students. After the candidate's formal presentation, s/he would answer questions. What predictably and quickly emerged from this interchange was that there seemed to be some serious wrong thinking going on at other universities. Fresh from our classes in which the latest theories, research, and art education developments had been discussed, we asked the candidates questions on particular sources, scholars, and ideas. To our satisfying surprise, candidates were often unaware of certain sources, or, even if they had read a particular book or article, they often gave interpretations that were blatantly wrong. Furtive glances, a stiffening and shifting of posture, and even perhaps a trace of horrified smugness would pass among us. The graduate students who asked intricate questions that probed the premises of a resident professor's favored ideas could be assured of looking good, even if the candidate managed to answer correctly. This was our home turf and treacherous terrain for the candidate, and it was as easy for us to make points in this environment as for the candidate to lose them.

As far as I know, there never was any formalized plan of conspiracy to put any candidate in a bad light, but candidates managed, in some measure, to commit intellectual faux pas. Besides serving to eliminate candidates obviously incompatible with the general philosophy of current faculty members, for graduate students, this informal and unplanned rite of occupational passage seemed to verify that we were being educated in the right direction and outsiders were often woefully off-track. True believers in the field of art education could be identified on the basis of what they knew and how they expressed themselves. To elaborate upon Tom Wolfe's (1984) descriptive
The purpose of this paper is to examine types of academic reality and how some come to be viewed as correct and others as wrong in an environment ostensibly dedicated to the promulgation of multiple viewpoints and to the examination of ideas. The discussion will be limited to graduate art education programs and how the particular characteristics of individual universities inculcate selected knowledge, assumptions, and procedures that lose their human authorship and become taken-for-granted. Integral to most socialization processes is the development of a resistance to looking at one's learned assumptions and procedures as being relative in time and space. The following aspects will be discussed in terms of how they contribute toward the shaping of academic consciousness: (1) socialization procedures of graduate art education, (2) the failure and limitations of even reflexive modes of inquiry to make graduate experiences relative, and (3) assumptions shared by art educators and other New Class intellectuals (Gouldner, 1979).

Most of us who observed the candidates' interview sessions have subsequently, I am sure, learned all too well during our own job interviews at other universities that right thinking has little to do with a higher order of truth and a great deal to do with the university environment one happens to be in at the time. Yet, the patterns of thought and the procedures of investigation acquired during graduate study persist and remain a powerful influence on one's academic reality set, as basic similarities among the mature work of graduates from the same university often reveal. I am proposing that socialization processes in graduate programs offer attractive rewards to those who become proficient in the manipulation of selected types of knowledge construction and modes of investigation. Conversely, undesirable consequences have been known to befall those who fail to internalize their program's condoned assumptions and procedures of study.

SOCIALIZATION PROCEDURES OF GRADUATE EDUCATION

In this paper, the socialization procedures of graduate education are discussed within the framework of a social theory of knowledge distribution. According to Gouldner (1979), in the nineteenth century the control of production and capital drastically changed from the Old Class who possessed durable goods to the New Class who possessed knowledge and information which were validated by acquiring academic credentials. This New Class consists of intellectuals and technocrats who possess concepts and skills that enable them to manipulate ideas and processes in both prescribed and new ways. In our rapidly expanding information society, abstract knowledge has become a commodity traded through educational systems which provide avenues for upward mobility. Intellectual capital provides access to incomes and the ability to exercise one's potential in a socially condoned manner.

As our stepped educational system aptly attests, membership in the New Class entails a lengthy process of learning highly socialized and specialized codes for processing information. For many occupations, graduate study is the culminating educational experience for induction into the New Class. Graduate creden-
tials are an indication of a refined understanding of the knowledge base and procedures of a given area of study. The major contradiction of the New Class is that while it wishes to extend its membership -- inasmuch as its social value is related to the size and prestige of its membership -- at the same time its capital value is dependent on maintaining exclusionary practices (Gouldner, 1979). Capital had meaning, significance, and power only to the extent it is desired and is accessible through procedures that eliminate some aspirants. If essentially anyone could easily gain access to a New Class occupation, its capital would be devalued. It is herein that selected and exclusionary types of reality emerge that acquire -- and actually require -- a commitment resulting in reification. Reification occurs when the historicity, human authorship, and reality of an idea, value, or behavior becomes obscured (Apple, 1979; Bowers, 1984).

The New Class is composed of various knowledge bases and operating procedures for a variety of occupations and disciplines. History and ongoing developments provide each discipline with a variety of schools of thought from which to choose their intellectual bases. In other words, there are within the New Class types of knowledge and procedures more or less specific to each occupational area, and, within each area, such as art education, there is a further differentiation of selected knowledge bases.

The rather generalized child-society-subject triad of Ralph Tyler (1949) has been used to describe the focus of programs and eras in art education (Hamblen, 1985). Erland's (1979) differentiation of aesthetic and psychological schools of thought into mimetic-behaviorist, pragmatic-cognitive, expressive-psychanalytic, and objectivist-gestalt has been applied to curricular foci. Designations such as these provide convenient labels for describing varied and wide-ranging phenomena. Most graduate programs, however, have a much more differentiated and esoteric knowledge base that eludes such categorizations. The nature of this knowledge base and the difficulties encountered in understanding it make it desirable and give it power. Also, it is the knowledge base's relative inaccessibility that makes the socialization processes of New Class learning especially potent and long-lasting. A graduate program knowledge base cannot be learned half-heartedly. In the hectic pace and intense focus of graduate study, students must learn a range of foundational information as well as quickly figure out which research topics and methods of inquiry are preferred within their graduate program. Historical origins and relativity of knowledge and procedures are not continually probed. While taking a statistics class and working with maximum variance in factor analysis it is doubtful many graduates have learned that this procedure "arose historically with reference to a definite theory of intelligence (Thurstone's belief in independent primary mental abilities) and in opposition to another (general intelligence and hierarchy of lesser factors) buttressed by principal components" (Gould, 1981, p. 301). I am proposing that graduate programs select bases of knowledge that are in favor, that these are exclusionary, and that they become reifications due to the powerful reinforcements involved.

Selective Distribution
Within Art Education

In art education there is a selective distribution of knowledge. Although individual programs change over time with personnel changes, they also exhibit a recognizable character based on the types of academic reality which are given
credence. This is what we, as graduate students, readily recognize in candidates from other universities and often saw as being a matter of wrong thinking.

Particular types of inquiry can be seen in dissertations from particular universities. One might be fairly accurate in predicting that many Pennsylvania State University dissertations would have a phenomenological focus during the 1970's. During this time, the University of Oregon was represented by a number of dissertations with a sociocultural framework placed on art instructional phenomena. The University of Illinois has had a fair number of dissertations based on the empirical investigation of the psychology of responses to art; Stanford graduates have often written on the use of educational criticism as a mode of analysis. Even greater differentiation of patterning can be ascertained by looking at the dissertations produced under the guidance of particular mentors at these universities.

That types of inquiry and ultimately meaning are a matter of social conditioning and are relative to one's purpose is highly evident in who is quoted and by whom within research circles. Broudy (1985) has noted that, even when a number of scholars are dealing with a fairly narrow topic, their references will differ. For example, he found that among four scholars who compiled a reference list of fifty to ninety sources on a given topic only five sources were repeated and those sources were works by the four scholars.

There is no one particular body of knowledge required of an area of study. As our hapless candidate often found out, reference to a researcher not currently in favor was a breach of etiquette tantamount to making unseemly noises at the dinner table. In some art education programs, Lowenfeld's ideas still shape the focus and modes of inquiry. In others, mention of his name in anything other than a critical tone or because of historical necessity will cause one to lose points. The bad blood generated between Lowenfeld and Schaefer-Simmern in the 1950's is still a controversial issue on some campuses, generally falling along the lines of professors who had them as their advisors or who were, in turn, schooled by professors who worked under them. In some art education departments, Carl Jung is best considered two four-lettered words. In others, one must believe that art provides avenues to the ineffable and that art can unite all of humanity in a common vision--or one risks being labelled a positivist. Examples of who is in, who is out, who is a nobody, what sources are current, which ones are passe, how particular sources are to be interpreted, which research modes are preferred, and so on, could, with some research, be cited for each art education program in the United States.

One can reasonably argue that program differences are necessary for the vitality of any field; they provide graduate study choices, and they result in research being produced from a variety of perspectives. These benefits are not being disputed. Rather, I am proposing that due to the highly selective information and procedures in each program and due to the attractive rewards to be gained and the punishments to be avoided from adhering to the tenets of a specific program, a program's knowledge base is often not seen as relative to human selection and authorship. It becomes seen as the correct way to understand the field of art education.

**Education as a Means of Socialization**

In this discussion, socialization is being used interchangeably with education. Sociology of knowledge theorists suggest that knowledge
and modes of inquiry do not exist as entities separate from human selection, interpretation, and significance (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Bowers, 1984). To participate in any educational process is to participate in learning what has been given some type of social group validation. It may mean learning to discuss the refinement of aesthetic sensibilities as the main reason for art criticism instruction and to consider only artistic exemplars as valid objects of study. Conversely, one may learn to consider art criticism as primarily an analytic tool and to believe that all artistic forms are worthy of study. In graduate study, these and myriad other distinctions are learned in lectures, discussions, the writing of research papers, and so on. They become the substance of frames of thinking that will be applied to current and, more than likely, future problem-solving. Both knowledge bases and modes of inquiry become a part of what Bowers (1984) has called the deep structure of our thinking and which Apple (1979) has metaphorically located at the bottom of our brains to indicate its imbeddedness.

This is not to suggest that doctoral candidates are passive creatures, soaking up whatever is environmentally offered like some Skinnerian sponge. They do question and give their own interpretations, often vehemently disagreeing with their university professors, and after graduation may produce research very different from what was current in their graduate program. Some graduate students, however, consciously select a university based on the types of reality sets in which they wish to be educated and the professional network they wish to develop. To some extent, through this choice, they participate in constructing the knowledge base and modes of inquiry that tend to become reified as they proceed through the graduate socialization process. They are, in effect, fairly willing and eager to become expertly socialized within some selected shape of academic reality. Even among those who wish to question the process, there are powerful incentives to conform and procedures operating to minimize dissent. As one progresses through the educational system, "one becomes increasingly reticent to tamper with that system in any significant way.... As one becomes more central to the system less deviation is acceptable because it has a more profound impact on the system as a whole.... The institution does not select... those who will potentially do it harm by making sweeping changes. The strongest institutions accept dissenters into peripheral positions, giving these dissenters a chance to accept parts of the system, thus developing a stake in that system. Dissent is thereby dealt with through a co-opting rather than confrontational technique. (Anderson, 1985, p.22-23).

Reinforcements in Graduate Study

Among the growing research of folklorists are collected stories on the anxieties and perils of writing a dissertation in which instances of lost, misplaced, stolen, and destroyed dissertations have been related (Lipson-Walker, 1983). To this body of research could be added accounts of changed dissertation topics to fit committee members' wishes, how dissertation committees are selected, and so on. Within the oral tradition of art education, there is the perhaps apocryphal account of the professor who would lock his office door, turn out the lights, and then hide out on the fire escape to elude a persistent doctoral student. And, there are the comic-tragic accounts of students having to schedule committee meetings in the mornings because by the afternoon a professor's liquid lunch would have taken effect.

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Psychologists, political pollingsters, and business managers might do well to study how graduates select their doctoral committees as one of the most sophisticated, finely tuned decision-making examples in today's society. This is a high-stakes decision wherein types of academic reality of different professors encountered during graduate work must be delicately balanced and reflected in one's own work or, at the very least, not criticized. Graduate students have been pampered and given every type of assistance; they have also been terrorized by personality conflicts, innumerable dissertation rewrites, and ambiguous expectations.

In a variety of fields, there have been publicized accounts of students who have failed to finish their programs because their controversial research would cause their university to lose the support of powerful foundations or lose exchange students from a potentially offended foreign government. At some universities, individual doctoral dissertations must fit within a larger research project. Failure to work with the project can mean interminable delays in finishing the program. One is reminded of the jaded definition of a successful student as being one who knows how to adjust his/her thinking to conform to the requirements of the situation.<2>

Characteristics of Academia and Academics

That professors educate within a particular academic reality set is to be expected. Professors are in the business of professing. They are often hired for their strong, distinctive, and well-developed research in a fairly narrow area of study. As a significant other, they are formidable. They have an elaborated speech code that is not easily assailed. But again, graduate students do not enter programs to become skeptics regarding their home university program. Graduate students are poised to believe, and only with difficulty may come to admit that a formerly admired mentor has been found to have feet of clay.

Graduate students are expected to develop a finely tuned sense of skepticism regarding the work of art educators elsewhere, but if such criticism is openly directed toward their own program, they may find themselves without any mentors, let alone a friendly doctoral committee. Not only must graduate students avoid criticizing the specific work of their own professors, they also must be careful that their ideas are not too divergent from their professors' general frames of reference. For example, Lowenfeld was not known for producing a generation of art education graduates who were either critical of his work or of his views on a variety of subjects. This does not suggest they were passive, unthinking individuals, but, rather, that in selecting to study under him, they were predisposed to some extent to his viewpoint.

Doctoral students, more than many others in society, have been rewarded throughout much of their formal education for thoroughly learning information presented to them. They have often become very proficient in the business of being a student. As they have focused on a particular program of graduate study, their types of academic reality became more finely tuned and discriminating. These types of reality take on a correctness which is questioned at the peril of lower grades, lack of support for a graduate assistantship, numerous dissertation proposal rewrites, a lingering dissertation, and, to some extent, a loss of personal stability. As in most socializing situations, it is infinitely easier to believe and conform that it is to dissent. Duplicity within a doctoral program is not easily maintained.

Doctorates are not necessarily given to the most creative peo-
ple, but more often to those who have learned to conduct themselves in such a way as to successfully make it through all the required rites of passage. A certain kind of acceptance of the status quo is required of those who would advance through the educational system—either acceptance or phenomenal cunning and patience. (Anderson, 1985, p. 24)

Ostensibly, universities are in the business of educating for critical thinking and for encompassing multiple viewpoints. Yet, one can read of professors who are not granted tenure for their political views or, perhaps, for their less than Puritan life-styles. The seriousness of thinking or doing the wrong stuff is evident in the fairly common and lingering idea-feuds between professors who have different viewpoints. Orwell's (1949) and Koestler's (1941) chilling accounts of mind control indicate that a fearful onus can be placed on making ideological errors in thought as well as in deed. In our information society, it is not just a matter of outwardly acting correctly. One's ideas—and the values and assumptions integral to those ideas—must also be properly aligned.

As Gouldner (1979) has discussed, ideas are a commodity; they are a form of capital. Capital as hard cash can be used to buy real estate; capital as ideas can be used to influence meanings, values, and actions that have few geographic restraints. Star doctoral candidates produce research that furthers their mentor's ideas much as favored children physically and emotionally resemble their parents. Starting with graduate school, a network of contacts and of mentors is built that can have important implications for future employment, editorships, consultancies, and so on (Hamblen, 1986). A community of like-minded thinking is built up around ideas, forming a subculture of occupational-ly related identifiable members. It is this professional subcultural component developing around ideas that provides the designations of insider and outsider and all the parochial protectionism that comes with believing that one's group is correct.

This is not to suggest that graduate faculty are intent on breaking the spirit of students or that students are isolated from divergent views. Quite the opposite is true, and this latitude, in fact, tends to give the patina of correctness to the reality the student does finally acquire. A specious freedom of expression is implied in academia (Shaw, 1985). At any university there is a wealth of library resources, professors in other subjects areas with different views, and contacts with educators on national, state, and local levels. The academic is portrayed as being actively involved in weighing alternatives, engaging in debate, refining positions, and questioning premises. The appearance of choice is everywhere. Moreover, most professors want students to develop into independent, critical thinkers who are able to base their arguments on a wealth of ideas. Yet, such critical thinking occurs within assumptions of shared definitions of what is and what is not correct. Selected assumptions offer approaches for looking at a range of phenomena which, throughout one's graduate program, are used as part of one's argumentation, are made public, and are subject to review. Students practice defending and refining their developing reality set and devising lines of thought to repudiate and deflate criticism of their views. A lengthy series of formal and informal reinforcements and implied and real threats operate to socialize the graduate student into particular modes of thinking.
MODES OF INVESTIGATION

Within the university environment, dedicated to the presentation of multiple viewpoints, one would think that processes of investigation would mitigate against the reification of knowledge and modes of inquiry. Such is not the case. Bowers (1984) suggests that modes of inquiry such as positivism and rationalism obscure their human authorship and tend to provide their own justification. "Positivism lends its own form of legitimization to the idea that knowledge is socially neutral. Challenging positivism, particularly within the university setting, is a lonely formidable challenge indeed" (Bowers, 1984, p. 69). According to Bowers, rationally fails to "grasp the nature of reality and to take control of it from the mystifying forces of history...reason itself is shaped by the unconscious history embedded in the language through which we derive the cognitive maps that serve as the basis of the rational process" (p. 69).

Hermeneutics, phenomenology, and existentialism have often been offered as antidotes to ahistoricism and asocial positions. They are considered approaches that can make explicit the relativity of experiences and meanings throughout time and space. This paper's examination of types of academic reality in graduate study falls into this general category of reflexive inquiry. However, such an approach should not lull us into believing that some greater truth is thereby being revealed. The fallacy of self-reflexive modes of inquiry is that they also cannot escape their historicity and a selected framework of assumptions. Reflexive approaches are also subject to reification and exclusionary attitudes toward other modes of inquiry. An examination of one's own premises is a twentieth century phenomenon that is evident in a variety of New Class disciplines and is very much part of modernity (Foucault, 1970; Gouldner, 1979; Hamblen, 1983).

It is not the purpose of this paper to proffer a solution to what could easily develop into a regression of problematizing stances, i.e., an examination of one's examination ad infinitum. It is, however, being proposed that graduate programs with reflexive modes of inquiry are no more immune to a reification and parochialism of their methodology than positivism, rationalism, or whatever. Ironically, a methodology that incorporates a problematizing, reflexive stance can give a sense of correctness specifically because a stable truth is not being claimed.

NEW CLASS VALUES IN ART EDUCATION

Part of the reason for the reification of varying types of academic reality that may even encompass problematizing modes of inquiry is that art education shares in the altruistic values of the New Class. Members of the New Class believe that they are the guardians and promulgators of knowledge that is necessary for individual and societal well-being (Gouldner, 1979). Their motives and actions are embedded in the democratic and humanistic principles of equality, honesty, and caring. The rhetoric of art education literature would have one believe "that there is not a mean bone in art education's collective body" (Hamblen, 1986, p.102). It is easy to assume a correctness of knowledge and mode of inquiry when one's ideas and actions are focused toward aesthetic enlightenment, social understanding, individual awareness, improving the quality of life, and so on.

New Class intellectuals are not merely content to act. They are also actively involved in examining their own acts. There is the implication that such self-reflexion will eliminate bias. When involved in what is socially defined as a worthy cause,
it is easy to forget that one is making selections from a range of possibilities and that one's own shape of consciousness is also part of the examining consciousness. One only need be in a class where a self-reflexive model of inquiry is mandatory to see that there can also be a dictatorship of compulsory openness and benevolence. The failure to examine types of reality in art education as a function of relative socialization processes is, in part, a function of sharing in the New Class belief that methodologies based on good intentions equate with right thinking.

SUMMARY

Most research in art education has been applied to education at the elementary and secondary levels, with little interest focused on the assumptions and life world circumstances of those who carry out such research and who formulate policy. Attention needs to be directed to the socialization processes to which art educators are subject and the implications of those processes.

This paper has dealt with an examination of how graduate students in art education learn types of academic reality based on the selected knowledge bases and modes of inquiry particular to their university's program. These knowledge bases and modes of inquiry take on a reified correctness and lose their historicity and human authorship due to the rigorous socialization process and the reward system of graduate education. New Class members' belief that they are engaged in improving the conditions of society and are acting without self-interest also obscures the selection process and relativity of individual knowledge bases.

In this paper, no solution is offered to eliminate the parochialism and exclusionary attitudes that develop around types of reality in art education. A social theory of knowledge distribution has been deemed applicable in this instance to examine the circumstances of art education graduate study. This author agrees with Donmoyer's (1984) belief that research approaches need to be evaluated, not on an apriori set of criteria, but on the basis of the purposes and meanings relative to one's intent. In other words, thinking the right stuff can be mostly a matter of deciding what one wishes to accomplish.

References


Footnotes

1 I wish to thank Dr. Kristen Congdon for bringing this source to my attention.

2 After a particularly grueling series of statistic assignments, my education professor jokingly remarked that individuals with doctorates are in high demand, not because of what they know, but because they do whatever the task demands.

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