DBAE. This is not a push for Visual Culture, although it is about the visual that takes place in the classroom (usually outside of the vision of the pushers). This is a shift in perception, an ear that performs beyond its limits, or an eye that hears. This is a synaesthetics.

Art educators have much to learn from those who refuse to speak, students who stand when asked to sit, students who defy the dictatorial impulse available to all educators, students who remain mute when expected to scream. This embodied silence has the potential to re-order, to open new possibilities for critique and creation, to inform our practice more than hearing the echoes of our own voices in the classroom.

Notes
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References


As a university supervisor, I have the opportunity to observe preservice teachers as they fulfill their student teaching practicum. Part of my task is to assess their performance, including their competence in content, instructional strategies, classroom management and organization. Some of my student teachers deliver art programs that emphasize media, processes, elements and principles. Many also focus on historical and critical inquiry. Some student teachers have already developed effective classroom management and organizational strategies. But is this evidence of quality art education that will prepare students for life's challenges? Are we denying students the opportunity to experience the transformative properties of arts education when we impose too much control on the environment? Are we playing it safe in the classroom rather than personalizing learning and dealing with real life issues? Coming to school ready to learn currently means more than just food in their stomachs and shoes on their feet. It may mean dealing with tough issues, such as the threat of terrorism, abuse, oppression, isolation, fear, racism, prejudices and intolerance. These are the silences in art education. Silence that becomes the norm is what Freire (1970) calls a "culture of silence" that eventually reflects one's subordinate position. Meanwhile, art educators wonder why students are not motivated to learn about content such as the Italian Renaissance or French Impressionist painting.
As educators we make a commitment to prepare future generations to participate effectively in our emerging political and social democracy. John Dewey (1916) states that the classroom is a microcosm for society and that we can provide experiences that provide habits of mind for full participation. This requires the ability to engage in civic dialogue and to have a deep understanding of ourselves in relation to our world. Yet students do not always perceive our schools as having connections to real life issues. Victor Lowenfeld (1982) said,

Students consider education primarily as the imposition of already established truths, with little or no concern paid to their personal needs or desires. There is no course aimed at providing the high school student with knowledge about himself, his own struggle in society, or even about the dreams he may have for the future (p. 398).

My observations and consultations with student teachers and cooperating teachers have supplied me with additional information on current practices in arts education. During a painting lesson that integrated Japanese landscapes, one disgruntled sixth grader sat at her desk and refused to participate. When approached by the art teacher, the unmotivated student rolled her eyes and exclaimed, "What do I care, those aren't my people!" This statement is a loud cry for thematic, inclusive, cross-cultural curriculum that personalizes the art experience for all learners. In some local school districts, elementary students receive art instruction approximately one hour each week. If the art teacher introduces one culture per lesson, it could take 6 weeks before the teacher presents the student with a lesson that relates to her own culture. For this reason, it is important to understand how cross-cultural arts education can enhance learning when it includes the beliefs, values, and patterns that give meaning to our daily lives. Culture is not static, but a dynamic entity that is part of our personal, national, and global existence (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001). Students need arts experiences that make connections to their own belief systems, their values, and traditions.

This article looks at ways that art classes may be unintentionally silencing the voices of individual students. Suggestions are given for encouraging empowerment and providing a nurturing environment for individual voices to be heard. Finally, a matrix of inquiry into the visual arts, including the moral dimensions of teaching is provided to guide this effort of inclusive curriculum.

The arts can be a place for helping us understand ourselves, our culture in relation our world, and to cope with the challenges of life. Indeed it is the best curriculum for understanding the human experience (Eisner, 2002). While the art room is often considered a place for stimulating creative and divergent thinking, many art rooms unintentionally promote silence by emphasizing classroom organization, management and formal instructional strategies that make weak connections to students' lives.

We may promote silence in students when:

We impose too much control.

We don't allow them to talk or share perspectives other than those that match our own.

We stress skill and technique over art interpretation and reflection.

We dictate what, when and how students will create rather than facilitate an environment that enriches the creative process.
Give students voice when:

We give students new tools for communication.

We provide nurturing environment, a safe place to share, where all voices are valued.

We encourage creative and critical dialog.

We give permission to disagree.

We teach how to engage in civic dialog with others with diverse perspectives.

Sit Still, Listen and Learn!

Classroom management is essential for effective teaching and learning (Dornek, 1992; Susi, 1989, 1993). I consistently witness classrooms with students sitting quietly at their desks creating artwork. Teachers have different systems for getting their attention. Some use a phrase; such as “Give me five.” Some teachers turn the lights off then back on. Control and authority is established in classrooms through clear expectations and routine, resulting in fewer discipline problems. While I agree that classroom management is extremely important, we may silence students when we control their environment to the point that we stifle their creativity and discourage personal and collective voice. Students often sit in rows, are not allowed to speak, and are directed to create in the style of a certain artist or art period. Art history or aesthetics is often integrated, but sometimes at a superficial level. One teacher suggested that she had them sit in rows because it was safer than letting them “get out of control.” An alternative approach may be to facilitate problem-based environments where students work individually or in small groups, with each student’s role and objectives clearly defined.

Control over content is also observed at times in K12 classrooms. Constructivist learning theory focuses on student-centered learning with embedded assessment (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). New teachers’ attempts to create student-centered learning often means art activities that direct students to include their favorite color, or their favorite pet, rather than focus on larger concepts or universal themes that prompt critical or divergent thinking. Using a theme such as, “Art shows us more than one perspective on an idea, issue or emotion”, students can compare and contrast the work of Thomas Hart Benton’s Hailstorm, and Grant Wood’s Stone City Iowa, and engage in critical analysis to discover the different mood and perceptions of these mid-western landscapes. Students can engage in dialogue and create works of art communicating their own perspectives on an idea, issue or emotion.

Social reconstructivist focus on using the arts as stewards in the community, acting as change agents. They use the multiple cultures to focus on real issues and practice democratic action for the benefit of disenfranchised social and cultural groups. The results of social reconstruction reach outside the school setting to the larger community (Sleet & Grant, 1988; Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Stuhr, 1994). Based on the theoretical framework of Freire (1970) who is well known for his emphasis on dialogue, empowerment and transformation through informed action; social reconstructivist focus primarily on social change. Henry Giroux (1988) builds on the work of Freire to encourage critical pedagogy and specifically dialogue that examines the social and political dominant ideologies propagated in educational institutions. He encourages critical pedagogy as a solution to transform a culture of silence into a culture of possibility, which leads to different forms of knowing.
As art educators in a multicultural, global society, we are further encouraged to critically examine the myths and assumptions which are a part of every culture (Bowers, 1974). Students can engage in comprehensive arts activities to identify and celebrate the unique aspects of their own culture, and use their cultural identity as a means for contrast and study of other cultural ideologies. When sharing information with the socially constructed realities of all groups, it is important that all power structures be diminished, and the aesthetic criteria of the non-dominant cultures be provided. In doing so, minority groups will more fully become a part of the classroom culture.

Age appropriate instructional strategies can be used that incorporate problem solving methodologies that involve real life issues. Very young students can feel empowered when they have choices and can affect change. For example, one-third grade class brainstormed responses to the prompts, 1) If I could change one thing about my school it would be... 2) One thing I can do about this situation is... After some deliberation, the class decided that the one problem that they wanted to focus on as a group was the problem of the location of the playground. They had to be quiet during recess because the playground was too near one building and the noise disturbed classes in progress. They then brainstormed solutions. A new playground location was decided upon, playground equipment designed, and models were created. The art teacher still taught principles and elements of design, art history, aesthetics, and discussed art in context. Students researched architecture and reported their findings of artists who created art in public spaces. The classroom teacher worked collaboratively to integrate math, language arts, and social sciences. Budgets were written, funding opportunities were discussed, and letters were written to administrators and board members. Throughout the project, the class engaged in dialog about the process. They discussed the democratic process, students were allowed to make choices, and all students participated.

They experienced the necessary tension between individual and collective voice. As a result of the project, they were given permission to move their recess to a different time until funding could be obtained to build a new playground at the new location. Students felt empowered throughout the process.

**Truth or Consequences?**

College students in my art methods classes are sometimes skeptical of revealing their true feelings for fear of being wrong in class. We may silence students when we don’t allow them to talk, to share perspectives other than those that match our own. We may not realize that a hidden curriculum discourages diverse perspectives. I usually structure art critiques differently each time we have a class critique, and then we reflect on the art critique process. One critique model requires that all students participate. Another model allows a few students in class to dominate the conversations about art. Students reflect on advantages and disadvantages of each model so that they can make informed decisions as future educators. Many students are too concerned about the teacher’s viewpoint, or they seek a “right answer”. So, I purposefully strive to say as little as possible during critiques to allow student voices to flourish. This strategy almost backfired one time. When I finally spoke up during a class critique, suggesting that many do not view occupational folk arts as a viable art form and solicited student opinions on the matter, one student spoke up relieved. She finally admitted that she previously did not want to reveal that she did not accept occupational folk arts as appropriate art forms for arts education during our art critique, because she could tell from the nature of the conversation that the majority of those participating in the conversation did not feel the same way that she did. We then discussed the value of dialog and respect for differing perspectives, using art as example.
Not only should our art lessons allow for sharing of perspectives that do not match our own, it should include all individual students in the learning community. Lessons should reflect valuing a variety of arts experiences for all students and allow for multiple understandings through arts integration. For instance, there is more than one way to approach art, and there can be multiple meanings of art. Allowing students the opportunity to engage in dialog and share their own perspectives including personal experiences combined with aesthetic responses in a nurturing environment can encourage individual voice and empowerment. The teacher or facilitator should be sure that all perspectives are brought forth and maintain a neutral stance on the issue.

Silence can be perpetuated when we stress skill and technique over art interpretation and reflection. Elementary art is often taught on a tight schedule, sometimes in 30-40 minute sessions. When time is short, art education often consists of a short demonstration of the skill or technique required, directions or expectations, distribution of art materials, art making, then clean up. Closure with review of content is often omitted, along with art interpretation and reflection. Personalization of the learning experience is strained when students are rushed to create and see no connections to life or personal experience.

When we dictate what, when and how students will create rather than facilitate an environment that enriches the creative process, we silence students. As a college student in arts education, I was immersed in the Discipline-Based Arts Education approach. My early years as an art teacher were during the time when all administrators required all teachers to integrate a multicultural component to all lessons. I watched as all teachers scrambled to include something about any culture in their lessons, even at the risk of tokenism. Tokenism “not only trivializes the aesthetic production of all socio-cultural groups, but, what is worse, it avoids confronting the real challenge of critically apprehending the meaning of the object, artist, and process in the social-cultural context” (Stuhr, Petrovich-Mwaniki, and Wasson, 1992, p. 21). My first lessons consisted of art lessons that introduced students to one culture, then proceed to mimic their artistic creations, thereby trivializing their contributions. Fortunately, my education has evolved to thematic, cross-cultural, inclusive curriculum. Students should be active participants in problem solving, contributing members of a learning community. Art products should be original and reflect depth and breadth of content and process.

**Voice and Empowerment**

Playing it safe in the artroom may mean teaching art content with no connections to real life issues, and maintaining control over the environment. Teaching real art to real students means personalizing the learning to provide quality comprehensive arts education that prepares them for participation in a civil society. We empower students when we allow them to develop individual and collective voice. John Goodlad, et al. (1990) and colleagues discuss teaching as a moral endeavor and introduce a four part mission for a healthy democracy; (a) nurturing pedagogy, (b) access to knowledge for all, (c) enculturating the young in a social and political democracy, and (c) serving as stewards of schools.

We empower our students when we provide a nurturing environment, a safe place to share, where all voices are valued. It is essential to make connections to the larger world outside schools. We must model respect and help students share what they learn. Encourage creative and critical dialog. Explore pedagogical strategies that encourage creative and critical thinking and encourage stimulating intellectual conversations between students. This may include challenging students’ existing pre-assumptions, creating innovative
anticipatory sets, or intriguing problem-based learning experiences. Give permission to disagree.

We live in a nation where people from all parts of the world contribute many cultural resources. Through the arts, we can teach students how to engage in civic dialogue with others with diverse perspectives. Therefore, it is appropriate to teach our students the habits of mind to function successfully in this democracy. The arts model democratic concepts such as respect, loyalty, patience, courage, self-respect, confidence, honesty, multiple, empathy and tolerance (Smith, 2000) and can provide access to knowledge for all students. They can provide rich learning opportunities for students who possess different learning styles, preferences, and abilities.

Cross-cultural art education does not mimic cultural art objects, nor does it focus on just one culture. Rather, it suggests we select on a universal theme and explore how different cultures express their responses to that theme (Chalmers, 1996). It addresses issues of voice, exclusion, and bias. Cross-cultural art education helps us to focus on “what is portrayed, what is written and communicated, whose voices are included and whose are silenced” (Hurwitz & Day, p. 35).

In order to insure that our democracy remains alive, we need to create authentic learning experiences in school that prepare students for real life. Enculturing the young into a social and political democracy includes practicing and modeling the democratic processes. The arts model how cultures pass down traditions from generation to generation.

Teachers have an obligation to be socially and politically active. The needs and rights of communities and the public good need to be protected. Serving as stewards of the schools means to confront key issues and standing up for what you believe in. It requires focusing on the tension between the individual and common good. Public art, censorship, and aesthetics are starting points for acting as stewards in the community. Helping teachers learn how to develop comprehensive arts curriculum that prepares students for success in a democracy can be challenging. The following process/content diagram is an example of a curriculum development tool used by classroom teachers integrating the arts.

**Inquiry into the Visual Arts**

The process/content diagram was developed by the Prairie Visions Nebraska Consortium for Arts Education as a guide for teachers developing comprehensive art curriculum that is thematic, cross-cultural, and inclusive (See the chart at the end of the essay). This matrix includes inquiry into the visual arts and the moral dimensions of teaching. These questions guide teachers as they select appropriate art images, design curriculum, and make connections to real life. It also contains the cultural, historical, critical, aesthetic, creative, and moral perspectives.

Over 100 teachers attending a summer professional development program in the Midwest received training on the characteristics of comprehensive arts education, including thematic, inquiry-based, cross-cultural, standards-based, curriculum development. Teachers worked in teams as they discovered the disciplines of art, including the cultural/historical perspective, the critical perspective, and aesthetic and technical/creative perspective. They were also introduced to the moral dimensions of teaching and the importance of preparing students for life in a democracy. A process/content diagram was distributed to guide teachers as they developed quality art-based curriculum.

Teachers worked in teams to design interdisciplinary units. One team used the process/content diagram to develop a unit on public sculpture. The theme of the unit was “Art commemorates important people or events in our lives.” The essential questions for the unit were:
1. How do we memorialize significant people or events in our lives?
2. What roles does art play in the collective memory of a society?
3. What is good art and who gets to decide?
4. How does art relate to a specific time/place or culture?
5. What is more important: artistic freedom or the collective good?

The questions on the process/content diagram helped teachers with the selection process in deciding which examples of public sculpture to include in the lesson. The question, "What am I going to choose to study?" or "Is this interesting to me?" may be a starting point for selecting images such as the following public sculpture: Jefferson Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, and the Washington monument. However, if we use the diagram as a guide, we may discover that further investigation and additional images may be necessary for introducing an inclusive curriculum. The Moral Perspective: Access to Learning For All says: Do my lessons allow multiple understandings through arts integration? I am not certain that the three images originally selected portray multiple understandings, rather a singular perspective. Another question on the Process/Content diagram: The Moral Perspective: Stewardship question asks: Do my choices allow students to feel ownership of their learning? With my current selection, will my Native American students feel ownership? Will these images communicate the theme of Art commemorates important events or people in our lives to all my students?

These questions may lead me to include images of other cultures. The three images selected represent monuments in our nation's capital. All three images represent the singular perspective of white males, specifically our nation's presidents'. While these images do demonstrate the theme of art (public art) commemorating important events or people in our lives, it would be good to create a more inclusive curriculum. So, in using the current example, the team added the Vietnam memorial, which was created by a young Asian female. It contrasted with the typical memorial in that it was not a statue of a recognizable figure, but a contemporary sculpture. They created a lesson that revealed the controversy and resolution of the competition and selection of the Vietnam memorial. They engaged in small group discussion surrounding democratic issues such as, who should decide, and how to resolve conflict. When reflecting on the enculturation of youth in a social and political democracy, it is important to help students understand the necessary tension between individual and collective voice. So in revisiting the question Do my lessons help students value the balance between the individual and the community? (Moral Perspective on the process/content diagram) educators designed art activities that confronted real world issues, and in an effort to help students see the larger view of the world. They designed a group community art project that allowed students to engage in problem solving. After designing the lesson, educators referred once again to the process/content diagram, but this time, it was used as a self-assessment tool. They reflected on the processes and content of the lesson. “Do my lessons encourage students to see a larger view of the world? Do my teaching methods allow students to engage in rich understandings at a variety of levels? Do my lessons provide access for all my students? Do my lessons connect art to life? If these questions can be answered favorably, then the lessons are most likely characteristic of an exemplary comprehensive arts unit.

The ideas suggested here are not intended to be prescriptive, nor is the process/content diagram meant to be linear. Educators can select any question on the diagram as a starting point for inquiry into the visual arts. It serves as a guide when developing meaningful art-based curriculum.
Conclusion

Many art classrooms teach art lessons that seem successful. Students behave and create art products that look similar. But we may be perpetuating silence of valued voices. Balaisis (1997) states that children “are easily silenced... and they often learn to internalize the censor and remain quiet” (p. 84). Comprehensive arts education can model democratic processes that prepare students for living in a global society. By providing real life learning experiences in an inclusive model we can teach students how to engage in civil dialog. The arts help us to discover our personal and collective identity. They can provide an avenue for expression, for nurturing our souls, and activating our individual and collective voice. In doing so, we are contributing to the safety of society by creating a new generation of students that will be the voice of our future.
References


