Editorial: Being OTHER(W)ise

Wanda B. Knight

While traveling in England during Spring 2009, I had the opportunity to see the London production of the musical Wicked, a prequel to a cultural icon ingrained in our nation’s psyche, the classic version of the The Wizard of Oz. Told from the perspective of the alleged wicked witch, Wicked celebrates the obvious notion; there is anOTHER side to the standard story.

Most of us, at some point in our lives, can relate to being looked at as different or outsider, like the green-skinned, black-clad, smart, caring young lady, Elphaba, whom the Wizard’s propaganda machine demonized as wicked. From the play, we find out Elphaba wasn’t wicked after all; she was just misunderstood. Opening our minds and hearts to differing points of view can be likened to opening doors to new forms of knowledge otherwise unknown or unknown otherwise.¹

Knowledge: Otherwise Unknown or Unknown Otherwise

Volume 28/29 of the Journal of Social Theory in Art Education explores the theme OTHER(W)ise. The theme opened doors for contributing authors to focus on “the other,” and on different or otherwise untapped art topics, apart from supposed or expected topics. Moreover, it opened doors for them to look at other forms of wisdom and knowledge, and what constitutes that knowledge and wisdom, how it is organized and who is empowered to teach it, and just as critically, what qualifies as evidence of having learned it.

¹ The author of this editorial took the picture of the closed door on the cover of the journal, while traveling in Cambridge, England, Spring 2009.
In keeping with the spirit of the call for papers for Volume 28/29, the five contributing authors considered different methods and means to ensure that invisibility and silence of some forms of knowledge do not normalize others and, therefore, maintain their dominance. Moreover, other eyes as implied by the “ise” in OTHER(W)ise proved to be fodder for each author to introduce new perspectives that help shape the vision for the field of art education in exciting new directions we might not have explored otherwise.

Rolling introduces OTHER(W)ise through a series of narratives that highlight different categories of bodies, some not like the others—those that belong and others that do not belong. Sweeny focuses his article on a fantasy piece of classroom technology that allows teachers to have not only purported “eyes in the back of their heads” but eyes everywhere in the classroom. Buffington draws our attention to the technologies of Web 2.0, which she describes as being another means of creating knowledge for those who have Web access. Wilson McKay argues for transparency and vulnerability in self-other relations, touting their benefit in art education, while jagodzinski uses psychoanalytic deconstruction of two Journal of Art Education cover designs to bolster his argument for criticality in art education.

**Being Otherwise: Otherwise Being**

Far too often educators disregard the knowledge and wisdom that children from other cultures bring to the learning situation. Instead, teachers use their “socially positioned [cultural] lens” (Vavrus, 2002, p. 85) to draw conclusions about student competence, frequently labeling these children as failures because their backgrounds, languages, and cultures do not match theirs. As a perceived “other,” they are forced to resist dominant, narrow assumptions and acquire wisdom and knowledge, conduct, habits, and ways of being that prove they are otherwise.
In an article—titled *One of These Things Is Not Like the Other: Art Education and the Symbolic Interaction of Bodies and Self-Images*—inspired by an early 1970’s song on “Sesame Street,” James Rolling explores self-image and identity through a series of narratives that demonstrate human tendency to formulate social positional distinctions that create in-group and out-group dynamics that privilege some over others. “Why isn’t art education included in the same category as reading, writing, and arithmetic as one of the essentials of a good education? Why isn’t art education like the others? Why are students of color overwhelmingly pathologized as a special education population in public schools?” (p. 14). “Why aren’t Black boys included in the same category as those taken for granted as able-bodied, able-minded, and normal? Why aren’t Black boys and girls like the others?” (p. 16). These critical questions, among others, pop up throughout Rolling’s article, highlighting issues that warrant our deepest consideration—if we as a whole are committed to increasing the quality of art/education and equity of opportunity for learners.

**Other Eyes**

Robert Sweeny’s article, *The Pedagopticon: Other Eyes in the 21st Century Classroom*, is not like the others as it is a satirical look at the growth of contemporary surveillance used in U.S. classrooms as a means to control student behavior and discipline, among other things. While the technologies described as the *Pedagopticon* are imagined, Sweeny indicates, “the mechanisms behind them are all too real” (p. 30). Sweeny does not claim that surveillance technologies are inherently bad, he does; however, raise ethical and political issues about the ubiquity of surveillance technologies in the classroom, and in everyday life and culture, claiming that “the Pedagopticon not only makes educational sense—it makes cents” (p. 40).
Other Wisdom

Like Sweeny, Melanie Buffington’s article focuses on newer technologies. Interpreting the journal theme, OTHER(W)ise, “as meaning other ways of being wise or alternative approaches to generating knowledge,” Buffington—in Other(wise): The Myth of Wikipedia—highlights aspects of her experience, with Wikipedia, to emphasize opportunities and challenges presented by the technologies of Web 2.0 (p. 43). Following a critical examination of who creates content for the Web, how that content is created, whose ideas are represented, and who controls the information once it is released to the Web, Buffington concludes with a call to the field of art educators to create knowledge about art education on Wikipedia.

Similar to Buffington, Sara Wilson McKay calls on the field of art education to open doors to OTHER methods and means of increasing the quality of art education. In The Space Between: Intersubjective Possibilities of Transparency and Vulnerability in Art Education, Wilson McKay argues for an open attitude towards transparency and vulnerability in art education “in order to cultivate in our students ‘continual communication with, and responsibility to, concrete others’” (p. 73). Wilson McKay asserts that an open attitude toward transparency and vulnerability benefits both students and teachers in various ways. Further, she uses artwork and museum exhibitions as supporting examples to emphasize intersubjective relationships and social possibilities, touting that “It helps us see how important it is to see together. [And,] it helps us recognize we can never see the whole picture, and that relying on [anOTHER] to help us see more can minimize; yet, require personal vulnerability” (p. 73).

Jan Jagodziński’s article, Thinking of the Frame Otherwise: Putting Art Education into the Abyss of the Real, uses a form of psychoanalytic deconstruction as a strategy to examine two 1998 Journal of Art Education cover designs, with the goal of challenging
the field to retain a critical art education. Otherwise, he cautions us, absent such "a tension and commitment, ... the picture of our 'reality' stays 'rosy' and the encounters with the Real is missed" (p. 95).

Jagodzinski does not view art criticism so much as a hermeneutic act of criticism, but "a displacement of the act of looking as conditioned by the framed image so as to bring students to a condition of social, political, and ethical responsibility through a confrontation of the other" (p. 94). According to jagodzinski, this could prove to be one strategy among others "to continue the commitment to critical social transformations" (p. 96).

Returning briefly to *Wicked*, the musical that encourages us to look carefully at another side of the story, some forms of discourse in the United States remain as polarized as the good witch and the bad. However, collectively, the authors have dealt with topics related to otherness, other forms of wisdom, and other eyes. Even so, I challenge all art educators to locate a mirror and peer into your own eyes. Look intently until you see past the image in the mirror. Stare until you perceive the power within you to become the change you want to see. Hopefully, you will be motivated to face the prevailing winds by running against them, for a while.

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