Book Review

_Readings in Discipline-based Art Education: A Literature of Educational Reform_


Reviewed by Mary Ann Stankiewicz

_The Pennsylvania State University_

When I began reading Ralph Smith's compilation, I was struck by a strong sense of nostalgia, as well as by the comprehensiveness of his anthology. _Readings in Discipline-based Art Education_ is a book that art educators should own as a reference for intellectual history of art education in the late 20th century. The book is organized into seven sections: (1) interpretations of DBAE, (2) the disciplines of DBAE as contexts of understanding, (3) curriculum issues, subdivided into chapters on teaching and learning and chapters on implementation and evaluation, (4) artistic and aesthetic development, (5) professional development, (6) issues facing DBAE including the artist-teacher, elitism, feminist criticism of DBAE, and postmodernism (one chapter each), and (7) art museums and museum education. Each section includes a list of recommended readings to supplement the authors' reference lists; thus, this book is valuable as a guide to DBAE literature. Readers should, however, be aware of two issues: first, the power of an editor to shape what is available as the defining literature of the field; and, second, Smith's belief in the specialness of art and its privileged status outside of politics.

Smith's major contributions to aesthetic education have included his ability to summarize sophisticated philosophical arguments and explain their relevance to art education. One can regard this edited collection as a capstone to Smith's career. Although many art educators seem, like weather-vanes, to shift rationales with each change in the educational winds, Smith has been a steady compass needle consistently pointing toward what he believes is true north. This anthology shows us Smith's perspective on the northern exposure of DBAE, chilly perhaps to those raised in the sunny south of creativity and self-expression, but bracing. As a compass needle, Smith provides not only a guide for those heading due north, but also a point of comparison for those steering in other directions.

**Autobiographical Context**

My personal involvement with Discipline-based Art Education (DBAE) began in the spring of 1984. I attended a presentation by Leilani Lattin Duke, Director of the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, a branch of...
the J. Paul Getty Trust, at the National Art Education Association annual conference in Miami. In a hotel meeting room packed to standing room only with other art educators, all murmuring about the fact that a wealthy foundation was taking an interest in the status and condition of our professional field, I listened to Duke's description of plans to support "a new, more comprehensive approach" to art education (Duke, p. 17). During the conference the late Vincent Lanier introduced me to Dwaine Greer (pp. 207-214), who invited me to Los Angeles to observe the second summer of the Los Angeles Getty Institute. As my week of observations drew to a close, Ron Silverman interviewed me regarding my impressions and what I had learned from talking with the elementary classroom teacher participants. In the course of our conversation, he asked if I thought I could teach what I had observed. With the hubris of youth, I responded that, although my own university classes were small, I thought I could lecture as I had been watching Harry Broudy (pp. 20-26, 188-192), Michael Day (pp. 195-206, 323-331, 351-356) and Mary Erickson (pp. 162-170), among others, do during the Institute.

In January 1985, I was invited to a Texas meeting where artists, art critics, art historians, and philosophers of art discussed how their disciplines could contribute to art education as part of K-12 general education. George Geahigian (pp. 171-179) and I were among the art educators asked to facilitate discussion among the discipline experts and to listen to their emerging ideas. During the next two years, I attended several other Getty meetings, serving with Elliot Eisner (pp. 35-45) as a final reviewer of "Becoming Students of Art" (Clark, Day, & Greer, pp. 27-34), referred to as the DBAE monograph. In the summers, I served as a faculty member for the Los Angeles Institute as it reached outward from the initial California Institute of Technology site to other locations in Los Angeles County. With fellow summer institute faculty, I attended spring planning sessions with Dwaine Greer and his management team. Harry Broudy was the senior faculty mentor in our post-doctoral seminar. We listened to him explain the ideas underlying his lectures, carefully questioning him to make sure we understood the nuances of his position and arguing among ourselves about ways to interpret these ideas to practicing teachers. Although I brought Broudy's ideas back to my university students, I was also influenced by exemplary classroom teachers who brought visual art into the general education curriculum. My students read articles by Michael Parsons on aesthetic development (pp. 274-280), as well as Howard Gardner's work on artistic development (Davis & Gardner, pp. 257-263).

We moved to Los Angeles County in July 1987 when my husband David Ebitz (pp. 80-87) accepted a position as head of museum education at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu.² We had received advice on where to live from teachers and principals involved in the DBAE summer institutes and renewal programs. I began teaching at California State

²Since David is still my husband, I will omit any discussion of his chapter from this book review.
University, Long Beach, where the art department, along with several other universities in the California State University system, received a grant from the Getty Center for Education in the Arts to align the preservice program with DBAE (Silver, pp. 104-112). Through the Summer Institutes, I met other art educators, including Katherine Schwartz (pp. 332-339) who initiated the dissemination of DBAE in Alaska.

In 1990, I began work as a Program Officer at the Getty Center offices in Century City. My portfolio included projects in preservice art education, professional development, further dissemination of DBAE, and theory development. I had the good fortune to come aboard after the harshest criticisms of DBAE had subsided, at a time when the new approach was being successfully adapted in schools across the United States. One of my favorite projects was initiating a publication by David Perkins, The Intelligent Eye (pp. 153-161). I also worked with the series of books on the disciplines of DBAE published by the University of Illinois Press under the guidance of Ralph Smith (Smith, pp. 46-51; Levi, pp. 69-79; Wolf, pp. 88-97; Brown, pp. 144-152; Erickson, pp. 162-170; Geahagan, pp. 171-179). Along with other program officers and consultants, I reviewed drafts of Stephen Dobbs's book (pp. 52-60), known around the office as the DBAE handbook, and drafts of the final evaluation of the Regional Institutes (Wilson & Rubin, pp. 215-224). As a Program Officer, I had the pleasure of observing Marcia Eaton (pp. 98-103) and Marilyn Stewart (pp. 180-187) teaching specialist art educators about aesthetics during a summer program in Cincinnati, Ohio. I met Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pp. 396-404) and heard him explain his theory of optimal experience at a dinner party hosted by Brent Waller of the Getty Museum.

I left the Getty in 1992, before Graeme Chalmers (pp. 225-234) wrote his book on multicultural art education and DBAE, and prior to the Getty's collaboration with the College Board for interdisciplinary curricula in secondary schools (Boston, pp. 235-248). While I continued working as a consultant, I gradually became more distant from the day-to-day work of the Getty Institute for Education in the Arts, as the Center was renamed. Thus, for me, one aspect of reading Smith's anthology was reconnecting with both my personal history in art education and with recent events in the history of art education, American education and culture.

Educational and Cultural Contexts

The readings in Smith's DBAE anthology were originally published between 1982 and 1998, while education in the United States was undergoing several waves of reform intended to better prepare students for a changing society. Reformers argued for the economic value of education in international competition (National Commission on Excellence, 1983). Although the United States was spending record amounts on education, with a larger proportion than ever before from government funds, in international assessments American students scored at lower levels than their
counterparts in countries which spent far less (Trager, 1992). If the nation was at risk from poor schools, then teachers must be the front line for change. Calls for improved teacher preparation appeared in a body of literature that provided background for several Getty preservice initiatives (e.g., Carnegie Forum, 1986; Tomorrow’s Teachers, 1986). While many school districts changed from centralized administration to site-based decision making, educational policy placed greater emphasis on accountability for student learning. Thus, the educational context surrounding DBAE endured conflicting pressures as top-down initiatives for school reform and greater accountability collided with bottom-up, grassroots efforts for educational renewal.\(^3\)

A number of elements now taken for granted as part of education in the U.S. took root during this period of change. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards developed in response to calls for greater professionalization of teaching as a means to improve schooling. An education summit held by the first President Bush and state governors in 1989 resulted in the creation of the National Educational Goals Panel in 1990. Efforts by leaders in arts education, including representatives from the Getty Trust, led to inclusion of the arts in the challenging subject matter identified in the national goals and to development of National Standards for the Arts (Consortium, 1994). Interest in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was revived when NAEP seemed to offer a means to measure the success of states and districts in meeting national goals (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998). Authentic assessments, considered more valid than the standardized tests used for accountability, were recommended not only as a means to assess student learning but also as vehicles for curriculum reform and the professional development of teachers. Staff at the Getty Center for Education in the Arts followed all of these initiatives, finding ways to link DBAE and art education reform to national trends.

The art world changed as well. Architecture led the way into postmodernism. Photographers such as Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, and Sherrie Levin used their work to criticize gender stereotypes in the mediated world (Phillips, 1999). Post-structuralism in art history and criticism exposed the political foundations of representation. Artists reached outward, using performance art, electronic and other newer media for community activism. While some art escaped from the gallery into the street or subway, the high art market soared as “art became big business” (Phillips, 1999, p. 320). The ethics of the art business came under criticism in 1989. Washington’s Corcoran Gallery canceled an exhibition of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe, the photographer who had died of AIDS in 1988. Senator Jesse Helms introduced legislation to bar the National Endowment for the Arts from funding photographic work by Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano, and others that Helms called “obscene.” While some artists seemed determined to disrupt every remnant of genteel

\(^3\) John Goodlad (1999) makes the distinction between these two, very different approaches to educational change. 

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good taste, conservative academics like Alan Bloom lamented the closing of the American mind (Levine, 1996). The culture wars pitted traditionalists, like Helms and Bloom, against postmodern, post-structuralist progressives who recognized the importance of questioning the authority of received values (Hunter, 1991; Phillips, 1999).

During these same years, computer-based technology revolutionized business, education, and personal lives. Fax machines gained popularity during the early 1980s as a media for electronic mailings (Trager, 1992). During the next decade, “e-mail” would become the term of choice for paperless messages sent via computer over the rapidly growing Internet. Personal computers were rare in the early 1980s; now most of us cannot imagine working without them.

While digital technology was contributing to dramatic cultural changes, the United States’ population became increasingly diverse. Rates of immigration rose in the midst of debates on the potential contributions of new immigrants to American society. Old notions of the United States as a melting pot were replaced by metaphors of stir fry and tossed salad. The definition of diversity expanded during this period to encompass not just ethnic or racial differences, but also age cohorts, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons—all of whom sought respect, personal dignity, and recognition of their rights to active participation in society. The AIDS virus, recognized in 1980, caused a growing toll of death that was compared to the 14th century Black Plague (Trager, 1992).

These social and technological changes occurred during a period of economic growth. The Los Angeles Getty Institute originally addressed the art instructional needs of elementary classroom teachers because art specialists had been cut from California schools as a result of property tax reforms that protected homeowners but reduced educational and cultural services. Across the country, tax reforms based on the California model helped give citizens money to invest in stocks and bonds (and sometimes in art or new cultural institutions). In 1984, Texaco acquired Getty Oil, raising the price of shares and boosting the already wealthy J. Paul Getty Trust to apparently limitless wealth. Despite a dramatic stock market fall in October 1987, the ‘80s are remembered as the era of leveraged buy-outs and the ‘90s for soaring stocks and initial public offerings (IPOs) from technology start-ups.

All of these events and issues seem, to me and other members of the silent and baby-boom generations (like the authors in Smith’s collection), recent if not current events (Strauss & Howe, 1991). To those currently entering art education, these events and issues occurred in the distant past. What is important to keep in mind in reading Smith’s DBAE anthology, however, is that many of these essays were conceived and written before or during these events. Art educators struggling to keep up with reforms in their own field did not always have the inclination to follow the latest trends in educational policy, artworlds, postmodern theory, or social change.
Potential for Continuing Scholarship

This DBAE anthology places its subject less in the context of educational reform (or renewal or change) than in an impulse toward orthodox traditions in philosophy of art education, a balance of philosophical Realism and Idealism sometimes referred to as Essentialism (Morris, 1961). In the first paragraph of his introduction, Smith declares his view of the aim of DBAE: “engendering in young people a well-developed sense of art requisite for the intelligent engagement with works of art and other things from an aesthetic point of view” (p. 1). He goes on to explain that “building such a sense of art” requires students to acquire some ability to create art, some knowledge of art history, some understanding of basic principles of aesthetic judgment, and some ability to reflect on the values and uses of art. Smith’s secondary focus on “inquiries into knowing and the known” is consistent with his Essentialist stance and belief in scientific rationality (p. 1). Smith is open and honest about his underlying assumptions. The Introduction and Afterthoughts bracket his collection between post-war art education and Smith’s own life experience.

In his Afterthoughts (pp. 411-417), Smith admits that his compilation is hardly disinterested. His own experiences growing up during the Great Depression of the 1930s, experiencing World War II in the 1940s, then studying at Columbia during the early 1950s have shaped his work on aesthetic education, just as my experiences shaped my understanding of DBAE as, in part, a political construct. While Smith acknowledges the value of social interpretations of art education (p. 414), he makes it clear that his own approach is grounded in philosophy and leans toward “nonpolitical interpretations of DBAE” (p. 413). At a Getty invitational seminar in 1989, Smith argued that politicizing art education threatens the appreciation of great moments in art, while alternative conceptions of DBAE may “compromise art’s special aesthetic character or discredit the history of artistic accomplishment” (Getty Center, 1990, p. 74). Smith himself has consistently espoused an interpretation of art education, including DBAE, as aesthetic education, i.e., one of the humanities, traditional areas of study that focus on effective communication, critical thinking, and pride in cultural heritage (Smith, 2000, pp. 46-51). He has long argued for the importance of teaching students to recognize the privileged status of works of art.

Given the high degree of coherence in Smith’s own values, his personal aesthetic and his philosophy of education, the choices he has made in editing this anthology are not surprising. Nonetheless, I found a few of his editorial choices disconcerting. For example, Smith’s decision to edit Theodore Wolff’s section on types of art criticism to omit Wolff’s explication of three forms of contextualist criticism, while including descriptions of diaristic and formalist criticism, reopens this collection to charges that DBAE was biased toward formalism (compare p. 95 with Wolff & Geahigan, 1997, pp. 22-30). If this book were used with a class, students...
should also read complete, unedited sections from the original sources found in the thorough list in the front of the book (pp. vi-xii). Although the majority of chapters in this book were written by authors affiliated with the Getty Trust as employees or paid consultants, Smith has included a few chapters which do not represent official, brand-name DBAE. These chapters frequently come from issues of the Journal of Aesthetic Education and from the 1992 NSSE Yearbook, both of which Smith edited (Reimer & Smith, 1992). While outside my idiosyncratic experience of DBAE (sketched in the first section of this review), these selections affirm Smith’s decision to place DBAE in the context of “the cognitive revolution in thinking about the character of mind and human development” (p. 1).

On the other hand, constructivist approaches to linking cognition and art education bring into question an Essentialist emphasis on transmission of received wisdom, belief in objective reality, and cultural reproduction, such as Smith reveals. While reading Smith’s anthology this summer, I also read Efland’s Art and Cognition: Integrating the Visual Arts in the Curriculum (2002). Efland’s goal is not to maintain a privileged position for art in education, but to help learners use the arts in constructing reality. Smith’s statement of purpose for arts education (quoted above) differs from Efland’s: “the purpose for teaching the arts is to contribute to the understanding of the social and cultural landscape that each individual inhabits” (Efland, 2002, p. 171). Both Smith and Efland are cognitively oriented, but scholarship today tends to focus on content, the what to be studied (women’s studies, visual culture, cultural studies, African studies, etc.), context (where and when), and construction of meaningful understandings, rather than on traditional disciplines such as history, literature, and the sciences, which claim both content (ends) and particular methods of inquiry (means). One of the difficulties faced by DBAE was confusion between ends and means—a common problem as ideas in art education move from theory into practice. For example, learning about the four art disciplines of DBAE, i.e., the professions of art critics, art historians, philosophers of art, and artists, sometimes became an end, although it has been argued that the disciplines should be means to the end of understanding and valuing art (Geahigan, 2002; Wilson & Rubin in Smith, 2000, p. 221). This tension between ends and means can be seen in Parts One and Two of Smith’s anthology.

Smith admits the assumptions underlying his editorial politics, grounding his selections in his autobiography and the context of art education. The reader, however, must be vigilant to Smith’s omissions as well as his admissions. Privileging visual art and placing it outside of political, economic, and other social contexts may not be the best way to advance art education at the present moment. Art is both means and end. Art belongs in general education not only because it is special, but also because of what it has in common with other cognitive domains.
DBAE was most powerful while it was the focus of active advocacy and program development by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, one of a number of entities within the J. Paul Getty Trust. As an operating foundation, rather than a grants-making foundation, the Trust tended to exercise fiscal conservatism while acting for cultural change. Having chosen to support one of the several approaches to art education in existence at the end of the 1970s, Getty staff faced competing pressures toward conservation and change which often led them to reduce or obscure decided differences among the art educators who contributed to DBAE (DiBlasio, 2002; Marché, 2002). Any comprehensive study of DBAE should treat it not as autonomous theory, but as a context-bound ideology subject to the institutional press of an operating foundation during a period of rapid social change and cultural conflict. Nonetheless, until a contextualized study of DBAE comes along, Smith’s anthology will serve as a comprehensive collection of major writings grounded in philosophical and cognitive foundations from aesthetic education.

References


Mary Ann Stankiewicz


