RESPONDING TO
JOHNSON, SAUNDERS, AND LOVANO-KERR

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The papers presented by Johnson, Saunders, and Lovano-Kerr are varied in content, but united in the sense of originating within two linked dilemmas. The first dilemma asks whether art educators are to embrace and actively work towards incorporating one currently popular political stance into the education process, or whether we are to devise, as far as we can, a curriculum formed from a synthesis of positions. The second asked whether, in using words like "enculturation" and "social transmission," we mean "to the world of the school," or "to the world at large."

These are well-worn dilemmas. Their continuing presence is evidence of past failure to address them successfully, and of their persistence as matters frustrating to the field.

Lovano-Kerr produces data to show that the prevailing current model for art education is production - centered, and goes on to suggest that Discipline - Based Art Education (DBAE) is a vehicle that encompasses "the world of art in all its diversity. Works of art are studied within their cultural context; questions on the nature of art are discussed; aesthetic perception and response is developed through viewing and responding to works of art" (Lovano-Kerr, 1986). It is, in short, a better model, because it is multilateral.

The assumption held by the field at large about DBAE is, however, that its writers have very definite ideas on what may occur within the spirit of DBAE in the name of art, and what may not. The school district that adopts DBAE is clearly buying a set of values, and since Lovano-Kerr states that the teacher need not (in fact, should not) be responsible for program design, one assumes that the four areas of a DBAE program -- production, history, criticism, and aesthetics -- having received initial sanction from the program writers, will give their own sanction to the content of the program, to create a closed model for art education.

To take that approach will permit the teacher to do what the program requires, but is likely to exclude the teacher from the ideological controversies that have marked recent debates between the proponents of DBAE and those of different persuasions: debates that recently caused Ken Marantz to remark "There just ain't no consensus" (Marantz, 1986). Contrary to what Lovano-Kerr has written, I do not believe that DBAE will expose its clients to the world of art in all its diversity. I believe it embodies one set of values: those that result in thinking of art as a discipline.

At the same time, some of the reticence expressed in some quarters for DBAE, deriving from the notion that DBAE may drive all alternative art programs out, is misplaced. At this point, the most reasonable course would be to get to know it better, before coming to any conclusion for or against it.

Of course, it may be that those who implement curriculum at state levels will find the kind of format presented in DBAE, rooted in tidy aesthetic rather than in untidy social affairs, just what they prefer. A program where argument is formalized and where issues for discussion are clearly identified has some definite advantages for administrators. Saunders probably has these in mind when he contends

that to neglect social consciousness may be to run counter to the general pragmatism of the American way of life, but to emphasize that social consciousness might draw the fire of those who hold to an apolitical role for art education: a group that, according to Saunders, exercises much of the clout in American art education (Saunders, 1986a, p.5).

Lovano-Kerr mentions Patricia Clahassey's article as one that offers evidence of new interest among artists in social consciousness (Clahassey, 1986). One has to remember, however, the risks of drawing parallels between what goes on among professional artists and what goes on in schools. In general terms it seems that, rather than the linear progression that Clahassey describes, there occurs a continual shifting focus upon one or another part of a spectrum of possibilities, and a selection of one group of ideas for attention from a number of options currently being practiced. That emphasis is limited to one group, rather than having a curriculum derived from a cross section of possibilities, perhaps says something about our continuing unwillingness to see the wood for the trees.

One should not even assume that the selection of one group of options is dynamic or deliberate. More likely, it is the visible part of an inertia that serves to keep traditional divisions operating long after the social circumstances that brought them into being have disappeared. Art teachers are now trained in universities, but university programs have not seriously moved to reflect the character of art as practiced today. Industrial art and commercial art are taught in isolated pockets, while architecture is presented as an adjunct to the history of art, with emphasis on the building as art object rather than as provider of services. Almost twenty years after the publication of Reyner Banham's Architecture of the Well Tempered Environment (Banham, 1969), mention of climate control systems and their effect upon building possibilities (and ultimately, upon the communities that supported them) is rarely to be found in undergraduate art education courses.

Saunders quotes William Irwin Thompson's notion that, confronted by unmanageable complexity, we should look in the opposite direction, to simple messages (Saunders, 1986b). That seems not totally useful, unless what Saunders has in mind is stepping back from the data far enough to be able to look at its elements and their relationships, and grouping them into a set of economical categories. Human beings seem, happily, capable of this sort of activity, and then of using the categories as if the underlying complexities had somehow resolved themselves.

The second dilemma, whether enculturation means school enculturation or society enculturation, has particular significance for multicultural education settings. In one city that I know, over 40% of the student body has a first language other than English. The art teacher of one of the high schools, where that city - wide ratio is duplicated, told me that most students were much more interested in becoming assimilated into the little world of the school that in waving the flag for their parent culture. When I looked through their sketchbooks, that seemed to be confirmed: their subjects were media - influenced, state-of-the-art images of Transformers (currently a big - selling item in toy stores), rock stars, and sports figures. Some of these students, arrived only recently from Vietnam and Chile, appear to have an agenda that calls for fitting into the school; other groups (for example, a number of students of Ukrainian descent) actively seek identification with the larger Ukrainian community, and use their school activities as one way to achieve

those ends.

In describing the process of enculturation, Johnson hints at, but never quite mentions specifically, the corollary of acculturation. Life for the school age person is a recurring process of being weaned away -- or sometimes thrust away -- from the general pattern of enculturation. One cannot assume that while our ideas about educating students change, the subjects of our study remain the same. Ask any student teacher: the comment is likely to be "I've only been out of school myself for three years, but these kids are nothing like we were."

If the expectation is that students be enculturated into the closed system of the school, then the body or content around which that process occurs could well be something like DBAE. If enculturation into society at large is the goal, then courses in the economics and the sociology and the politics of art should be an essential part of teacher training. Johnson's point about the teacher being a professional informer is an important one, for it implies that the teacher first receives the message. Suppose our informants receive only part of it; worse, suppose they receive the articles and prepositions and miss some of the substantive nouns and verbs. Johnson quite rightly asks: What concepts should be taught? Where do they come from? We should also ask those questions in the context of teaching teachers.

The two dilemmas, involving the setting of values and the identification of a context for their implementation, appear to be inevitable concomitants of the education process, and incapable of resolution. But it is possible that the dilemmas are the result of misconceiving the educational process itself. Stephen Jay Gould (1985) writes of Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, an 18th century embryologist who spent much of his time wondering where different species came from. Maupertuis' notion was that eggs and sperm might carry parts of particular organisms within themselves; modern science reveals that the answer lies in coded instructions: DNA. Maupertuis could not have visualized such a solution, says Gould, because technology had not yet provided the means to construct that kind of metaphor. For example, when Jacquard looms were built, each "instructed" by a stack of thin wooden slabs with holes cut in them; that metaphor was suddenly available.

It is impossible (to make a bad biological pun out of it) to conceive the inconceivable. The metaphor we currently use, of thinking of the educational enterprise as a society in microcosm, may not be the most appropriate. But for the moment it is the best we have, and it makes sense to give students and teachers alike the kinds of strategies they need to make the enterprise comprehensible, as well as some acquaintance with the different agendas and different constituencies involved.

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