DBAE and CLAE: Relevance for Minority and Multicultural Students

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The importance of art programming which reflects, and is responsive to the diverse needs of students in a multicultural society is examined. It is argued that the DBAE fails to consider the increasing diversity among the population of our schools in the prescription of standardized and achievement oriented curricula. It is further claimed that CLAE offers an alternative to DBAE which promotes sensitivity to the cultural make-up of our classrooms.

The Question of Muliculturalism

One of the greatest challenges for educators entering the last decade of the twentieth century is the education of the growing population of multicultural and minority cultural students in American public schools. It's not uncommon for these students to feel alienated and have difficulty being a part of a predominantly white, middle-class school system. Classroom teachers are often not prepared to work with children whose cultural attitudes and values are so different from their own. Philips (1983) found that American Indian children have linguistic and behavioral modes of communication specific to their culture. Philips observed that tension and obstacles to classroom learning were created by teachers socialized in the white dominant culture who misinterpreted communication cues sent out by the children.

Increasing numbers of school age children are entering the United States from Asia, South America and the Middle East. In addition, the number of children born in the United States from minority cultures who are often in the lower economic strata of society continues to increase in the large urban school districts. It is becoming difficult to close our eyes and ears as educators and ignore the fact that our schools are facing tremendous problems in the education of today's student population. The dropout rate of students in the public schools is escalating, youth gangs are a fact of life in our inner cities and the educational literature continues to grow on students "at risk" of failure in our schools (Cummins, 1986; Hornbeck, 1987; Vobejda, 1987; Wehlage, 1988). Poverty, discrimination, crime and conflict ridden neighborhoods all combine to take their toll on our youth. Wehlage (1988) describes the conditions that confront educators today:

The causes of dropping out - family back-ground conditions, personal problems and school practices - present a complex set of problems... This web of conditions surrounding those at risk of dropping out makes intervention a formidable challenge for all educators (p. 1).

These concerns in education are not only related to multicultural and minority students, but are present for all populations in our schools. Focusing on difficulties that we have with diverse groups of students can highlight common practices and attitudes in the schools that need to be examined, modified or changed.

How is the field of art education dealing with educating the minority or multicultural student, the student at-risk and those students feeling alienation and cultural conflict in the classroom? Currently, the major focus of art education is on implementing a discipline-based approach to art education in the public schools. A handful of art educators are writing and discussing concerns for implementing cultural literacy in art education. What possible relevance does "Disciplined-Based Art Education" (DBAE) or "Cultural Literacy in Art Education" (CLAE) have for minorities and multicultural students in the public schools?

DBAE and CLAE

There can be multiple interpretations of exactly what a DBAE or a CLAE curriculum should be. For purposes of this paper, the comprehensive statements by Eisner (1987) and Clark, Day and Greer (1986) define the form of DBAE which is associated with The Getty Center for Education in the Arts. In theory DBAE places rigorous equivalent curricular emphasis on art history, art criticism, studio art and aesthetics. In practice, "aesthetic scanning," SWRL art curriculum and the use of Chapman's *Discover Art* (1985) have been utilized by the Getty for training elementary classroom teachers in DBAE.

Cultural literacy specific to art education has been outlined in a chapter in *Democracy in Art* (Boyer, 1987) and has its roots in Bower's (1974) book *Cultural Literacy for Freedom*. In CLAE, the student is guided by the teacher to decode personal cultural experiences related to art as well as the culture and art of others. Culture can be defined as the learned and shared values, attitudes and beliefs of specific groups of people. Large cultural groups of people can be identified by *geographic location*, such as the Japanese or Brazilians, or micro-cultural groups can be found within dominant cultures, such as the Appalachians or the Amish in the United States. Other microcultural groups can be identified through *economic level, type of occupation* or *religious beliefs*. All people belong to a dominant culture, as well as various microcultural systems. These microsystems may contain different levels of complexity and traditions and exercise greater or lesser degrees of influence on people's thinking and behavior.

Schools are a place where culture is transmitted and knowledge is passed down to students as a "given." When knowledge is conceived of in this way, very little if any questioning takes place in the classroom. CLAE centers around questioning and examining knowledge and cultural experiences in art. In a cultural literacy program the teacher helps the students understand that their culture and knowledge is not to be taken for granted and that various attitudes and assumptions need to be analyzed and human origins of knowledge identified.

Reflexive and critical thinking skills about art as a cultural process are key to CLAE. A CLAE curriculum would have a spiral structure sequencing from simple to more complex thinking and from the student's individual worldview and culture to more expansive views of art in culture. Studies of the present are emphasized by examining feelings and attitudes about art related to contemporary art movements and cultures. Studies of the past are examined for identifying origins and influences that have affected attitudes and changes in the world today. Skills necessary for adapting to the future are continually held in perspective. Imagination and speculative thinking skills in art are employed for preparing students to expand their visions and flexiblity. A phenomenological approach integrating art heritage, aesthetics, art criticism and studio art would be used with a continued focus on examining the student's worldview.

DBAE's four foci have their origins in European academic universities where emphasis is placed on exemplars and the study of the classics. DBAE focuses on studying, examining, talking about, responding to, and doing studio work related to "masterworks" and "styles" in the history of art. The aspect of art criticism centers on the identification of formal and expressive qualities of the art object and the artist's intent. If carried to the extreme -the study of exclusively white, western art and the emphasis primarily on art historical knowledge - DBAE could create a sense of *alienation* for the multicultural or minority student.

Currently in art education DBAE is particularly visible and one might even say "popular." In *Studies in Art Education* and *Art Education* during the last five years are any indication, most journal articles describe discipline-based approaches while only a limited number of articles describe cultural processes in teaching. There has been a strong rationale for the discipline approach in art education. The "bandwagon" syndrome for "back to basics" was felt by art education back in the 1960's after Sputnik and Bruner's discipline approaches in education. Barkan had ample support for his concepts of art history, studio, and art criticism in the public schools (Boyer, 1980) and this *was* definitely an upgrade from the potato printing, string painting and mimeographed holiday art that was all too prevalent in the elementary classroom. Art educators in universities, who did the majority of the published writing in the field, could see the benefit of modeling school curriculum after academic subjects that mirrored those taught in the university, while high school art teachers had traditionally replicated university studio settings in their classrooms. Students could select courses in ceramics, jewelry or painting, and art history was taught by the slide-lecture approach. Unfortunately, most of these courses in the high schools emphasized the technical, hands-on, approaches to art education.

Discipline-based approaches became a strong counter movement to Lowenfeld (1970) and his theories of child-development in art education. The child as the center for the curriculum in the 70's and 80's lost popularity in university art education courses. Crayon and cut paper projects designed to foster "creative and mental growth" were not favored. Talking about and looking at works of art (in the form of reproductions and slides) were favored. In general, there was growing support for content based on discipline approaches in the field (Boyer, 1980)

Most art educators today would agree that students should at the very least acquire sequential, structured (1) experiences in studio processes and visual expression, (2) skills for identifying meaning in works of art and the ability to appreciate art throughout history in a variety of cultural settings, and (3) methods of aesthetic inquiry and criticism.

In terms of analyzing the organizational base and implementation of DBAE and CLAE, there are no real comparisons. DBAE has a central corporate structure supported and funded by the Getty Foundation that has national outreach programs. CLAE is recognized by only a small group of art educators and emphasizes local decision making by teachers. With less support monies currently being allocated for education from federal, state and local governments, corporations will fill the gaps and become more involved in educational decision making. If this is to be the trend of the future - corporations may also hold the purse strings and determine who decides what is to be taught, what research is to be recognized, who is to teach and who is to be included in the different levels of the decision making process.

The Relevance of DBAE and CLAE

Do DBAE and/or CLAE have relevance for minority and multicultural students? DBAE has the propensity of focusing more heavily on subject content and less on a concern for the students who are being taught. In an "Issues Seminar" (1988) sponsored by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts (1988), Feinstein, the seminar director, noted the different approaches between positivists and phenomenologists in education,

> Positivists, she said, would hold that the subject matter - content and sequence and scope - is more important than the student, the society, and so on. The phenomenologist would hold that the students' *experience* of the subject matter is more important. She admitted that she was making the dichotomy more 'black-and-white' than it might actually be; she and most of her colleagues, she said, are probably somewhere in the middle, leaning toward subject matter. 'But I think it's important as educators that we think about where we are. Do we in fact think we have a subject matter and is it worth teaching? Then let's teach it' (p. 60).

As art educators we must not become so defensive about the worth of our subject area so that we lose sight of who we are teaching and how best to teach them. Educators outside the field of art education are joining forces to combat the escalating rise in the drop-out rate in the schools. Students that are low-achievers, failing, or dropping out are every educator's concern and responsibility.

Educational research indicates that successful school programs promote a "social bonding process" between the students and the school. Wehlage (1988) found that a major obstacle to this bonding was "incongruence between the school and the students' social and cultural orientation" (p. 5). Programs that were sensitive to students' needs and problems were most successful when learning strategies centering on the students' interests and strengths were developed. These findings do not seem particularly earth shaking, and such programs do not have to be lacking in either structure or subject content to be taught.

CLAE structures the curriculum around the student's culture, progressing through expanded world views of art and finally developing imagination and speculative skills. DBAE structures the curriculum around knowledge and skills based on four academic disciplines as defined by master specialists. Culture is observed from the "outside-in" in DBAE. Students may study the cultures of others, but this is usually in an historical context. The concept of culture as a process in socialization is not used to examine one's own culture nor the culture of others. CLAE has the potential to be strictly student-oriented without emphasizing skills and knowledge of the subject matter. DBAE has the potential to be subject oriented and not concerned about the students as individuals or sensitive to their individual diverse cultures.

CLAE is more closely related to successful programs identified in the current research literature for students-at-risk. The spiral sequenced curriculum in CLAE could be used with all students. The emphasis on reflexive and critical thinking balanced by the development of affective and emotional factors are essential for high-achievers, as well as, those having difficulty in the schools. More importantly cultural literacy in art education is a *teaching process* which differentiates it from DBAE. CLAE not only supports the study of cultures in an academic sense or the study of a wide range of art forms existing in contemporary cultures and ethnic groups, but it places the student on center stage in the educational setting. The students should not be viewed merely as a receptacle for knowledge. Rather their world views and feelings about art are considered central to what should be selected to study and analyze. In CLAE, students are allowed to participate in decisions regarding their own education, thus promoting a sense of ownership and involvement.

An art education that incorporates cultural literacy better prepares students for the world they will be living in tomorrow by encouraging speculative thinking and imagination with a focus on change. An aesthetic education emphasizing cultural literacy will encourage positive feelings about cultural identity and promote appreciation for cultural aesthetic changes and diversity in the aesthetics of others. Art educators can meet the challenge of educating the multicultural and minority students by using cultural literacy as an approach for examining beliefs and attitudes within the disciplines of art.

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