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Rising to the Challenge

### **Summary**

The articles assigned for this week's discussion function as somewhat of a "wake up call" or "call to arms" for current and future art educators to reevaluate our goals as teachers and the education we provide. The authors of the four articles approach art education as a platform for preparing youth to be active and educated citizens of our country and of the world. Each author discusses different approaches and content to address in our methods of instruction, but all of the authors support a reconceptualization from the way art has been taught in the past to the way art education should be presented currently. Art education is reflective of the present and therefore will continually need to evolve based on contemporary culture.

In her article, "Art Education for Democratic Life," Olivia Gude (2009) explores how quality art education helps prepare and create successful and active participants of a democratic society. This is achieved through the arts ability to aid in the development of self through hands on experience of the world and its objects. Students become aware of themselves and the nuances of the world. Through art education, students learn to appreciate that others see and interpret the world differently and that individual interpretations make up the collective democratic society. Students learn that "different" is okay and that the contemporary world is always changing. Students accept complexity and even contradiction as we continually discover new things about ourselves, each other, and our culture. Therefore, Gude argues, art education prepares individuals to be active participants in a democratic society.

Similarly, Doug Blandy (2011) addresses the importance of using art education as a platform to address important social and cultural issues that are happening contemporaneously across the globe in his article, "Sustainability, Participatory Culture, and the Performance of Democracy: Ascendant Sites of Theory and Practice in Art Education." Blandy argues that if we teach our students about the sustainability of the environment and of culture and community that we are teaching our younger generations about the importance of a collective identity. Currently our society focuses on the individual and is losing sight of our collective identity and communities. Blandy supports an education where we teach students to be aware, proactive,

innovative and politically savvy. In today's technology rich world, young generations should be able to learn well and gather information readily because there is so much accessibility to information. Blandy (2011) discusses the importance of "net neutrality" which ensures that the information gates remain open with shared documentation that is freely shared by organizations and individuals with motives to educate (p.253). Art educators need to be concerned with how we can make the best citizens through the structure of the education we provide.

Theory and practice sometimes exist as separate entities and as Patricia Stuhr (2003) explains through personal experience in her article, "A Tale of Why Social and Cultural Content is Often Excluded from Art Education—And Why It Should Not Be," the challenges of making changes to the pedagogy of art education from the past to that of the present and future can be crippling. Stuhr (2003) explains the important role art education can fulfill in teaching our students how to, "actively participate in a world that has reverence for life and values social justice" (Bigelow, Harvey, Karp, & Miller, 2001; Caine & Caine, 1997). She shares her frustration to how deeply rooted even new teachers seem to be in the modernist approach to teaching art from the past and the difficulties of changing the mindset of educational institutions as a whole. Stuhr's (2003) personal mission is to change the pedagogy of art education to one that exemplifies, "...a caring, social space where critical investigation of and through relevant cultural production can be facilitated by teachers to help students to inquire into the complexities and possibilities for understanding life and death in new ways" (p.303).

The authors of the article, "Drawing (Past, Present, and Future) Together: A (Graphic) Look at the Reconceptualization of Art Education," Stephen Carpenter and Kevin Tavin (2010) discuss methods of art education instruction of the past, conventions and trends that are presently influencing art education, and the future of art education pedagogy. Visual culture, community-based education, sustainability of the environment, democracy and citizenship are all common threads discussed by all of the authors presenting a post modern approach to art education in comparison to what Carpenter and Tavin (2010) refer to as, "modernist elements of art and principles of design, and other archaic concepts of art" (p.342) that were developed over the past three decades and still heavily influence the instructional methods of art education today. Carpenter and Tavin (2010) present a variety of questions to the theory of art education and, "...a reconceptualization of the field of art education that is more reflexive about its own history

and politics, anxieties and fears, and practices and references than it has been to this point” (p. 348).

Through the individual voices of the authors read this week, they all share a similar vision of the direction art education needs to move in. Each author addresses the important and unique role that various art education sites can foster in the development of younger generations as better members of their communities, as democratic citizens, and as members of a global collective identity. The authors believe that art education offers students a safe environment to reflect and interpret the world around them and teach them to be active participants in this world. As Olivia Gude (2009) states, “People who have participated in quality arts education experiences identify the importance of free expression for themselves and for others. They recognize that values and visions cannot endure unless they are continuously seen, examined, challenged, and re-envisioned within individual and collective life” (p.11). Art education can provide many opportunities through a flexible curriculum to aid in the development of highly aware and educated participants of individual communities, cultures and of the world. It is up to teachers to rise to the challenge and make the difference that our present generations need in order to be proactive members of our global identity.

### **Key Points, Terms, or Examples/Evidence given**

*Gude:* In the following segment of her article, “Art Education for Democratic Life,” Olivia Gude (2009) defines *self identification* based on classic works written by Victor Lowenfield. She writes, “Through quality art education, students are introduced to a range of tools and develop the skills needed to represent their experiences in their fullness, complexity, and contradictions. Through experimentation with media and with aesthetic and theoretical methodologies, students represent their life experiences in images, words, sounds, movements—through contrasts and comparisons, juxtapositions and layers, reverberations and silences” (Gude, 2009, p. 8).

*Blandy:* In Doug Blandy’s (2011) article, “Sustainability, Participatory Culture, and the Performance of Democracy: Ascendant Sites of Theory and Practice in Art Education,” he defines *participatory culture*, “as one where there are relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, where there is strong support for creating and sharing what one creates

with others, and where there is some kind of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices” (Jenkins & Bertozzi, 2007, p.174).

*Stuhr*: Patricia Stuhr (2003) defines *art education* in her article, “A Tale of Why Social and Cultural Content is Often Excluded from Art Education,” as “...an ongoing process and not a product...to be a caring, social space where critical investigation of and through relevant cultural production can be facilitated by teachers to help students inquire into the complexities and possibilities for understanding and expressing life and death in new ways” (p.303).

*Carpenter & Tavin*: Carpenter & Tavin (2010) discuss at great lengths the *reconceptualization of art education* in their article, “Drawing (Past, Present, and Future) Together: A (Graphic) Look at the Reconceptualization of Art Education,” which they see as, “...engaged in an ongoing attempt to shift from traditional modes of art making and ‘art thinking’ toward a profoundly critical, historical, political, and self-reflexive understanding of visual culture and social responsibility” (p.329).

### **Critical Analysis, Applications, and Personal Reflections**

It is my ultimate dream to someday have an art school of my own. My vision of this school is fully developed and one of the key components is the role and involvement my school has in the community. After reading the Blandy (2011) article I have better words to describe my goals; I want to aid in the sustainability of my community. It was ironic that right before I sat down to read the article, I had just returned from a gallery at a local community art school, Crealde, where I observed a photography exhibition pertaining to the African American history and cultural development of Hannibal Square in Winter Park, FL (somewhere I frequently visit in our community). I had no idea of the rich history of the area. This exhibit represents exactly what Blandy (2011) is discussing in his article; there are various sites for art education to address the teaching of our youth what their civic duty is and how to be an active member of one’s community and therefore the greater global community as well. I hope to take on such a role as teaching my students the importance of one’s community history as well as an awareness of where the community is at presently and how to creatively develop goals towards the future of the community.

An example of a lesson plan that I have in mind is what I will call, “Art in the Garden.” At my future school I plan on having an extensive native plant garden as well as areas of the garden that feature styles of gardens from around the world (Japanese, English, European, African, Chinese, etc). In my lesson plan I hope to teach students about sustainability of the environment and the issues of invasive species. The lesson will educate students about the damages created to our local environment by invasive species, how to appreciate the beauty of plant species that grow native to our local environment, and how those species aid in a prosperous eco-system for our local environment. After a classroom presentation about sustainability of the local environment and a lesson in species identification, students will take a nature walk in the garden where they will identify a variety of plant species native to our locale (much like a scavenger hunt). Students will have drawing boards and easels/ mules and will choose a composition to draw or paint from observation and have a one on one “conversation” with the plants native to our area. Through this lesson I hope to create awareness of important issues of sustainability but also fight ignorance that native species are “weeds” and need to be cleared when in fact they have in an important role in the local eco-system. Another lesson plan involving the garden would be to educate the students on the various gardens of the world in order for students to, “...generate, apprehend, and hold multiple ways of knowing and being in the world” (Gude, 2009, p.11). I want to teach students to appreciate their own individual culture and community as well as the cultures and communities of others across the globe.

Challenges I foresee in teaching lessons that involve material that explores contemporary critically informed content is that we live in a fairly conservative climate and when teachers advocate investigation of current issues, parents and leaders of institutions tend to be extremely critical and of the mindset that we are filling children’s minds with liberal, unproven, controversial, hippy-minded, heavily-biased garbage that will lead to the demise of our constitution and culture as we know it. Educators must tread carefully in order to not upset the apple cart too much and be respectful and diplomatic when presenting information reflective of “the now”, especially when the information explores political, religious, social, racial, and gender themes. People have very strong opinions about the topics listed above and although a teacher may want to make changes for social justice, the teacher must be aware of the audience beyond the classroom; the audience that serves as tax payers and patrons for the education system as a whole.

## **References**

- Blandy, D. (2011). Sustainability, participatory culture, and the performance of democracy: Ascendant sites of theory and practice in art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 52(3), 243-255.
- Carpenter, S. B., & Tavin, K. (2010). Drawing (past, present, and future) together: A(graphic) look at the reconceptualization of art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 51(4), 327-352.
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