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Images, Art and Education

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Michael Gillespie

Art education has traditionally been of low priority in Nebraska's—and the nation's—schools. Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) is a new approach that integrates the various facets of art education throughout the general curriculum. DBAE attempts to teach students critical reasoning skills so they may learn to make their own judgments rather than be manipulated through "technological image management." It also enhances the traditional art curriculum through multicultural study. Nebraska's Prairie Visions project can serve as a model to other states, which are increasingly recognizing the value of DBAE.

Serious efforts are underway to rethink and revise the way art is taught in the schools. Nebraska is a leader in an innovative approach known as Discipline-Based Art Education, and there is good reason to think that this approach, or one like it, will provide a way for art education to become integral to the curriculum rather than remaining the afterthought it has often been.

Virtually all advocates of general education call attention to the importance of knowledge of the arts as part of our cultural heritage and as an avenue of understanding what it is to be a human being. As the National Endowment for the Arts stated in *Toward Civilization: A Report On Arts Education*, there are four reasons why arts education should be important: "To understand civilization, to develop creativity, to learn the tools of communication, and to develop the capacity for making wise choices among the products of the arts." Nonetheless, the report concluded, "The problem is: basic arts education does not exist in the United States today" (1988).

Discipline-Based Art Education is an attempt to remedy that situation. The basic idea of the approach is to enhance art education by interrelating four disciplines: art making; art history; art criticism; and philosophy of art. To teach these topics in the classroom requires that classroom teachers become generally familiar with these areas of study

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and that they utilize a wider range of materials and methods—such as slides, books, discussions of general principles, and practice at justifying judgments about art—as well as the activities of making art. Implementing the approach thus involves a good deal of in-service teacher training as well as planning for optimal use of materials available in local districts and buildings.

Nebraska's Model

In Nebraska the Prairie Visions project—a consortium of 23 school districts, the Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Art Teachers Association, Educational Service Units, museums, colleges and universities, and other supporting associations—received a \$625,000 grant to help support the art education activities of the consortium for the next five years. While the Getty Center for Education in the Arts is the main source of support, the project has also received other funds from the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities, The Nebraska Arts Council, the Woods Charitable Fund, Inc., and the Cooper Foundation (Gale 1988).

The existence of the project in Nebraska and the receipt of such support are legitimate sources of pride. Just as important, however, is the fact that the discipline-based approach to art education is still in the process of being developed and perfected. There is a very real possibility that further elaboration and implementation in Nebraska may become a model for others around the nation. The evidence so far should make us rather optimistic about enhancing the quality of art education in our schools. In order to uncover the problem areas inherent in such a new project, Prairie Visions is placed here against the background of general education.

Given some of the tendencies of our society, it is uncertain whether such a school reform stands a good chance of actually improving the abilities of those who receive the education. The view of general education advocated in this chapter emphasizes the importance of the enhancement of the human capacity to interpret and critically evaluate life situations through the development of ways of thinking about images. Education in the arts is one of the main ways to bring about this enhancement.

Images at Large

From listening to educators, one sometimes forms the impression that formal education initially introduces young people to images. But that is far from being the case. Our children and ourselves are virtually inundated with images, especially as we continue to undergo the "graphics revolution" that places such an emphasis on the production and reproduction of images. And by and large, the images are put to manipulative and deceptive purposes.

Evening television, where most of our children and fellow citizens subject themselves to such messages, regularly uses our most significant symbols, metaphors and images to manipulate feelings. Important symbols of patriotism are shamelessly used to sell beer, and deep concerns about the family are utilized to peddle ever greater amounts of insurance. And these are just the advertisements; the quality of the programming is equally dubious. One of the main concerns about how images are used is the recent emphasis on "image management," especially in politics and political campaigns. It is apparently believed by some that the wise use of knowledge about images is rather naturally a matter of attempting to control others. As educators and concerned citizens we must ask what the prospects are for sensitivity to art and the interpretation of images in such an image-battered world.

Personal World Images

Before turning to the specific question of schooling, let us note that there is already something image-like in what we bring to our life situations (Boulding 1956). Each of us has a sort of mental image or map of our world. Without thinking about it, we are able to place ourselves in the world spatially. We also place ourselves in time: each person reading this has a rough view of history as he or she sees it, including some important events in world history leading up to the present time and a rough sequence of events as they have occurred in his or her own lifetime.

In addition, this world image is a map of the social lay of the land. We all have a view of what the social world is like as we enter into it and attempt to live and act in it. Indeed, a great deal of peoples' world images are shared with others: especially in a single society at a single time, many of the components of world images are common at the same time that each world image is one's own.

It is important to note also that many components of world images are closely tied to values. What is most important, and in what ways, are things of which we all have preconceptions. When we come up against events, persons, experiences of different types, we each rate them, or rank them on some sort of implicit scale. Much of this is done unconsciously, though it may be done explicitly as well.

Just as important, world images are dynamic and changing, and they are used to interpret new experiences. New information can be handled in many ways. Much of it is not registered by the observer at all; it seems to pass through unnoticed. Often new information is rejected, for one way of maintaining stability in one's view of things is to exclude possible conflicts and incoherencies. Information that fits may, in many cases, simply be added as a unit to the world image. At other times, however, information (or conflicts) may accumulate until a major change must be made.

It is important to call attention to images of the world for three reasons. First, since we interpret the world through our world images, many people would like to influence them. Many of the debates about education are about world images, both those images of the people doing the criticizing and those of the students whose world images are being shaped and altered. And because values enter into the disagreements, the debates can be heated indeed.

Second, the emphasis on world images reminds us of the importance of the ongoing nature of experience. Some of the components of world images are generated by formal study, but others are not. The influences upon the world images of young people today are multifarious and often very persistent and assertive. Schooling is one of those influences, but it is not the only one. Therefore we ought to think of the tasks of schooling as somewhat limited rather than claim that schooling is responsible for every asset or deficiency we see in whole generations of people.

Third, thinking of human beings in terms of their capacity to interpret experience through the use of images helps us understand that, even if our claim for it must be limited, we need education to go beyond what we pick up without effort. Education allows us to go beyond the images of everyday opinion and mass culture to make ourselves capable of subtler and more comprehensive ways of interpreting the world.

Art Education

It would seem reasonable that art education could play an important part in the development of such ways of thinking (Broudy 1987). Yet until recently Nebraska students, like American students in general, have had little exposure to art. According to the NEA report (1988), for instance, when adults are questioned about their exposure to courses in art history or appreciation, more than 80 percent say they had no such exposure by the age of 24. Of those who did have some course work, over 60 percent had it between the ages of 18 and 24. For many students, in Nebraska and elsewhere, art is a part of elementary school. But overall participation drops off rapidly beginning in the seventh grade. And even when art has been regularly included, it has often been what some teachers call the "hand turkey" approach; that is, students make standard projects thought to be appropriate for the next public holiday (the name comes from a popular Thanksgiving project). In addition, curricular materials available for more extensive involvement with art in the classroom have been relatively inadequate or unavailable; for many districts and schools, such materials have been acquired only beginning in the 1980s (National Endowment for the Arts 1988).

We must conclude that, on the whole, art education has not fared well in American education. Yet art education offers one of the main opportunities for the inclusion of reflection and criticism in schooling. It is surprising that this argument has not been a more persistent theme for education policy makers.

The Uses of Schooling

Recognizing that each of us, and each student, has a developing world image, we should ask how we expect schooling to contribute to that image. To answer this question, it is helpful to start by asking, What are the uses of schooling?

Most people, when they think about what schooling is for, agree that we ought at least to be able to use it. In his recent book, *The Uses of Schooling*, Broudy notes that two standards are often applied. The first claims that those who have spent the time in school and put in a good effort should be able to reproduce on demand what was learned—a replicative use of schooling. Broudy claims such learning is often the object of much repetition and reinforcement in the classroom, such as with learning multiplication skills. Second, Broudy identifies an applicative

use of schooling, which goes beyond direct repetition to make connections between the interpretation of theory and practical problem situations in specific areas of life experience (Broudy 1988).

These two criteria have their appeal when it comes to debates about education because each directly connects schooling to the world of work. It is difficult for advocates of general education to avoid using such criteria, because they are apt to be fairly safe politically. The problem is that they do not work.

Though there is specific learned material that can be recalled, most people cannot replicate what they learned in school, at least not for very long. Who, for instance, would after 10 or 15 years care to take the exam for a history course, even one in which they earned a passing—perhaps even excellent—grade at the time? As Broudy says, "Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of items studied in school and on which successful examinations have been passed are not recallable in post-school life. They are not available for replicative use" (1988).

A similar point can be made about knowledge as professionally useful. Some people use schooling in this way if they end up practicing a profession, but most people do not use what is learned in school in this way. Broudy states, "The applicative use of schooling is a poor criterion for general education because, although characteristic of professional practice, it is so rare in ordinary life" (1988).

Since, by and large, schooling is not used in the ways suggested by these criteria, we are left with a dilemma: "Either the schooling was inadequate or the criteria are wrong" (Broudy 1988). Either we should quit teaching general science, literature, art, history, and mathematics because most of it is forgotten and not used in professional life anyway, or we should admit that looking for replication and application to professional life are not the criteria appropriate to general education.

The *associative* and *interpretive* uses of education are more apt characterizations of proper expectations of general education. To become an educated person, one must be able to draw upon stores of concepts, theories and images to interpret contexts in life situations in ways that go beyond what would otherwise be possible. As we saw in briefly summarizing the world-image notion, making experience intelligible by means of our ways of ordering and relating phenomena is something common to human beings. The main function of general education is to enhance this capacity.

The result of general education should be a fund or store with which one knows. The name Broudy gives to this fund is the *allusionary base*, which he defines as "the associative resources provided by schooling and experience plus the interpretive repertoire of concepts and images" (1988). By comparison with replicative and applicative uses of schooling, the associative/interpretive model allows for some selective forgetting that leaves developed capacities for interpretation even while details are lost. It is in this way that the studies of the arts and sciences have their impact. It is not accidental, Broudy suggests, "that the humanities or the liberal studies are not primarily learned for replication or application, but rather to furnish an imagic and conceptual store (an allusionary base) *with* which to think and feel" (1988). As it turns out, there is a point to the old saying that education is what you have left after you've forgotten what you learned.

Discipline-Based Art Education

In the DBAE approach, the four areas of study interact so that history, philosophy, and criticism expand possible connections of art making to other parts of the curriculum. Such emphasis on the four disciplines enhances the ability of the curriculum to encourage development in cognitive abilities as well as to provide increased contact with culture and tradition. In Elliot Eisner's words, the study of art as "learning to perceive, create, comprehend and judge" aesthetic images may serve as both a meaningful access to culture and a major way to develop intellectual capacities (1987). In some ways this conception is quite a change, or implies one, for the arts as well as for the conception of art in education. The study of art in the DBAE approach is seen as an important component in the education of all students, not just the talented or those of a certain social standing. "To put it bluntly," says Broudy, "The fine or serious arts have traditionally been the concern of the upper social classes. . . . The idea that the children of all social classes needed to have schooling in the arts, therefore, is revolutionary, even in as democratic a society as that of the United States" (1988).

The Nebraska Project

Nebraska—along with Florida, Minnesota, Ohio, and Tennessee, where similar projects are underway—has distinguished itself nationally by attracting funds. Nebraska's opportunity to assume a leadership role in art education lies in the ways that it works out and supports the

specifics of reform in art education. Much significant work has already begun.

One area where a lot of effort has gone, for instance, is in working out the specifics of the relationships among the four disciplines so that there is some plausibility that the general goals of cognitive development may be achieved. This has had to be done in a way that is accessible to teachers and usable in classrooms to achieve educational objectives. "DBAE is not a curriculum but an approach to art education," as Eisner has suggested (1987).

The Getty Center provided initial models for *Prairie Visions*, but those have been modified to reflect the needs of Nebraska and the talents and capabilities of those actively involved in the project. In order to fully discuss and plan such matters, Nebraska project leaders have chosen an organizational model that involves participants at all levels and attempts as much as possible to avoid the hierarchical organization that so often discourages the sharing of ideas. This approach, which makes a serious effort to hear the voices of teachers from the beginning, may itself prove to be an example for others to follow.

Another instance where it is necessary to reinterpret national models to better fit local needs and opportunities is the utilization of diverse cultural materials. In Nebraska, the artistic contributions of traditional perspectives within European culture have been balanced with those of Native Americans, African Americans, and women, groups often underrepresented in cultural studies. Nebraska museums have also been well utilized. At the same time, Nebraska educators, like those in other parts of the country, do understand the need for international awareness of culture; today's students need to be aware of, for example, Asian, African, and Middle Eastern cultures as well as local ones. Challenged by the riches of cultural diversity, practitioners must carefully pick exemplars for study. In this effort they bring images from many cultures, including those formerly repressed, into public consciousness.

In both these dimensions (the interaction of component disciplines in DBAE and multicultural enhancement of art education curricula) Nebraska's *Prairie Visions* project may well be in a position to provide useful models for other states and regions of the country. Nonetheless, to meet this promise, those in responsible positions, especially at the state level, will have continually to monitor progress in translating goals into local and district practices.

Challenges for Prairie Visions

The Prairie Visions project confronts four major concerns that any similar project in art education must face. Each of these has to do with the difficulties inherent in reforming art education while keeping general education goals firmly in mind.

Teacher Training. As Eisner has pointed out, in the classroom the success of DBAE depends on availability of curricular materials and good teaching (1987).

School districts in Nebraska are gradually acquiring new art education materials. Although few of these are specifically designed for DBAE, they can be very useful. But a lot depends on the training of the teachers, especially because in many instances the teachers themselves will have had little experience with art teaching. This is particularly true at the elementary level, where classroom teachers may be asked to teach art without the aid of art specialists. The educational backgrounds of many teachers may not have prepared them for the exploration of art as a way to develop critical perspectives on culture. In addition, much of the subject matter of the DBAE approach will be new to many, even well-trained, teachers.

In the Prairie Visions project so far, the approach to this problem has been to offer summer institutes that give three intense weeks' exposure to the basic concepts of the disciplines. The first such institute, participated in by 150 principals, classroom teachers, and art specialists, was held in the summer of 1989.

The summer institute approach looks promising, but it cannot be counted on indefinitely. After the five cycles supported by Getty Center funds, there must be ways to continue and expand this sort of teacher training. As more schools and districts implement changes in art education, there will be a growing need for pre-service training of teachers as well. It seems imperative that colleges and universities make commitments to this training and plan to do so in ways that profit from the extensive experience provided by the Prairie Visions project.

Evaluation. The lack of student progress assessment standards is one of the signs of the low status of art among school subjects. Presumably, DBAE approaches in this schools will alter this situation. But it is not clear as yet what the standards or means of assessment should be. When large numbers of students are asked to make art, for example, it does

not seem appropriate to make the product the basis for assessment. On the other hand, it would run counter to the general education goals and the skills development orientation of the DBAE approach to resort to "objective tests" in order to evaluate performance in separate disciplines. This problem of assessing student performance is not faced by Nebraska alone; how to institute meaningful and appropriate evaluation in a field where that has not been a central concern remains a problem nationally.

Art Making and Creativity. The DBAE approach attempts to enhance the place of art in education by emphasizing its cultural significance and the ways experience with art can enhance general abilities of interpretation. In part, this reaction counters an earlier view of art education defined in terms of "creative expression" for a few talented people only. But there is a danger that reaction to this earlier view could become over-reaction; in emphasizing interpretation and culture, the creative aspects of art making might be played down too much. In anticipation of such a possibility, it should be kept in mind that the art making component has many facets that are not found elsewhere. As Eisner has emphasized, students can be uniquely challenged by projects for which there are multiple possible good solutions that can be discovered by different individuals as well as by the same individuals making and remaking the objects (1987). In other words, it is here that one finds the experience of using imagination to come up with good alternatives (in contrast to other subjects, where there is supposedly one right answer).

Several responses might help assure the continuing significance of art making in the Prairie Vision program. Boards and administrators who will make future decisions might seek state support for curricular materials that include resources for art making as well as conceptual and cultural approaches to art. Administrators could also assure that art projects are generally serious enough to carry educational content, avoiding the superficiality of "hand turkeys." And art teachers should be assured that art courses will not be seen as holding places for behaviorally difficult or otherwise intractable students.

Teachers can do much as well, especially in their efforts to devise projects that combine art making with other skills. In addition, teachers often could use local artists as resource persons; a remarkable number of artists are at work in Nebraska, and their abilities could be tapped to enhance the education of others. There is much in the person-to-person

contact with working artists and attempting to make one's own art that cannot be learned from studying criticism, history and philosophy.

Problem Areas and General Education. In all these potential problem areas the demands upon educational leaders will be to keep active development and local implementation in balance, especially once the excitement of large grants and national attention is over. The best way to attain this balance is to keep a view of general education, such as that presented in this chapter, in mind.

Teacher training is a good example. When it comes time for universities and colleges to take over the tasks of preparing classroom teachers, it will be imperative that cooperative ventures be established and maintained. Thus, for instance, if the goals of this new form of art education are kept in sight, there will have to be training for teachers in which art historians, philosophers, critics, and artists regularly participate. To simply have a course or two within colleges and departments of education will not do, for the whole DBAE approach is based upon the insight that the *ways* of thinking of the different disciplines must interact. Yet this sort of thing—requiring cooperation among departments, colleges and campuses—is notoriously difficult in today's highly specialized and bureaucratic institutions. To work through the details of such arrangements, we need to keep the goal of general education in mind, so that such a goal can function as a practical guide.

Similar considerations apply to the other problem areas. Given the strong beginning of the Prairie Visions project, such practical arrangements, even if difficult, are well within the scope of our present institutions, and we may have confidence that they will be made a reality. The possible outcome for the last problem area, images and society, looks far less hopeful.

Images and Society. The fourth challenge facing DBAE is its relation to the development and direction of American culture. Here we are forced to consider matters that go beyond local and state contexts. Earlier it was noted that one way to understand education is as an extension and refinement of our public and private world images, and that others may attempt to control and manipulate our world images (McClure 1986). We often find, for example, that the student who spent some time in school talking to a local artist, enriching his or her world view, may go home that evening to watch hours of television.

The National Endowment for the Arts emphasized that the development of abilities of critical assessment is one of the main reasons for arts education. The writers mention both the power of the arts to stir emotion and their capacity to both inspire and manipulate. They go on to assert:

Every child growing up in the United States is bombarded from birth with popular art and artful communication over the airways and on the streets. The purpose of arts education is not to wean young people from these arts (an impossible task even if it were desirable) but to enable them to make reasoned choices about them and what is good and bad.

Arts education can help make discriminating consumers. Understanding the art of design, for example, can lead to better industrial products, as the Japanese understood when they swamped our automobile market. Similarly, knowledge of design enables the citizenry to make informed choices affecting where and how we live. Understanding of the media arts could affect the Nielson and Arbitron ratings, which dictate the broadcast agenda. (1988:18)

Art education, it is said, is needed to develop capacities for critical evaluation. At the same time, the writers characterize choice in terms of being a wise "consumer" and seem to promise that, given arts education, we shall do better at economic competition. This interesting juxtaposition of claims calls attention to something very important about the prospects for projects such as DBAE: that schooling takes place in the culture at large, and there, in our daily lives, there is no lack of images. We are, as the NEA report says, bombarded with images. In addition, to use the word *consumer* in this sense creates an ambiguity that hides the fact that general education and education for economic growth may not be the same thing.

From the point of view of this chapter, the two goals of sensitive discrimination and economic development are really quite different. There is indeed a pressing need to aid young people in making reasoned judgments about the images they are bombarded with. But to promise greater production and improvement in the balance of trade as part of the same educational package is misleading. (If the balance of trade does not improve, should we conclude that it was a failure of art education?)

Reproduction of Images

One of the main characteristics of our century is the number of methods that have been developed for reproducing images. Photography, mechanical means of reproduction and printing, television,

video, and "imaging" by use of computers and the transport of the results by electronic means, are common in our world. Awash in images of one sort or another from a very early age, our children hardly need education to introduce them to images.

"Images have a power in our world undreamed of by the ancient idolaters," as Mitchell has put it (1986). The emphasis on the surface and the appearance of things has become a part of life, so that it is hardly a choice of whether or not to participate. In American society today, "image management" has become both a lucrative business and a matter-of-fact 'necessity' in commerce, industry, politics, and interpersonal relations" (Ewen 1988). Historian Daniel Boorstin, in his book *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, pointed to the "graphics revolution" and the impact it was having on our lives (1987). His claim was that we tend to use the new-found capabilities of images and their reproduction for purposes of manipulation and deception, especially self-deception.

Let us put this concern another way. In the earlier discussion of world image we saw that each of us, often in agreement with others, has scales of values that we tend to use to rank what we interpret of our experiences. In Western societies generally, and in the United States in particular, we tend to play up values having to do with action, cognition, and affectivity (production, analysis, feelings of pleasure and pain) and play down what is reflective or contemplative (Maquet 1986). The graphics revolution, once it becomes integral to the production process, makes this valuation even stronger. It seems clear, then, that there should be a decided emphasis not only on programs such as DBAE, but on the potential for critical assessment within them. Such a focus would require a renewed emphasis on general education as well.

But much is running in the other direction. It may be too much to hope that some schooling that aims at personal valuation and critical reflection will have much chance against the ever-growing manipulative and deceptive uses of the power of images. One is tempted to despair over the "susceptibilities of a culture gone from teleology to television in a generation" (Logan 1989). Perhaps one should conclude that our mass use of commodified images must inevitably infect the authenticity of all images. A more sensible, though less striking, stance would be, as Mitchell suggests, to bring some general critique of the use of images in society in line with ". . . the fact that the museum is (sometimes) the site of authentic aesthetic experience, the media (sometimes) the vehicle of

real communication and enlightenment" (1986). How shall we distinguish the sham and the authentic? A good general education should prepare us to tell the difference.

It may also cut against the political grain to advocate it. Projects such as Prairie Visions allow us to put general education to the fore in our thinking. But there are many pressures here and elsewhere to tie educational planning to economic development in ways that may make general education difficult or even preclude it. Whether we speak of universities or of local school districts, the pressures to treat education as an element of economic development at the expense of general education and the development of the all-round capacities of our children are very real. It will require some strong leadership, not only at the state level but also in the local districts, to maintain long-term commitments to general education. In the past we have always claimed to do both; to provide preparation for economic life and preparation for life. We have, of course, not succeeded, but we made the claim. We must hope that educational leaders keep making that claim.

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