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Author(s): Mary Ann Stankiewicz
Published by: National Art Education Association
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1320675
Accessed: 18/09/2010 17:36

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Discipline and the Future of Art Education

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Although sometimes framed as competing orientations to art education, society, the learner, and subject-matter drawn from art disciplines are necessary components of the field. The early 19th-century mental-discipline model of liberal education encompassed four metaphors that helped structure K-12 education as well as higher education: mind as muscle, social classes as mind and body, knowledge as object, and visual art as language. Disciplinary, structured knowledge changes in response to social factors and cultural contexts. Two notions of structure have interacted in the past century—the logical structure of content and the psychological structure of the learner. The emergence of scholarly disciplines has given us experts as models of knowledge. Discipline-based art education, like earlier approaches to art instruction, has adapted knowledge, metaphors, and modes of inquiry from other scholarly professions. However, as art curriculum content is simplified and organized for instruction, the complex richness of expert knowledge may be decontextualized, frozen in time, and treated as an end rather than a means to student understanding of art and of themselves in relation to the worlds of art. The future of art education depends on recognizing that knowledge and processes of inquiry are socially constructed, situated in sociopolitical contexts, and subject to change in response to intellectual climate.

Defining “art education” is a challenging task. Who are we and how did we come to be? Elliot Eisner has described a “triadic relationship” of orientations to art education: society-centered, subject-centered, and child-centered (1972, p. 58). Karen Hamblen (1984) traced the learner-subject-society triad back to Ralph Tyler who argued that all educational theories and programs must address three components of the educational process: the learner, subject matter, and society. Although Hamblen reports that Laura Chapman (1978) suggested a balance of goals related to all three components, both Hamblen and Eisner argue that most art programs and art educational theories emphasize one point of the triangle over the other two.

Three Components of Education

![Three Components of Education Diagram]

Rather than viewing the learner, subject matter or content, and the social context as three competing orientations to art teaching and learning, I agree with Chapman that all three elements are necessary to art
education. The tripartite model answers three different questions vital to art educators.

• Who do we teach?
• Why do we teach?
• What do we teach?

To paraphrase the classic Abbott and Costello skit, who's on first, what's on second, and why just slid into home plate. The who, what, and why of art education play on the same team, not opposing ones.

Who do we teach? Children, adolescents, adults committed to life-long learning, future teachers of art, college students, pre-schoolers, the 8th grade students in the fourth period computer graphics course, the students with developmental disabilities who have come to the art museum with their teacher and instructional aides—each of us has our own specific answers to this first question.

Why do we teach? Again, each of us can answer this question specifically in relationship to our values and goals, but we all have some vision of improving society, of helping to make life better for our students and future generations.

What do we teach? My focus will be on how dynamic processes of organizing and simplifying content have contributed to the development of structured knowledge for art education. I will begin by laying out the mental discipline model of liberal education with several distinctions and metaphors that have influenced K-12 education as well as higher education. My brief overview of art education history will explore how two notions of structure have interacted—the logical structure of content and the psychological structure of the learner, then sketch the development of discipline-based art education (DBAE) during the 1980s.

Furniture of the Mind

Around 1828, faculty at Yale College in Connecticut faced proposals for educational reforms. Two recently founded institutions of higher education, the University of Virginia and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, had supplemented the traditional classical curriculum with agricultural and industrial studies. Critics of Yale's conservative devotion to Latin and Greek, ancient literature, mathematics, natural and moral philosophy suggested that the college curriculum be revised to better serve the emerging emphasis on business. The Yale faculty responded by preparing a statement in which they declared that the purpose of college was to lay a broad, deep, and solid foundation for a thorough, life-long education.

The two great points to be gained in intellectual culture, are the discipline and the furniture of the mind; expanding its powers, and storing it with knowledge. The former of these is, perhaps, the more important. (Yale Report, 1997, p. 192 [emphasis in original])
The Yale faculty argued that traditional subjects should be studied because of their "distinct and independent merits;" they declared that familiarity with exemplars of classical rhetoric would form good taste, disciplining the mind to appreciate "what is elevated, chaste, and simple" (1997, p. 198). The liberal education they advocated was based on two different but similar distinctions: the first applied to the learner and the second to society. First, they believed that mind and body were separate. The mind housed the higher, rational faculties, mental powers developed through rigorous systematic study so that, in later life, these powers could be applied to various endeavors. The educated mind should exercise rational control over the lower, sensual nature of the body. Second, the Yale faculty split society into higher and lower classes. Liberal education was the legacy of aristocratic, upper-class, free men. It was chiefly intellectual and theoretical, as opposed to the manual, hands-on education that prepared the lower classes for lives of work.

Liberal Education and Four Metaphors

First Metaphor—Mind as Muscle

In spite of their belief in the mind/body split, advocates of this mental discipline model for liberal education used the metaphor of the mind as a muscle to explain their beliefs. Just as a well-developed body resulted from a program of varied muscular exercises, so the well-developed mind required a balanced and complete program of studies to exercise mental faculties such as reason, memory, and imagination. This idealized model for liberal education has at least four parallels with early formulations of the discipline-based approach to art education based on traditions of humanistic education (Clark, Day, & Greer, 1987; Levi & Smith, 1991).

- A liberally educated person would understand how to respond appropriately to texts by others and be able to speak and write fluently and effectively. The goal of DBAE was to help students understand and appreciate art, to know how to respond to art as well as create art.

- The goal of liberal education was to develop a well-rounded, balanced character and lay a foundation for later professional studies. In DBAE art was taught as an essential component of general education and as a foundation for later, specialized study.

- The liberal studies were ends in themselves with intrinsic worth; they were not studied as means to practical ends. DBAE focused on art as a subject for study, not as a means to enhance learning in other subjects.

1 Interestingly, the emphasis on text found in much postmodern scholarship sometimes accompanies arguments for a return to rhetoric as a key discipline. (See Landow, 1997; Lanham, 1993.)
• The content of a liberal education, the furniture of the mind, was
organized according to traditional areas of study, or scholarly disci-
plines, and sequentially structured. DBAE derived content from
four art disciplines: (in alphabetical order) aesthetics, art criticism,
art history, and art production.

Second Metaphor—Body and Mind in Social Classes
The traditional distinction between upper and lower classes was some-
times muddied in the United States. The nation had rebelled against
British aristocracy, establishing a republic of, by, and for the people.
Although socio-economic classes existed in the early republic and would
become more sharply defined as the 19th century advanced, advocates of
liberal education argued that all classes should have access to the same
models of excellence. In theory, a liberal education should be general
education for all, even though (or perhaps especially because) it had been
derived from the education of European aristocrats (which included the
fine arts). The democratic rhetoric of equality notwithstanding, white
men who had the easiest access to higher education expected to use their
rationally trained faculties to govern the lower orders of the political body.
The model of education that they held out for others was the liberal educa-
tion that shaped their social consciousness and maintained their power.

Third Metaphor—Knowledge as Object
These metaphors of mind as muscle and society as a body governed by
the best minds put abstract ideas into concrete forms. In a similar fashion,
the mental discipline model objectified knowledge. The metaphor of
knowledge as furniture suggested that knowledge existed outside any one
human mind, that it could be conveyed into the empty chamber of mind
and placed in an orderly arrangement. Structure existed in the furniture;
knowledge could be classified. The powers of mind were the muscular
moving men who could put each piece of knowledge into the position
designated by external authority.

These metaphors continue to color our educational beliefs. For example,
E. D. Hirsch has compiled solid knowledge to be mastered at various grades
into a sequential Core Knowledge curriculum (see www.coreknowledge.org).
The May 1989 National Invitational Seminar on Discipline-based Art
Education in Austin, Texas, sponsored by the Getty Center for Education in
the Arts, was titled “Inheriting the Theory,” a title that suggests intellectual
property.

Fourth Metaphor—Visual Art as Language
At the same time as the first three metaphors were helping shape
American beliefs about education, visual art was being cast as a liberal,
humanistic study through scholarly and popular discourses (Storr, 1992). In the early Republic, college faculty and student orators lectured on specific works of visual art, expounded on the historical development of Western arts, and debated aesthetic issues, such as how best to develop good taste and the relation of ethics and aesthetics. These lectures and discussions were not part of specific courses in art history or visual art criticism, but were embedded in other subjects, the standard college president’s senior seminar in moral philosophy, or in public lecture series, graduation speeches, and mechanics’ institutes. Through these discourses visual art was positioned as a component of the language-based liberal arts that dominated the traditional college curriculum.

Here we have the fourth metaphor: visual art as language and literature, as a means of expression and communication as well as a body of knowledge, more furniture for the mind. Positioning visual art within the liberal arts implied that art could be a rigorous, intellectual discipline, a necessary part of a democratic education. Through these metaphors at the core of early 19th-century conceptions of mental discipline, the visual arts entered the parlor of liberal education, becoming part of conceptions of a broad general, democratic education.

**Developing Discipline(s)**

The term discipline initially referred to following a strict regimen for behavior, a meaning with continuing popular use. The Yale faculty applied the term to structured opportunities for learning, to an intellectual regimen that would exercise mental faculties. During the first half of the 19th century, academic disciplines did not exist in the forms we take for granted, as “methods of inquiry, networks of concepts, theoretical frameworks, techniques for acquiring and verifying findings, appropriate images, symbol systems, vocabularies, and mental models” (Gardner & Boix-Mansilla, 1994, p. 201). College faculty were just beginning to identify themselves with the subject they taught rather than with their institutions, to think of themselves as experts in particular domains (Finkelstein, 1997).

After 1850, this self-conscious professionalization accelerated, encouraged by several factors, among them the evolution of learned societies into professional associations that supported scholarly publications and conferences for dissemination of research, and the development of specialized graduate programs modeled on those in European universities. By the end of the 19th century, scholarly disciplines were becoming institutionalized (Stankiewicz, 1994). Each had particular clusters of goals and problems, characteristic methods of inquiry, technical concepts and principles. The expectation that the aspiring disciplinary expert must make new knowledge became formalized with the growth of graduate education.
Extending our furniture metaphor, we might think of the antique mental furniture of classical knowledge being supplemented by pieces with newer functions crafted in newer styles by apprentice discipline experts.

Modern disciplinary self-consciousness emerged later in the visual arts than in some more traditional academic domains. According to art historian Sarah Burns (1996), the modern artist invented himself during the late 19th century. In the years before the First World War, avant-garde artists were eager to throw off the bounds of tradition, to make art unrestrained by academic conventions. As studio art departments developed in colleges and universities, the mythology of self-expression became academic convention. Although the first M.A. degree in fine arts was awarded by Vassar College in 1876, most graduate programs in art history or studio art were established a half-century or more later (Smyth & Lukehart, 1994). Art teachers and college art professors all belonged to the same professional associations until 1912 when the College Art Association (CAA) was founded. CAA, now the major professional organization for art historians and artists, grew out of work begun in 1907 by a joint committee of the Western Drawing and Manual Training Association, the Eastern Art Teachers’ Association and the Eastern Manual Training Association (Burke, 1942). Although studio art and art history are recognized academic disciplines with departmental status on many campuses, art criticism and aesthetics typically remain specializations within other fields.

Colleges have had a potent influence on the lower branches of American education. Secondary schools began as preparatory institutions for those who hoped to attend college, gradually coming to be regarded as poor men’s colleges, or college-substitutes for future businessmen (Angus & Mirel, 1999; Reese, 1995). During the late 19th century, college presidents, notably Charles Elliot of Harvard, played an active role in the National Education Association, chaired committees on curriculum reform in secondary schools, and delivered pronouncements on K-12 education. College entrance requirements were seen as a key factor in secondary school structure and curriculum into the 1930s and beyond. Twentieth-century high school art courses often have been modeled on college art studio courses.

Thus the early-19th-century notions of the discipline and furniture of the mind colored curriculum development in schools, either directly through imitation and adaptation, or indirectly through approaches developed in opposition to these traditions. When academic disciplines were formalized during the second half of the 19th century, the physical and natural sciences served as models for those seeking rigor in history, art history, and design theory, among other would-be disciplines. Many art educators tried to make their subject appear scientific by developing

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2 My use of the male pronoun reflects the demographic reality that most modern artists have been men.

3 Although the rhetoric of secondary schooling has emphasized benefits to young males, the majority of high school students have been female. (See Angus & Mirel, 1999, p. 203.)
schemes of categories, classifications and hierarchies as well as theoretical rules to guide practice—to give structure and discipline to their knowledge and skills.\footnote{Two examples of such categorizers are Langdon S. Thompson who chaired the National Education Association Committee of Ten on Elementary Art Education (Wygant, 1983) and John Ward Stimson whose system of categories appears in his book The Gate Beautiful (1903).}

In the world of the common schools, discipline connoted orderly behavior as well as orderly subject matter. Like other schoolmen, Walter Smith believed that following a well-ordered course of study disciplined scholars, introducing them to orderly habits necessary in an industrial society (Efland, 1990). The order that disciplined minds put into the art curriculum was expected to transfer somehow into orderly behavior among working and middle-class students.

Although most late 19th- and early 20th-century art educators took the importance of logically organized, classified, and structured curriculum for granted, assumptions about mind and knowledge were beginning to change. Prang art education texts, for example, were influenced by Kindergarten theories and practices with their metaphors of innate powers unfolding in a supportive environment. Child Study was another influence. In 1880, G. Stanley Hall began a study designed to catalog and classify the contents of children’s minds. Hall argued that instruction should be devised in accord with developmental structures; that the organization of the child’s mind was a better guide to curriculum development than logically organized subject matter. Although authors of the Prang textbooks believed that the power to conceive the ideas prerequisite to expressive art was inborn, most art content was derived from academic approaches to representative drawing, from established critical standards for good taste in decoration, from the history of ornament and scientific principles for constructive drawing, i.e., from work by experts in emerging art disciplines (Stankiewicz, 1990; in press).

**Locating Structure**

Art educators who created design theories, like Arthur Wesley Dow and Denman Waldo Ross, believed that creative abilities were innate, that artistic genius could be nurtured but not imposed by instruction. Dow (1917) asserted that producing art depended upon the exercise of internal powers, not gathering facts nor developing knowledge and skill. However, Dow and Ross also argued that anyone could learn the principles and elements of art, revealed in the works of past and present artists, and rationally structured through their theories of composition and pure design (Stankiewicz, 1990). Both Dow and Ross had their students study varied examples of past art through reproductions and original works that they collected.

When these theories of design were popularized, they were simplified. As early as 1908, one commentator noted that the elements and principles of art, intended as means to improve expression and guide response, were
being taught as ends in themselves (Boone, 1908). Exercises in repeating lines to make rhythmic patterns, for example, were taught without connections to exemplary works of art and without references to how rhythm might contribute to possible meanings in art. Students were encouraged to create original designs without awareness of the possible range of world design and ornament.

Traditional educators and early 20th-century Progressive educators differed in their attitudes toward subject matter. Traditional educators favored formal subjects with logically structured content grounded in verbal or mathematical symbols. Progressives argued that subject matter should grow organically out of the child’s interests or respond to current social needs. The philosopher and educator John Dewey (1902) tried to reconcile these two views of structure, arguing that the child and the curriculum were two ends of one process. Dewey acknowledged that the child’s relationship with the world was integrated and fluid, but he also recognized that scholarly domains embodied the cumulative outcomes of human endeavors. For Dewey subject matter was not furniture but a map that recorded and organized human achievements while serving as a guide for the future. He explained that continuous reconstruction was necessary, moving from the child’s present experience out into the subject matter that represented organized bodies of knowledge then back to the child.

Masterful progressive art teachers like Margaret Naumberg and Victor D’Amico found their own balances between attention to the individual child and deep understanding of modern art (Stankiewicz, in press). They had the luxury of small classes, well-equipped studios with sensuously stimulating supplies, and access to the New York art world. The majority of public school art teachers relied on greatly simplified strategies to introduce classes with 30 or more students, limited time and basic supplies, to school art experiences that provided a humane element in the impersonal atmosphere of mass education (Efland, 1976). Beliefs that children’s art rose from deep down inside (Cole, 1966) and that colorful, easy-to-clean-up-after materials were sufficient motivation oversimplified the convictions of these master teachers, but functioned as survival skills for many art teachers in the baby-booming years following World War II.

**Discipline-based Art Education**

By the 1960s U.S. schools were again facing criticism. Just as the Yale faculty of 1828 had advocated strengthening mental powers and expanding knowledge in response to their critics, so educators and content experts focused on disciplined studies as a way to counter those who criticized Progressive excesses. Art educators began to search for meaningful art education, for a sense of greater purpose than imitating tradition or expressing whims (Landis, 1951). The psychologist Jerome Bruner influenced
curriculum reform in a number of subjects when he argued forcefully that "the foundations of any subject may be taught to anybody at any age in some form" (1960/1977, p. 12). The key to such teaching was discovering the structure of the discipline and representing its underlying principles in a form that would appeal to and be understood by the learner.

Bruner’s *structure of the disciplines* model used “structure” in the two senses that I noted earlier, referring both to the child’s cognitive structures and to orderly bodies of knowledge. In his influential paper at the 1965 Penn State Seminar, Manuel Barkan acknowledged the ambiguity in Bruner’s notion of “structure,” adding a third sense of structure. For Barkan, curriculum in art education “needed to derive its structure from characteristic processes that artists, critics, and historians used when they did their work” (Efland, 1984, p. 209). Barkan’s third sense of structure hints at the possibility that disciplinary knowledge could include both the process and the content of inquiry—reuniting disciplinary power with the furniture of knowledge. As Barkan declared:

The art educator cannot avoid theory, because he must be guided by it; hence, he must synthesize the knowledge in art of the artist, and the knowledges about art of the aesthetician, the critic, and the historian. (Barkan, 1966, p. 243)

During the 1970s, growing interest in aesthetic perception, critical judgment, artistic heritage, and more meaningful artmaking influenced theory development, federally funded pilot projects, and state art education policy documents. In spite of these reform efforts, K-12 art education seemed stuck in practices from earlier decades. When the J. Paul Getty Trust was formed in early 1982, the staff identified improving the quality and status of K-12 art education as one area for attention. Informed by discussions with leading art educators, Lani Duke, Director of the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, made the strategic decision to focus resources on one approach to art education, rather than possibly diluting the impact of the Getty’s initiatives by supporting a number of approaches (Duke, 1999). The approach selected grew out of Barkan’s reconceptualization of curriculum for art education and drew on work by Elliot Eisner, Harry Broudy, Ralph Smith, Laura Chapman and others that, in many respects, continued traditions of liberal education.

The label *discipline-based art education* was coined by Dwaine Greer in a 1984 article in *Studies in Art Education*. The definition of DBAE presented in the monograph by Clark, Day, and Greer (1987) was forged through extensive critical review by art educators, artists, art critics, art historians, aestheticians, and others. The Getty Center for Education in the Arts, later renamed the Getty Education Institute for the Arts, worked to accomplish its mission through five program areas: advocacy for art in general education, curriculum development, demonstration programs,
professional development, and theory development. Although DBAE initially signaled attention to content, and was criticized for ignoring the other two components of art education—the learner and the social context—, the discipline-based approach has influenced the National Standards for Arts Education, the framework for the recent National Assessment of Educational Progress in the arts, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards guidelines for art certification, as well as state art guidelines, district art programs, and the art teaching of many individuals (Day, 1997). With the demise of the Getty Education Institute (Duke, 1999), disciplinary perspectives on art education have lost both a champion and a catalyst.

**Discipline and the Future of Art Education**

In the early days of moving DBAE from theoretical construct to active implementation, art educators struggled with how content from the four art disciplines might be thought about and taught as means to student understanding and appreciation of art (Clark, Day, & Greer, 1987). One solution was to treat each art discipline as a separate entity, following the lead of Clark and Zimmerman (1978) who had suggested that students learn to walk in the shoes of each discipline expert in order to move from naive to sophisticated understanding. This seemed a logical approach to curriculum planning, but tended to fragment knowledge about art, to raise questions of curricular balance, to focus on the professional activities of discipline experts more than on enriching students’ understanding of works of art. Another problem was that, when the complex structures of each discipline were necessarily simplified for instruction, the art disciplines were treated as if frozen in time.

Just as the 1980s and 1990s have been a period of reforms in education, so artists, art critics, art historians, and philosophers of art have been re-forming their domains, re-examining their goals, re-conceptualizing professional problems, and renewing modes of inquiry. Artists moved away from non-objective formalism, rediscovering narrative and subject matter, as well as social relevance (Lacy, 1995). New media, many derived from computer-based technologies, extended the possibilities for human expression (Bolter, 1991; Landow, 1997). Art historians supplemented traditional methods of connoisseurship, iconography and iconology with newer methods informed by Marxism, feminism, poststructuralism and critical theory (Pointon, 1994). Art critics followed the lead of literary criticism by adapting some of these same approaches in response to new forms of visual art (Richter, 1989; Smagula, 1991). While the big questions of aesthetics remain the same, changes in art works, in the practices of art criticism and history suggested new ways of examining those questions (Neill & Ridley, 1995). At the same time that art educators began to look
more closely at art disciplines as source of content, the disciplines were changing in response to social and cultural forces.

As discipline-oriented approaches to art education are brought into the 21st century, we must keep in mind the fact that the art disciplines are not solid and fixed, like 19th-century parlor furniture. Even Dewey’s metaphor of maps fails to account for changing structures of knowledge. While metaphors of disciplinary lenses (Wilson, 1997) support a more complex, comprehensive discipline-oriented art education, the lenses continue to be treated as static. Perhaps we should try to imagine the disciplinary lens as Alice’s looking-glass—sometimes allowing us to see into an art world, sometimes reflecting our own products and perceptions back at us, and sometimes permitting us to climb through into Wonderland (Carroll, 1960).

Art disciplines generate and structure content—the what of art education. Without knowledge and processes of inquiry adapted from discipline experts, art education leaves the worlds of visual art, becoming another subject altogether. However, each scholarly discipline is socially constructed by its practitioners, shaped by social factors and grounded in culture that changes over time. Inquiry processes used by artists, art critics, art historians, and aestheticians are structured by their disciplinary expertise, but also offer tools that can be used by non-experts for thinking in and about art (Koroscik, 1992-1993, 1993, 1996). Passive metaphors of learners receiving objectified knowledge from external authorities should be replaced by conceptions of the learner as an active agent, setting personal goals for learning, and creating meaning through encounters with art (Erickson, Katter, Lankford, Roucher, & Stewart, 1999). Both content and learner are structured by gender, ethnicity, class, and all the other cultural factors that contribute to the production and reproduction of shared values.

The complex lattice (Efland, 1995) of art education should not artificially separate learner, context, and content. Who, why, and what are necessary and inseparable to fully defining art education. Definitions of art education are not firm and fixed—each of us contributes to defining our field as we teach, plan lessons and learning activities, do research, write and publish. The distinctions and metaphors that we use in developing our definitions are useful tools until the artificial separations they provide become barriers to recognizing wholeness in and teaching students to appreciate the richness of the visual arts.

References


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