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Curriculum Change for the 21st Century: Visual Culture in Art Education

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CURRICULUM AND VISUAL CULTURE

National and international art educators have begun to move away from the emphasis on traditional fine arts disciplines toward a broader range of visual arts and cultural issues (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Barbosa, 1991; Blandy, 1994; Congdon, 1991; Duncum, 1990; Freedman, 1994, 2000; Garber, 1995; Garoian, 1999; Hernández, 2000; Hicks, 1990; Jagodzinski, 1997; Neperud, 1995; Smith-Shank, 1996; Tavin, 2000). These contributors to the field have argued for a transformation of art education in response to changing conditions in the contemporary world where the visual arts, including popular arts and contemporary fine art, are an increasingly important part of the larger visual culture that surrounds and shapes our daily lives. In the process of this transformation, art educators are replacing older views of curriculum and instruction with an expanded vision of the place of visual arts in human experience.

The change in art education has historical roots. From the beginning of public school art education in the late 19th century, a range of design forms have been included in the field. For example, early art education focused on industrial drawing and handicrafts; children’s interests became a topic of art education by the 1920s; art in daily life was a slogan of the 1930s; during World War II, visual propaganda was taught in school; and during the 1960s, crafts increased in popularity. In the following 2 decades, a few art educators addressed important issues in the uses of popular culture and mass-media technologies, contextualizing these in relation to students’ lives (Chalmers, 1981; Grigsby, 1977; Lanier, 1969; 1974; McFee & Degge, 1977; Neperud, 1973; Wilson & Wilson, 1977; Wilson, Hurwitz, & Wilson, 1987).

Substantial differences exist between those roots of a generation or more ago and the contemporary movement. This is the case, in part, because the global virtual culture only suggested by theorists before the availability of interactive, personal computers in the early 1980s has now become a reality with its associated proliferation of images and designed objects. The current transformation of art education is more than just a broadening of curriculum content and changes in teaching strategies in response to the immediacy and mass distribution...
of imagery. It includes a new level of theorizing about art in education that is tied to emergent postmodern philosophies based on this growing environment of intercultural, intracultural, and transcultural visualizations.

The shift to visual culture not only refers to expanding the range of visual arts forms included in the curriculum but also to addressing issues of imagery and artifacts that do not center on form per se. This includes issues concerning the power of representation, the formation of cultural identities, functions of creative production, the meanings of visual narratives, critical reflection on technological pervasiveness, and the importance of interdisciplinary connections. The focus in recent decades on fine arts disciplines in U.S. art curriculum and standardized testing have resulted in the exclusion of such critical aspects of visual culture in art education. In fact, these aspects of the visual arts have been given more attention in “nonart” school subjects such as anthropology and sociology and feminist, cultural, and media studies (Collins, 1989; Mirzoeff, 1998; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). If the intention of education is to prepare students for personal fulfillment and to constructively contribute to society, then art education must deal with newly emerging issues, problems, and possibilities that go beyond the constraints of learning offered by a discipline-based curriculum and standardized forms of assessment.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss art education in terms of the broadening realm of visual culture and to theorize about curriculum change. The development of a conceptual framework for postmodern visual culture is vital to any contemporary teaching with a goal of critical reflection. Although scholars in art education and other fields have begun to develop theoretical underpinnings for understanding visual culture, the topic from an educational perspective remains severely undertheorized. As a result, much theoretical work needs to be done in order to promote appropriate interpretations and applications of visual culture in art education. In this chapter, we have drawn on scholarship from inside and outside of the field to lay a foundation for curriculum theory. In the following main section, we support the argument for broadening the domain of art education by presenting the visual arts in their contemporary, sociocultural context. After discussing this context of visual culture, we address shifts in recent theory and practice of art education in the second main section.

BROADENING THE DOMAIN OF ART EDUCATION

A global transformation of culture has occurred that is dependent on visual images and artifacts ranging from what we wear to what we watch. We live in an increasingly image-saturated world where television news may control a person’s knowledge of current events, where students spend more time in front of a screen than in front of a teacher, and where newborn babies are shown videos to activate still-developing neurons. Visual culture is pervasive and it reflects, as well as influences, general cultural change. The pervasiveness of visual cultural forms and the freedom with which these forms cross various types of traditional borders can be seen in the use of fine art icons recycled in advertising, computer-generated characters in films, and the inclusion of rap videos in museum exhibitions. The visual arts are the major part of this larger visual culture that includes fine art, advertising, folk art, television and other performance arts, housing and apparel design, mall and amusement park design, and other forms of visual production and communication. Anyone who travels, watches rock videos, sits on a chair, enters a building, or surfs the Web experiences the visual arts. Visual culture is the totality of humanly designed images and artifacts that shape our existence.

The increasing number of visual culture objects and images shapes not only art education in the 21st century but also the intergraphical and intertextual connections between visual forms (Freedman, 2000, 2003). The conceptual and physical interactions of various images and artifacts, forms of representation, and their meanings are fundamental to the way in which
the visual arts are interpreted and understood. Art now crosses many old borders of culture and form. For example, advertising photography, body fluids, and Star Wars paraphernalia are all exhibited in art museums. As a result, knowledge of what has traditionally been considered fine art objects and “good” taste can no longer be seen as the only visual cultural capital to serve elementary, secondary, or higher education students. Fine art is still of great value in education and an important part of historical and contemporary visual culture; however, the broader, creative, and critical exploration of visual culture, and its local, state, national, and global meanings is a more appropriate focus if we want students to understand the importance of visual culture.

In this section of the chapter, we discuss four conditions of the contemporary world that contextualize art education and lead to changes in the production and study of visual culture by students. First, important characteristics of personal and communal identities are discussed in terms of representations constructed in and through the range of visual culture. Second, increasing daily interactions with newer media, particularly visual technologies, are addressed as a major part of contemporary human experience. Third, the permeable quality of disciplinary boundaries and the significance of interdisciplinary knowledge to the complexity of visual culture are discussed. Fourth, the importance of critical processes of interpretation in understanding the complexity of visual culture is presented. Although, we have delineated these conditions into sections for this chapter, the contents of these sections actually blur and interact.

Social Issues and Cultural Identities

At one time, sociologists thought popular forms of visual culture merely reflected social life. Contemporary images and artifacts, however, are a major part of social life. Visual culture teaches people (even when we are not conscious of being educated) and, in the process, we recreate ourselves through our encounters with it. As we learn, we change, constructing and reconstructing ourselves. Global culture functions through visual culture (television, radio, newspapers, telephones, faxes, World Wide Web, etc.) to produce hegemonic, virtual realities, including our social consciousness and identities.

The influence of visual culture on identity occurs on personal and communal levels. Various aspects of personal identity are made up of many cultural bits. Culture is a collage of many cultural identities that are selected and translated on a continuing basis (Clifford, 1988). Far from being a unified whole, any particular identity is a combination of others, with its resulting contradictions and incongruities. These identities include age, gender, and/or sexuality, socioeconomic class, exceptionality (giftedness, differently abled, health), geographic location, language, ethnicity, race, religion, and political status.

All we can ever understand of a cultural group is based on individual, temporal experience as lived or expressed. Fragmented knowledge of identity is all that can exist, making it difficult to understand even our own cultures and social groups. However, the more that is learned about visual culture, the better we can grasp the concept of identity; and the more that is learned about the various members of a particular group, the more richly we can understand their visual culture (Stuhr, 1999). A recognition of our own sociocultural identities and biases makes it easier to understand the multifaceted identities of others. It also helps us to understand why and how students respond to visual culture as they do (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Freedman & Wood, 1999).

Communal identity is constructed by social groups at the international, national, regional, state or province, county, and local community levels where institutions, laws, and policies interact and change. These communal levels are continually being constructed and reconstructed in accordance with sociopolitical positions. Communal identity is an important conceptual site where cultural beliefs and values are formed, sanctioned, and/or penalized as it mediates the uncertainty and conflict of daily life and change.
Global visual culture is created through commodification and distributed at an international level. The merchandise of global visual culture has expanded beyond products to ideology, spirituality, and aesthetics. This merchandizing can be a useful tool when coopted for positive educational purposes, such as for saving endangered species, protecting the environment, or promoting human rights; however, it can have negative effects as well when it colonizes, stereotypes, and disenfranchises. As a result of the expanding, global influence of visual culture in the formation of identity and lived experience, art education has a new global significance. Through lived experience with the increasing range, availability, and speed of visual forms, many art educators have come to understand that visual culture is in a continual state of becoming and should be taught as such.

Visual Technologies

A critical issue of visual culture is the place of visual forms produced through the use of computer and other advanced technologies. Computer technology is not only a medium but also a means that has enabled people to see things previously unimagined and to cross borders of form from the fine arts to the mass media to scientific visualization. Visual technologies allow people to create, copy, project, manipulate, erase, and duplicate images with an ease and speed that challenges distinctions of talent, technique, and the conceptual location of form. It could be argued that many of the issues that are seen as critical to postmodern visual culture have existed historically in other forms; however, the global technological presence of images and objects, the ease and speed with which they can be produced and reproduced, and the power of their pervasiveness demand serious attention in education.

Contemporary visual technologies have promoted the collapse of boundaries between education and entertainment. Advertisements, Web sites, and even the news, combine education and entertainment to promote the sale if products and/or ideas. Consumers are approached as audiences through the instantaneous transmission of sound and imagery to even the most remote areas. Goods and ideas are pitched under the guise of enjoyable and addicting entertainment. This edu-tainment has fictional qualities that have become an important part of daily reality and the sensual qualities of the imagery are as seductive as they are didactic. It is the wide distribution of this interaction of seduction, information, and representation that makes newer visual technologies so powerful.

Although experiences with visual technologies were once considered an escape into a fictional, virtual world, students using technology today are understood as engaging with complex, global communities at multiple cognitive levels. We now experience technology as reality and appropriate visual culture as life experience, turning it into attitudes, actions, and even consciousness (Rushkoff, 1994). While we are being shaped by technological visual culture, we shape it through our fashion, toy, music, and other preferences. Corporations and advertising agencies videotape students in teen culture focus groups, who act as informants on the next “hot” or “cool” thing, which are then developed into products. The products are subsequently advertised and sold inside, as well as outside, of school to their peers through global visual technologies. The process illustrates one of the parts visual technologies plays in the fusion of education and entertainment as well as in the collapse of boundaries between student culture and corporate interests.

Visual culture forms are merging. Rarely do contemporary artists specialize in painting on canvas or sculpting in marble; painters do performance art; actors do rock videos; video artists recycle film clips; filmmakers use computer graphics, which are adapted for toys and T-shirt advertising; and advertisers appropriate paintings. Today’s visual arts have moved beyond painting and sculpture to include computer graphics, fashion design, architecture, environmental design, television, comics and cartoons, magazine advertisements, and so on.
Visual culture also overlaps with arts not usually categorized as visual, such as dance and theater. Performance artists of many types use computerized lighting and sound to create atmospheric and dramatic effects. The performing arts are part of visual culture. Even music has become more visual through the increased use of rock videos and complex technologically produced light shows during concerts. Through the use of technology, such as computer graphics and audio software, art objects have increasingly become recycled bits of other objects that are collaged, reconstructed, and reproduced.

In the process of changing the visual arts, advanced technologies have changed what it means to be educated in the arts. In the context of postindustrialized culture, the visual arts can no longer be seen as isolated from general culture, the products of a few alienated, individual artists working in a small fine art community of museums, collectors, and galleries. Museum or gallery exhibition contact with original fine art objects is now only one of many possible experiences with the visual arts. Newer technologies have enabled encounters with the visual arts to become embedded in all aspects of our daily lives.

Permeable Arenas of Knowledge

It is becoming more difficult to distinguish the fine arts from other aspects of visual culture because the qualitative differences among these forms have become less discrete. Visual culture is a mode of experience that connects people through many and varied mediators. The variety and complexity of the experience are dependent on the possibility of a range of quality related to form, none of which should be inherently excluded from the investigation, analysis, and critique enabled by art education. Even concepts and objects previously considered fairly stable are in flux. Truth has shifted from an epistemological to an ontological issue: That is, it becomes less about what we know than who we are. Time has lost its neat linearity, space appears to expand and contract, and boundaries of various sorts have become blurred. Perhaps most important, postmodern visual culture makes imperative a connectedness that undermines knowledge as traditionally taught in school. It involves interactions among people, cultures, forms of representation, and professional disciplines. As suggested earlier, this condition has been particularly promoted through the use of visual technologies.

In light of these contemporary conditions, it seems less important than it once was to focus determinations of either worthiness of study or quality of object in education on distinctions of taste or between “high” and “low” arts. Such distinctions may be important to understanding some aspects of artistic practice, such as private collecting, museum exhibition, and the use of fine art in advertising. These distinctions of visual form have long been based on socioeconomic differences and are therefore contrary to the democratic purposes of schooling. Although such distinctions might be understandable as boundaries of professional training in a period of increasing specialization, we now live in a time that includes important challenges to extreme specialization. Such challenges are made by even highly specialized professionals who realize that solving the most serious and important problems of the world demand interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledge.

The realm of the visual arts inherently overlaps with other disciplinary domains. Artists and other cultural producers draw on all types of knowledge and cognitive processes to create. Recent research on cognition, and even predictions by labor leaders, suggests that learning in the future will have more to do with developing a range of knowledge that involves disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and interpersonal relationships than with the boundaries of professional disciplines (Solso, 1997). Connecting content typically considered part of other school subjects in the curriculum helps students to understand the importance and power of the visual culture and their place in the world.
Processes of Understanding Complexity

As a part of the process of concept formation in education, the arts have often been dichotomously categorized, inhibiting understanding and reducing the complexity of visual culture. The process of learning new concepts does involve dichotomous distinctions. For example, children with pets may begin to learn that a cow is a cow by learning that it is not a dog or a cat; they learn to discern one style of painting by learning its differences from other styles (Gardner, 1972). However, if attempts to understand visual culture are successful, the dichotomies of early concept formation are overcome, the complexity of concepts becomes increasingly apparent, categories blur, and hard and fast distinctions become less discrete. At this level of understanding, oppositions become dualisms (“two sides of the same coin”), multiple perspectives are valued, and oversimplifications (such as stereotypes) are replaced by more complex representations.

Contemporary visual culture is too complex to be represented in a dichotomous fashion. The complexities are illustrated by practices such as image recycling, the difficulties of defining creativity as originality, and the effects of maintaining conceptual oppositions (including distinctions such as fine vs. popular arts and male vs. female capabilities). As discussed earlier, it is not easy to view cultures or their creations as totally separate because they interact on many levels and through many media. Fine artists borrow imagery from popular culture, men borrow from women, and artists in one country borrow from those in other countries. These intersections are revealed and supported in and through visual cultural forms.

An increasing body of contemporary theory and artistic practice represents the seductive infusion of meaning in aesthetics as the power of visual culture (e.g., Ewen, 1988; Shusterman, 1989). The integral relationship between deep meaning and surface qualities is one of the reasons that visual culture is so complex. It is not the surface qualities of form that make art worth teaching in academic institutions; rather, it is the profound and complex qualities, based on their social and cultural contexts and meanings, that are attached to forms. In part, postmodern visual culture producers of various types reflect and enable this refocusing of aesthetic theory. They often reject formalistic uses of the elements and principles of design in favor of symbolic uses that suggest multiple and extended social meanings.

Making meaning from complex visual cultural forms occurs through at least three overlapping methods: (a) communication, (b) suggestion, and (c) appropriation (Freedman, 2003). Communication involves a fairly direct line of thought between the maker and the viewer. The maker has a message that she or he intends for viewers to understand, and the message is conveyed in as direct a manner as possible to an intended and understood audience. Suggestion involves a process by which association is stimulated in viewers by a maker (whether intended or not), resulting in the extension of meaning beyond the work. Appropriation involves the creative interpretation by a viewer who encounters a visual culture form in which the maker has intentionally diffused meaning. In a sense, viewers complete any work of art by drawing on their prior knowledge and experiences as they construct meaning. However, contemporary visual culture is often complex because postmodern artists deliberately confound the construction of meaning. These conditions illustrate the importance of teaching visual culture as a process of creative and critical inquiry.

NEW APPROACHES TO ART EDUCATION:
VISUAL CULTURE INQUIRY

In part, visual culture inquiry challenges traditional forms of art education because it is sensitive to the social and cultural issues discussed in the previous section. The foundation of art education conceptualized as visual culture inquiry is a matter of teaching for life in and
through the visual arts. It helps students to recognize and understand the ambiguities, conflicts, nuances, and ephemeral qualities of social experience, much of which is now configured through imagery and designed objects.

In part, freedom in contemporary democracies is reflected through the ways in which visual realities are constructed, cutting across traditional artistic and social boundaries. Students and teachers are becoming aware of the power of visual culture in the formation of attitudes, beliefs, and actions. In dynamic ways, visual culture shapes the ways we look at ourselves and perceive others, often portraying individuals and groups in ways contradictory to the democratic purposes of schooling. At the same time, education is one of the last public forums for a potentially free critique of the products of mass distributed visual technologies that make up the media and visual culture and for thoughtful student reflection on their own production and uses of visual culture. The critical necessity of teaching visual culture in this context is seen in the lack of serious debate even in the “free” media as it becomes increasingly focused on entertainment (e.g., Aronowitz, 1994; Morley, 1992).

Perhaps the people most influenced by visual culture are children and adolescents. Students incorporate the social codes, language, and values of visual culture into their lives (Freedman & Wood, 1999; Tavin, 2001). Visual culture influences students’ knowledge, affects their identity construction, and shapes their aesthetic sensibilities.

In the following sections, we first argue the importance of moving from a school foundation of modernist aesthetic policy based on industrial training to a more meaningful and relevant art education. Second, we discuss problems of atomizing visual culture in curriculum. Third, we focus on teaching as a process of helping individuals and learning communities to make meaning through the fusion of creative and critical inquiry.

Reconceptualizing Modernist Aesthetic Policy: Art Education Responds to Industrial Training

An unstated aesthetic policy has developed through the educational application of an aesthetic canon that underlies all of what we do. As policy, the canon has calcified and reproduced itself, through century-long practices of schooling. Like any educational policy, this aesthetic policy implies a social contract that is revealed through the modernist, industrial curriculum and standardized tests taken by students and teachers. It is a historical artifact that was important in its time for the development of the visual arts in the United States and, in public school art education, has been based on industrial design at least since Walter Smith’s work in the 1870s. Times have changed, however, and the contract is being renegotiated. The new perspective of art education responds to contemporary change in what students need to know in and through the arts.

The industrial training model of education carries with it regimented, mechanistic training and the reproduction of traditional forms of knowledge through group conformity. As a result, students working within this model often make art that looks very much alike. These assembly-line-looking products, such as color wheels, are produced by rote and repeated in multiple grade levels. The emphasis on this model has enabled the development of the school art style (Efland, 1976, 1983) and has cramped teacher and student freedom in the exploration of conceptual complexity in both making and viewing. Of course, some technical exercises are important to art education, but to emphasize this model of instruction confounds the importance of art.

Like other school subjects, art education adopted industrial training as its basic approach in the late 19th century. Today, the business community has changed from a focus on modern, industrial production techniques to postmodern market information and services, in which home loans and vacations can be bought on the Web, children learn about outer space through role-play computer games, and people access maps through satellite connections in their cars. As discussed earlier, the history of art education is replete with examples of the inclusion
of popular culture images and objects. The current movement leaves behind the technical emphasis of industrial training that alienates producers from the larger meanings associated with their production. Instead it gives attention to the multiple connections between form and meaning.

The industrial model in art education is based on analytical aesthetics. This aesthetic perspective has been treated in curriculum as if it is objective: That is, analytical aesthetics is not generally taught as if it were a socially constructed and culturally located philosophical stance. In curriculum, the analytic emphasis is formalism. Formalism is a pseudoscientific conception of aesthetics that developed in the late 19th and early 20th century at a time when science was gaining currency in application to all areas of social life. Other conceptions of aesthetics exist but have largely been ignored as philosophical analysis in art education.

Even when the focus of instruction is not formal per se (that is, when formal qualities are understood as supports for ideas) the educational presentation of formal qualities is not always responsive to social and cultural issues. Consider the example of frontal views of authority figures, which is often included as part of the aesthetic canon students must learn. Not only is this concept relatively trivial in the big picture of the small amount of time we have to teach students, but also it is Eurocentric. In certain African cultures, authority has been represented traditionally in female relief form in which its femaleness (protruding breasts and buttocks) is intended to be viewed from the side. Another instance where the Western canon of pictorial frontal views of authority does not hold up is in the context of traditional Plains Native American shields and teepees where authority figures are represented as part of symbolic narratives. Their authority might be recognized by headgear, size, and so on. Even in European art, the authority of male figures has been symbolically shown by uniforms, weapons, and even by connection to a spouse as in a pair of profile portraits. These examples illustrate that the focus of curriculum must change if students are to develop an understanding of the complexity of thought concerning visual imagery and artifacts.

The traditional focus on historical, fine art exemplars has tended to suggest a single line of Western stylistic development. Formal and technical qualities have been represented in curriculum as the most important connection between art objects. Even the educational emphasis of content, such as the figure, landscape, or still life, has often become formal and technical when teachers assign students to “make a Van Gogh sunflower painting” with paper plates and dry markers. In the past, the rich conceptual connections among images, objects, and other forms of culture, which are often their reasons for being, have been missed or hidden in such endeavors. The complex, interdisciplinary reasons we value such artists’ ideas are neglected. Under these conditions, visual culture objects are transformed through education, often losing important attached cultural meanings.

Curriculum as Process: Challenging Atomistic Content and Assessment

Recently, general curriculum theorists have been struggling with the project of reconceptualizing curriculum from postmodern perspectives (Giroux, 1992; Pinar, 1988; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1996). This project is a response to the many social and cultural changes that are now influencing students’ lives. The project of developing appropriate educational responses to such change is increasingly important as societies and cultures leave the secure thinking of modernistic forms of education, where knowledge and inquiry methods are represented as stable and curriculum is intended to be reproductive. For example, postmodern curriculum theorists point out that curriculum is not a neutral enterprise; it is a matter of selection. As a result, curriculum contains and reflects the interests of individuals and social
groups. Patrick Slattery (1995) has argued that curriculum expresses autobiography because it is created by human beings who leave parts of themselves in their teaching and writing. He has suggested that curriculum should focus on issues of the self, because that is where learning takes place, and he argues that educators can use the concept of autobiography to better understand educational conditions. A postmodern understanding of the personal and social processes of curriculum planning and enactment exemplifies the aesthetic character of education and the importance of considering individual learning in relation to social contexts.

The modernist problem of curriculum may be thought of as having allowed a veil to fall over such social issues, hiding or obscuring them. This veil has covered the complexity and connections of artistic relationships as modernist curriculum has sought to continually break down knowledge into minute bits of information. As the curriculum has become more focused on small objectives and traditional, fine art exemplars are used over and over again, art has been transformed from visual expressions of multiple and complex ideas to oversimplified uses of formal and technical qualities.

The postmodern problem of curriculum is to lift the veil and thus make art education more meaningful than mere sensory experience. This could be accomplished by challenging students with inquiry based on creative production and critical reflection involving deep interrogations of images, artifacts, and ideas that approach the complexity of visual culture as experienced. This often requires some school subject integration.

The major issue of curriculum integration now can no longer be whether to integrate, but rather what, when, and how to teach students most effectively through the construction of integrated knowledge. Schools are adopting integrated approaches to curriculum in an effort to teach students the conceptual connections they need to succeed in contemporary life. Art education should help students know the visual arts in their integrity and complexity, their conflicting ideas as well as their accepted objects, and their connections to social thought as well as their connections to other professional practices.

As discussed earlier, confining the visual arts to narrow learning objectives and assessment strategies based on traditional notions of excellence in fine art disciplines is highly problematic. The old constructs of knowledge about the visual arts have included at least one other set of boundaries that has resulted in difficulties for an art education. It involves the question: Where do the boundaries of art stop and other school subjects begin? Reproducing narrow constructs of knowledge should not be the purpose of contemporary art education. Not only is finding a perimeter for the open concept of art difficult, but also it may be an ineffective way to approach curriculum. From a contemporary educational standpoint, our goal is to make as many connections as possible because connections produce integrated learning.

In order to reconceptualize curriculum in this way, it is necessary to understand curriculum as a process rather than as a single text. The process of curriculum is its product. Curriculum is not a unified whole. It is a collage of bits of information based on knowledge (Freedman, 2000, 2003). It is flexible, at some times sequential and at other times highly interactive, making connections not only to the previous lesson but also to life experiences.

An integral relationship exists between assessment and curriculum. Both must be of quality in order to have a successful program. An authentic perspective of assessment and curriculum is to develop both through community discourse. Criteria for assessment must be developed through community debate, but not allowed to be trivialized through excessive fragmentation and overassessment (Boughton, 1994, 1997).

Art education is no different in the dissolution of its boundaries from other areas and disciplines. Postmodernism and advances in computer and media technologies have enabled boundary erosion that has prompted new ways of conceptualizing subject areas and what constitutes important disciplinary knowledge. As a result, new methods for investigation and
data collection are continually being invented and developed. The arts figure prominently in these new methodological configurations (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Gaines & Renow, 1999; Prosser, 1998; Rose, 2001).

Artistic Production: Making Meaning Through Creative and Critical Inquiry

In the past, the focus on formal and technical attributes of production has limited our conception of curriculum and has been constrained by at least four interconnecting, historical foundations. First, there has been a focus on realistic representation as a major criterion for quality in student art. Teachers often cite parent and administrative pressure for this focus. A focus on realism, without conceptual foundation, addresses only one form of artistic production and ignores the importance of abstract and symbolic representations of ideas that are vital to human experience. Creative and critical problem investigation and production based on various forms of abstraction, fantasy, science-fiction, and so on can only be promoted through open-ended, independent inquiry leading to connective forms of representation.

Second, in conflict with the focus on realism, but coexisting with it is an emphasis on expressionistic characteristics and maintaining childlike qualities in student art. This has resulted in products that have formal and technical qualities that look somewhat like young children’s art regardless of the conceptual sophistication of the student. The painterly quality of child art is valued as evidence of individual self-expression (in part, based on fine art styles such as abstract expressionism) and is a foundation of the aesthetic of late modernism. However, these expressionistic qualities are not necessarily evidence of individuality because they have been socially constructed and have become a criterion for group assessment.

Third, as discussed earlier, the industrial training model has led to a focus on formal and technical qualities, but these are also easy to teach and assess. Curriculum content is often selected and configured to be efficiently handled in the institutionalized settings of classrooms. With the emphasis on standardized curriculum and testing, the reliance on simplistic, easily observed products or results and procedures is convenient. Although these practices often trivialize art and are generally irrelevant to students’ lives, they are considered efficient and effective by administrative and governing bodies, and teachers have been encouraged to perpetuate these practices.

Fourth, art teachers are forced to compete for funds and advocate for programs through art exhibitions for parents and administrators who are not well educated in the arts. As a result, teachers are often placed in a position of defending their place in the school community based on the success of exhibitions, which depend on a student art aesthetic that demonstrates a high degree of formal and technical skill, but is not intellectually demanding. Rather than acknowledging that art involves a range of life issues, abilities, and concepts, art teachers have been pressured to think that their worth is based on students’ technical production skills and knowledge of a few art historical facts.

The new conception of curriculum and student artistic inquiry opens up the possibility of moving away from these problems. A curriculum based on visual culture takes into consideration students’ daily, postmodern experiences and their future lives. Most students will not be professional artists, but all students need to become responsible citizens of the world. In a democracy, an aim of education is to promote the development of responsible citizens who think critically, act constructively in an informed manner, and collaborate in the conscious formation of personal and communal identities. In order for art curriculum to fulfill this aim in the contemporary context, students’ studio experience must be thought of as part of visual culture and as a vital way to come to understand the visual milieu in which they live. Student
studio experience is essential to teaching and learning about visual culture because it (a) is a process of creative/critical inquiry, (b) helps students understand the complexities of visual culture, and (c) connects and empowers people.

**Artistic Production Is a Process of Creative/Critical inquiry**

Creative production and critical reflection are not separate in art; they are dualistic and mutually dependent. Creative production is inherently critical, and critical reflection is inherently creative. When we look at an image or artifact, we create it in the sense that we give it meaning. It is important to conceptualize these processes as being interconnected if art educators are going to teach in ways appropriate to understanding visual culture.

Many different types of studios (i.e., commercial arts, fine arts, computer graphics, video and film production) and studio practices exist. Studio practices include conceptualizing, viewing, analyzing, judging, designing, constructing, and marketing visual forms. An important part of studio practice is participation in the discourses of various communities (professional, student, ethnic, gender, environmental, etc.) to develop contexts through which connections can be made between production and social life. As discussed earlier, a critical aspect of teaching visual culture is making connections and crossing borders. This is accomplished through conceptually grounded processes of creative/critical inquiry that promote synthesis, extend knowledge, and enrich relationships. These are the powers of the arts and vital aspects of studio production. Conceptually grounded production processes cross over traditional boundaries of form, breaking down old borders of media-driven curriculum, and turning curriculum upside-down, so that the development of ideas are given attention first and the techniques and processes emerge as the expression of those ideas. In this way, technique and media are related to and enhance the making of meaning in creative/critical inquiry. Visual culture is an expression of ideas through the use of technical and formal processes, but these processes are not the main purpose of artistic production.

Creative/critical inquiry is not only for secondary level students; in fact, it should begin at the elementary level. Young students are already adopting postmodern visual culture as a framework for understanding reality outside of school. For instance, elementary students analyze, role-play, draw, and construct environments based on the Harry Potter books, films, and toys from interdisciplinary perspectives of casting, acting, designing, costume styling, narration, and mechanization.

**Making Visual Culture Can Help Students Grasp Complexities of Culture**

Traditionally, art has been represented in education as inherently good. The term *art* has carried with it assumptions of quality, value, and enrichment. However, the visual arts are not inherently good. The great power of the visual arts is their ability to have a variety of effects on our lives; but that power can make them manipulative, colonizing, and disenfranchising. The complexity of this power needs to be considered as part of educational experience. For example, advertising images are produced by artists and are thought of as good for the companies whose products they are intended to sell, but, they often represent stereotypes and cultural biases that damage viewers’ self-concepts. Another example is the astronomical amount of money paid to sports stars and for historical fine art, which seems inconsistent with the ideals of moral responsibility. As a result of such complexities, investigations of issues of empowerment, representation, and social consciousness are becoming more important in art education.
**Cultural Production Connects and Empowers People**

Visual culture connects makers to viewers through communication, identity formation, and cultural mediation. Addressing aspects of visual communication, identity formation, and cultural mediation has become a vital issue in art education (e.g., Ballengee-Morris, & Striedieck, 1997; Freedman, 1994; Stuhr, 1995). Studio production can aid students to understand that visual culture involves personal and communal codes of symbols, images, environments, artifacts, and so on. Investigating the relationship between makers and viewers of visual culture can help them to identify and recognize ethnocentric perspectives at the national, regional, state, and local levels. This process is important because it creates possibilities for the critique of visual culture at all levels to achieve democratic educational goals intended to guide the preparation of reflective and responsible citizens, consequently leading to a more socially conscious and equitable society. From a visual culture perspective, production empowers makers and viewers by promoting critique through the process of making, encouraging analysis during viewing, and enabling makers and viewers to claim ownership of images and designed objects.

**CONCLUSION**

Art education based on teaching visual culture requires new curriculum and instructional roles, content, and strategies to shift the focus of the field from narrow, conventional approaches to open processes of creative and critical inquiry. A new language is necessary for art education that does not solely depend on fine arts discourse. Ideally, it should involve discourses on all the visual arts, such as media studies, design education, cultural critique, and visual anthropology. Art teachers should be educated to become involved citizens in the various communities in which they live and work. They should strive to enrich the communities to create pride in cultural heritage and address contemporary problems through artistic solutions. Art should be approached as an equally legitimate school subject and conceptually integrated with the rest of the school curriculum. All educators should teach the concepts and skills necessary to function effectively in a democratic society now and in the future.

New instructional strategies include teachers becoming role models of leadership in their professional community. To conceptualize art education as different from other school subjects inadvertently disengages it from the legitimate school curriculum. In the larger sense, art teachers focus on what other teachers consider important: the concepts and skills necessary to function effectively in a democratic society now and in the future. But, art teachers do this through visual culture, which is as profound in its effect as written texts.

Teacher education programs need to prepare teachers to act as facilitators of student creative and critical inquiry. As part of teaching visual culture, we must shift from a focus on didactic instruction to an education that promotes student responsibility. When students are allowed to investigate the range of visual culture with the guidance of a teacher, they can actively discover complex meanings, multiple connections, and enriched possibilities for creation and critique. Art classrooms should be conceptualized as multitasking arenas where images and objects cross over and are produced and discussed to lead students and teachers through the investigation of ideas, issues, opinions, and conflicts.

Through technological advancements, visual culture is becoming increasingly pervasive and affecting the lives of students and teachers worldwide. The professional field must respond to the challenge of this significant social change by educating new art teachers and retraining current art teachers to use technology to create students who are aware of the world they live in and to take an active responsible role in improving life for all.
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REFERENCES


