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## Historical Perspective as Professional Practice

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As art teachers, we often think about our professional commitments. As issues emerge, perhaps from a colleague's performance, a student's behavior, or an administrator's questions, we turn to our past experiences for insight. We develop our personal professional histories. Often we use additional resources, like the experiences of a respected colleague, for guidance. The history of the field of art education can also be used to clarify your professional concerns. Some of the questions art teachers bring forward are new to the field, others are old and have been successfully resolved, selectively avoided, or judiciously resurrected. Historical inquiry, when considered in relation to multiple perspectives and conflicting data, provides an opportunity to temper personal bias (Chalmers, 2004, Erickson, 1979; Stankiewicz, 2001b).

### History and the Purposes of Art Education

Let's consider one aspect of our field, the purposes of teaching art. Purposes, like theories, provide a framework for making decisions, including what to teach, how to teach, and how to advocate for your program. The terms "child-centered", "discipline-based", "community-based", "issues-based", "visual culture", or "brain-based" each refer to different initiatives that emphasize different purposes for art education.

Historians tell us that controversies over the purposes and value of teaching art have been with us for some time (Efland, 1990a, 1990b; Stankiewicz, Amburgy, & Bolin, 2004). At the turn of the last century,

two tallying cries "Art for Art's Sake" and "Art for Life's Sake" represented competing visions for art teachers (Kern, 1985; Logan, 1955; Wygant, 1993). Art education historians look at how specific purposes, like these, change over time.

### One Purpose— The Healing Power of Art

Questions about our purposes can come to us through the research of others. A recent issue of *Visual Arts Research*, edited by Doug Blandy and Julia Kellman (2004) titled "The Healing Power of Art," offers questions about the history of healing as a purpose of art education. This purpose falls within the broadly stated "Art for Life's Sake." The editors chose articles that "promote research

on how people grapple with life circumstances through the arts and arts education" (Blandy & Kellman, 2004, p.1). The authors considered this grappling in relation to inclusion, incarceration, social work, exceptionality, folk art, homelessness, and spirituality. As a historian, I would ask how this contemporary interest in the healing power of art meshes with past practices. Is it 1) a contemporary fad, or 2) a newly emerging phenomena with implications for the future, or 3) the continuation of a long line of similarly oriented practices? As a teacher, you may ask yourself if you have shared this interest in the healing power of art. Does it have a history in your personal experience?

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It turns out that this idea about the healing power of art has a long and varied history. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, art was valued as a tool that could heal a country fragmented by a Civil War, an infusion of immigrants, and rapid industrialization. Instrumentally, the arts were used to train people to adjust to changing conditions at work and at home (Amburgy, 1990; Stankiewicz, Bolin & Amburgy, 2004). Aesthetically, the higher ideals of taste and beauty were thought to have the power to guide people toward righteous living (Saunders, 1990).

Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, a language of design was formulated to discuss transcendent values of beauty and taste. The most influential design-based art educator was Arthur Wesley Dow, whose ideas about teaching spread from New York to California. Dow's sensibilities were shaped by his strict Protestant upbringing and his later interest in the Arts and Crafts Movement. Design for Dow was underlying structure but it also represented a primary and righteous ordering of the world. Dow noted that:

Teach the child to know beauty when he sees it, to create it, to love it, and when he grows up he will not tolerate the ugly. In the relation of lines to each other, he may learn the relation of lives to each other, as he perceives color harmonies, he may also perceive the fitness of things. (Green & Poesch, 1999, p.61)

Not only did Dow emphasize composition, he also advocated a moral message that reinforced ideals associated with constraint, work, and higher order organizational schemes (Moffat, 1977). Design sensibilities coincided with civic initiatives, such as the City Beautiful Movement, school beautification, and art weeks. Women's organizations, which often were involved in social service work, were the primary force behind these initiatives. (Efland, 1990a, 1990b; Stankiewicz, 1990, 2001a).

#### Between the Wars

After WWI, decisions about the healing qualities of art shifted from civic therapy to personal therapy. Soldiers returning from the

war required social services to heal their bodies and their minds. Craft education was encouraged as a form of occupational therapy. The Smith-Hughes Industrial Act of 1917 encouraged the development of Adult Education classes, which serviced both veterans and workers displaced by changes in industry. Industrial and Household Arts programs in higher education, which became Shop and Home Economics in public school, came to influence art education. An interest in rural craft traditions, which began with President Roosevelt's 1908 Commission for Country Life and became increasingly urgent during the Great Depression, combined social services organizations and the arts in an effort to preserve and promote rural community networks through the arts (Bennett, 1937; Smith, 1996; Stankiewicz, 1990). This interest in healing contributed to a form of art education in the 1930's that included duck decoys, traditional weavings, ceramics, and toys as well as posters, printmaking (White, 2004).

The healing power of art between the wars turned increasingly from physical to psychological conditions. Modern psychology provided frameworks for identifying trauma as a significant factor in war related disabilities (Hacking, 1995). While occupational therapy provided a significant component of treatment, an emphasis on the psychological healing power of art was also being advocated. The ideas of Sigmund Freud in psychology and Franz Cizek in art education helped American art teachers during the 1930's come to see a role for the arts to heal the disconnected lives of individuals (Freedman, 1989; Smith, 1996). Progressive educators, like Florence Cane and Margaret Naumberg of the Walden School, associated healthy and natural development with creative expression. Cane promoted sensitivity to the uninhibited movement of the body. Her instruction was influenced by the life span development of the child and the individual expressive needs of learners (Freedman, 1987, 1989, 1998; Packard, 1980; Smith, 1996; Wygant, 1988, 1993). Ruth Shaw, the inventor of finger paint, sought materials that allowed for a maximum flow of expressive energy (Stankiewicz, 1984, 2001a). Well before Jackson Pollock was dripping paint, school children had been up

to their elbows in Shaw's slippery medium.

#### Post-WWII

The most influential, and perhaps best articulated, incorporation of the psychological and physiological expression of the healing power of art was articulated in Viktor Lowenfeld's emphasis on developmental theory, haptic perception, and creative expression. Lowenfeld, along with contemporaries such as Victor D'Amico, stressed expression and creativity as universal attributes (Efland, 1990a; Sahasrabudhe, 1997, 2001; Saunders, 2001; Smith, 1996). Universality seemed to be on many peoples' minds throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century but especially following the end of the Second World War. Anglo-American cultures framed art as a humanistic endeavor, which was offered as a means to heal a world shattered by the inhumanity of Nazi genocide. Herbert Read (1943), in *Education through Art*, maintained that art could guide a child's journey into a healthy adulthood free from repressive conventions and influences. His philosophy contributed to the development of the *International Society for Education through Art* (INSEA) in 1951 (Korzenik, 1995; Pittard, 1985). Also within this time period, Victor D'Amico at The Museum of Modern Art created The Children's Art Carnival, which highlighted the importance of individuality and creativity. This pedagogy was incorporated into the World's Fairs in New Delhi, Brussels, and Milan to promote American values (Sahasrabudhe, 2001). The healing power of art had become an instrument for personal and political well-being. Independent creative activity was valued over social action and communal experience.

#### Post-Industrialism

Just as the healing that was advocated for at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a response to a world of change, the healing at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is arguably a response to globalism, technology, mass media, cultural differences, and terrorism. The previously cited recent issue of *Visual Arts Research* speaks to many of these issues. A few of the titles are: *Folklife, Material Culture, Education, and Civil Society* (Blandy, 2004); *Creating Wellness in Correctional Populations through the Arts* (Gussack & Ploumis-Devick, 2004); *A Place*

of Presence (Gradle, 2004); *The Place of Art in Health Care, an Interdisciplinary View* (Kellman, 2004). These early 21<sup>st</sup> century initiatives stress the importance of culture, community, and inquiry. This healing resides in the capacity of visual art to cross cultural boundaries and utilize individual capabilities. Art educators struggle with ways to teach about differences so that the integrity of people's perspectives can be valued and understood (Chalmers, 2004). They often advocate for constructivist learning perspectives, which see a learner who draws upon multiple ways of knowing, different pathways to learning, and different objects of interest. You may have grappled with many of these issues as your teaching has adjusted to the changing demographics in your classroom, the effects of mass media on your students, and changes in contemporary forms of artistic expression.

### Healing Reconsidered Historically

Looking backward we can see that the topics of this issue of *Visual Arts Research* are not a contemporary fad, but rather can be associated with a series of initiatives including craft, design, creative expression, and issue-based learning. Looking forward, we ask if the healing power of art is a purpose that will dominate the field. To answer that would not be history but prophesy. Probably this purpose is too much an act of faith to be explicitly adopted by the standards movement. But as a subtext that art rejuvenates, either through critical action or ritual activity, it probably has some staying power. Art education programs will be involved with the issue of the healing power of art if for no other reason than the fact that people throughout time have used images, artifacts, and performances in ritual and critical ways. The healing power of art has been expressed through traditional effigy figures as well as through contemporary environmental and issues-based art.

This understanding, that a broad claim such as the healing capacity of art has a history, can help art teachers evaluate our own health care claims. We can make decisions about what needs healing, we can make judgments as to whether our health care claims have merit, and we can see how similar claims

from the past produced successful or failed curriculum initiatives.

### Conclusions

The above example is provided to demonstrate that a historical perspective can provide insights into contemporary practice. By asking the question "How have art educators conceived of art education in relation to healing?" the healing power of art can be considered more clearly. As an art teacher you might ask yourself how you have seen the healing power of art in your students. You might ask if this is a topic or theme that exists in the art world and as such should be taught to your students. You also might ask if this is an underlying value that you hold that permeates your practice. Perhaps it is more important to you than you have specifically acknowledged in your curriculum. Perhaps this perspective holds no place in your view of art or art education. What purpose then do you hold for art and art education and what is its history in your own teaching and/or in the field?

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## Highlights & Implications

### Highlights & Implications: Historical Perspective as Professional Practice

We all construct histories of our professional lives. Historical inquiry involves the conscious consideration of relevant data from the past in concert with new interpretive frameworks. An active engagement with the history of art education allows us to reinvent our professional selves, which in turn affects our professional practice. This analysis provides a more informed way to respond to questions about our programs.

#### History and the Purposes of Art Education

While there is a history of certain kinds of data, including textbooks, curricula, instructional resources, convention programs etc., there is also a history of ideas about the purpose of teaching art.

- How have your ideas about the purpose of art education changed over the years?
- How has your instruction changed in relation to changes in purpose?
- How do your students' and colleagues' values about the importance of art differ from your own?

#### One Purpose - The Healing Power of Art

A recent issue of *Visual Arts Research*, *The Healing Power of Art*, prompts questions about the history of this specific purpose of art. The healing power of art has been put forward in many ways for over a century. Some of these promoted personal health and well-being and others promoted social integrity. Art education has been envisioned as a way to unify a divided country, unite people with a higher power, reintegrate people with mainstream culture, promote human development toward adulthood, reunite the human family, and celebrate cultural and human differences. The healing power of art has a long and varied history within the field.

- Do you see art as having a special place in the curriculum, one that can promote healing in some way for your students?
- Have you ever made reference to the healing power of art in speaking about your program?
- What other purposes do you see as guiding art education?
- Which do you think is the most relevant to your teaching? How has your thinking about this evolved over time?
- How has this evolution created a shift in your classroom practices?