



MEDIA REVIEW

Developing Visual Arts Education in the United States Massachusetts Normal Art School and the Normalization of Creativity

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Stankiewicz, M. A. (2016). *Developing Visual Arts Education in the United States: Massachusetts Normal Art School and the Normalization of Creativity*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. 263 pp. ISBN: 978-1-137-5448-3.

Readers who are studying the histories of art education, higher education, Massachusetts and Boston civic and political culture, women's studies, as well as the emergence of creativity, industrial arts, drawing education, and color studies, will find much to use in Mary Ann Stankiewicz's *Developing Visual Arts Education in the United States: Massachusetts Normal Art School and the Normalization of Creativity* (2016). Stankiewicz brings to this project her considerable

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experience as a historian of art education, including her work on aesthetic education and Henry Turner Bailey. She also brings to this volume her experience with art education's professional association, the National Art Education Association, where her interest in policy shaped her work as president (2003–2005). As with other projects taken on by Stankiewicz, this newest work is thoroughly researched, carefully crafted, and competently narrated.

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While the study covers the years from 1850-1930, the emphasis is the development, maturation, and influence of the Massachusetts Normal Art School (MNAS), founded in 1873. The school continues today as the Massachusetts College of Art. Stankiewicz convincingly makes the case that MNAS played a significant role in the development of the policies and practices that have shaped the beginnings of American art education policy. Stankiewicz also uses the development of the school as a case study to reflect on the multiple forces that influence the development of public policies, which over time can come to be the norm of a field. Normalization is related to Normal Schools, postsecondary institutions developed to train common school teachers. Therein, educational norms were identified and teaching strategies were developed. Stankiewicz stated:

The growth of the common school with its aims of cultural and technical literacy established a new platform—and systematic, regulated methods—for art education. As educational bureaucracies developed, participants in the system needed to learn, or invent, ways to manage relationships up, down, or laterally. These behaviors became taken for granted as the normal way to work. (p. 238)

These behaviors became taken for granted as the normal way to work. *Developing Visual Arts Education in the United States* is a study of the way MNAS, the leading institution of its day, came to value creativity as a focus of policy, pedagogy, and, by implication, a revered and valued fundamental approach for personal and civic development. The force of Stankiewicz's work is built on the detail of her research, which includes: significant and familiar historical figures; state, national, and local law; broad social justice topics with an emphasis on the influence of gender; demographic accounting of teachers and students; industry needs and commercial

interests; and theories and practices that vied for pedagogical currency.

Founding Narratives

Readers of this review are most likely familiar with the multiple accounts of art education's history, wherein Walter Smith and the Massachusetts Drawing Act of 1870 figure prominently (Bolin, 1990). Stankiewicz's work gives greater scope to these foundational accounts, pulling in a wider range of forces and practices that have come to bear on the development of the field. In the final chapter of the book, Stankiewicz provides some perspective on several of these accounts and clarifies the orientation of her approach.

Like all well-constructed narratives, Stankiewicz's history contains a beginning, a central character, a cast of dramatic influences, a developing plot line, and a contingent conclusion. Beginnings are important in that they frame the action. The Bible provides the most durable marker: "In the beginning..." while fictions use "once upon a time..." Stankiewicz begins her chronology within Antebellum Massachusetts, a kind of art education wilderness where there exist multiple forms of education from the teaching of genteel refinement for women and professional training for artists.

In spite of a variety of approaches and purposes, Stankiewicz states, "Contrary to romantic notions of genius, New England's art crusaders taught that anyone willing to work hard could learn to draw" (p. 24). Of particular interest here is the role women had in the shaping of art education in the late 19th century. Yet to be developed were standards to accomplish a common curriculum. Stankiewicz's interest in policy, how it is engendered, maintained, and transformed, enriches the complexity of this study. Her narrative tells a story of this transformation, an account influenced by, among other things, the development of common schools, industrialization, an expanding middle class, and the role of women in American education.

From this platform, the Massachusetts Normal Art School emerges out of multiple forces

(personal, economic, legislative, and cultural). Of this, Stankiewicz states, "If the school had been established in a different city, a less industrialized state, during a period not following a Civil War and including a World War, its story would have been very different" (p. 3). The school's opening in 1873, three years following the passage of the Massachusetts Drawing Act of 1870, occurs just nine years after the end of the Civil War. Its beginning correlates with the settling of the nation.

Stankiewicz's choice of the school as the outstanding institution in this time period provides a remarkable factual record and a compelling narrative vessel. The school was shaped by multigenerational influences, including Charles Callahan Perkins, John D. Philbrick, Walter Smith, and Henry Turner Bailey, as well as industrialization, prior practices in the field, women's suffrage, immigration, and World War I.

The school's trajectory includes its formation, maturation, and influences throughout the world. As a narrative element, the school provides a complexity that cannot be reduced to a single personality or a single initiative. Readers might look to this approach, then, as a model for coming to understand the development of ideas over long stretches of time.

The overarching flow of the narrative provides readers with a glimpse of the shaping of the field of art education. The initial struggles included the establishment of the goals for the school and the identification of the populations the school would serve. Included in these decisions were varying perspectives on staffing and pedagogy. The supporting cast of this drama included the strong personalities of individual faculty members and administrators, as well as forces such as the instructional textbook publishing industry and the art materials industry.

Although Stankiewicz generally structures the history within a chronological framework, moving from Antebellum Massachusetts to post-World War I America, she simultaneously frames chapters into significant themes related to the school's development: Antebellum Massachusetts; common schools; Massachusetts Drawing Act; MNAS;

MNAS student body and alumni profiles; textbook influences; Henry Turner Bailey and George T. Bartlett's leadership; Vocational Education; and Alumni influences on the field.

One byproduct of this approach is that Stankiewicz introduces people as their contributions relate to the theme of the chapter. Here, I think in particular of Henry Turner Bailey and Walter Scott Perry's presence as students, teachers, and alumni. The more significant effect of this organization, coupled with Stankiewicz's detailed descriptions based on exacting scholarship, is a view into the life of the school. MNAS becomes a frame within which a wide range of interests, beliefs, social status, and personal behaviors get played out. Readers will see policy shaped by both belief and personality; by financial constraints and demographics; and by gender and immigrant status.

The other effect of Stankiewicz's organization is that each chapter contains its own narrative arc. For example, while chapter 5, "Pioneers Putting Their Hands to the Plow," presents little vignettes into the lives and contributions of several MNAS alumni such as Charles A. Barry, Walter S. Goodnough, William Mason, Leslie W. Miller, Walter Scott Perry, and a host of other artists and educators, chapter 6, "This Great Industrial Battle," presents a range of conflicting forces that influenced the direction of the school. Notably, there are disagreements between Charles Herbert Moore (nature drawing) and William Morris Hunt (feeling); Charles Elliot Norton and Smith; Smith and Mary Gunning; as well as conflicting purposes: picture making versus notational systems; public service versus private enterprise; political bodies versus educators; and fine arts versus industrial arts. These differing organizational strategies for the chapters give *Developing Visual Arts Education in the United States* varying forms with which to express the dynamics related to the chapter topics while avoiding the constraints of a strictly chronological account of its development.

Conclusions

There are two issues I suggest readers consider as they enter into the world that Stankiewicz opens up. The first is to enter with a pencil in hand, ready to chart out or web diagram, or whatever your favorite means of keeping track of events and people might be. There are many names and positions introduced, and people take on multiple roles; keeping these straight and in focus from the beginning will give the reader a richer reading experience. The second suggestion would be to keep track of the pedagogical developments. Although “and the normalization of creativity” is a stated emphasis of the text and the author does move through this progression, MNAS, not creativity, is the dominant force in this history. This is just to say that readers will

need to work to follow the creativity strand within the text. Responsive readers will place this work alongside other histories to identify significant influences outside of the MNAS and Massachusetts.

While prior accounts have emphasized the role of Smith and the Massachusetts Drawing Act on the field, I found Stankiewicz’s study to be a more robust accounting of the forces that come to bear on this field. Stankiewicz presents readers with a complex adult world, filled with principles and prejudices and those nagging logistics that can propel and impede all of our efforts. Here we can find our place, as teachers, researchers, administrators, and association members, and understand how other interests impact our lives.

REFEREN E

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