

THE DBAE LITERATURE PROJECT

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The idea of disciplined-based art education that was associated with the Getty Center for Education in the Arts (later renamed the Getty Education Institute for the Arts and eventually discontinued) during the eighties and nineties can be understood as contributing to a major effort by writers in the field of art education since mid-century to recast the aims and teaching of art in the schools. The Getty initiative, in other words, was not novel or revolutionary; it took its lead from existing ideas in the field which held that the teaching of art in the schools should be more substantive and demanding. Recognizing the error of past efforts to reform art education that attempted to bypass the field, Getty policymakers understood the wisdom of involving the field in significant ways. It was perceived that the field was moving in the direction of increasing the intellectual content of aesthetic learning by engendering in young people a well-developed sense of art that is preconditional for the intelligent and sensitive engagements of works of art and other things from an aesthetic point of view.

Building such a sense of art, it was argued, involved the acquisition of rudimentary capacities to create works of art, a general knowledge of art history, a grasp of some of the basic principles of aesthetic judgment, and an ability to reflect thoughtfully about the values and uses of the arts as well as the puzzling questions to which they characteristically give rise. Consequently, the Getty took the position that the teaching of art should be grounded in the interrelated disciplines of art making, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics (philosophy of art). It was not believed that art education should consist of teaching these disciplines as separate subjects: rather, the disciplines provided content and models of thinking and inquiry. Another way of interpreting the idea of disciplined-based art education is to say that it addressed the two faces of the cognitive revolution in thinking about the character of mind and human development—the substantive and the procedural faces. The theme of mind building, for example, emerged as one of the major purposes of DBAE (Duke, 1990). As interest in DBAE grew, it seemed advisable to take a look at the literature it had developed under the impress of both the Getty and by others. This was the occasion for the project briefly described below.

The DBAE literature project was a two-year study supported by the Getty and undertook two major tasks: (1) the identification of the major topics and literature of DBAE from 1982 to 1998, and (2) the preparation of an annotated bibliography for use by the profession and others interested in the idea of disciplined-based art education. The project identified over 600 items that were believed worth annotating. That may seem like a high number but the Getty initiative generated an uncommonly extensive literature, and the aim of the project was to achieve representativeness. It was also thought important to convey the varied tone and substance of the literature. This meant including

some items that radically misconstrued the purposes of DBAE, others that understood what such purposes were but took strong exception to them, and still others that either uncritically praised it or provided balanced accounts. In annotating the literature, project staff members endeavored to avoid evaluative terminology and tried to be as objective and descriptive as possible. Some items were included in the bibliography that did not discuss

DBAE specifically but which were consistent with it and thus considered worth inclusion.

The literature identified was subsumed under the following topics: aims and policy, antecedents and evolution, disciplines (art making, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics), curriculum (organization and the teaching of the four disciplines), implementation and evaluation, research and aesthetic development, professional development, museums and museum education, issues (elitism, multiculturalism, feminism), and a category "other" that consisted of items that did not fit anywhere else. To repeat, the project annotated items from 1982 to 1998. The project was not responsible for adding any references after that.

Upon completion of the bibliography, the Getty requested that the project provide a selective bibliography for Stephen Dobbs's guide to DBAE Learning in and through Art (Smith, 1998). For the Dobbs volume items were arranged under the headings of books, reports and proceedings, articles, instructional resources, multicultural art print series, videos, and advocacy. Smith's anthology *Readings in Discipline-Based Art Education: A Literature of Educational Reform* (2000) listed items (mostly short articles and excerpts) under fewer topics than in the annotated bibliography, for example, interpretations, the disciplines of DBAE: contexts of understanding, curriculum (teaching and learning and implementing and evaluating), artistic and aesthetic development, professional development, issues, and museums and museum education. The book of readings, it should be noted, was not part of the literature project. However, having compiled such an extensive bibliography, it seemed worthwhile to do something with it. With Getty encouragement and permission items were selected for a collection, and it is now on the publication list of the National Art Education Association. The book is dedicated to Leilani Lattin Duke for her unparalleled leadership over a period of seventeen years. The profession owes Duke an enormous debt, and the Association has appropriately recognized her accomplishments.

DBAE has been characterized by a respected member of the Association as "deadly boring art education," a judgment I have no reason to doubt was based on some instances observed. But the substantive literature of DBAE is hardly boring nor are many of the programs that implemented its approach.

Indeed, an idea which in effect asserts that any well-developed sense of art should be fashioned from some experience in art making, a sense of art's history, a grasp of principles of aesthetic judgment, and an understanding of the puzzles involved in understanding and appreciating works of art is not only inherently interesting but also challenging. Another view of DBAE, in contrast to some other reform efforts that were launched with conspicuous fanfare, is that its activities evolved quietly (Wilson, 1997). The evolution of DBAE has been anything but that. In responding to Wilson's characterization, Lankford (1999), a participant in the Getty regional institute venture, refers to the heated debates he and his students often had while addressing a number of controversial issues in the art world. He remarks, moreover, how one of the disciplines in which DBAE is grounded, aesthetics, was helpful in addressing such issues, as is his own book on the subject (1992). It is more apt to say that seldom has an idea so energized the field.

Interest in DBAE has consequently produced a large body of substantive writing only a few samples of which can be mentioned here. First to come to mind are the occasional monographs of the Getty publication program; for example, Broudy's *The Role of Imagery in Learning* (1987) Eisner's *The Role of Disciplined-Based Art Education in America's Schools* (n.d.), Arnheim's *Thoughts on Art Education* (1989), Gardner's *Art Education and Human Development* (1990), and Chalmers's *Celebrating Pluralism: Art, Education, and Cultural Diversity* (1996). Then there are the volumes in the Getty-supported series on disciplines and contexts of understanding, for example, Levi and Smith's *Art Education: A Critical Necessity* (1991), Parsons and Blocker's *Aesthetics and Education* (1993), Addiss and Erickson's *Art History and Art Education*, Brown and Korzenik's *Art Making and Education* (1993), and Wolff and Geahigan's *Art Criticism and Art Education* (1997). *Aesthetics for Young People* (Moore, ed., 1995) is noteworthy for the ways in which philosophers of art and art educators cooperated in explaining the uses of aesthetics in art education. In addition one can come across Clark, Day, and Greer (1987) and Duke (1990) on interpretations of DBAE; Eaton (1994) and Silvers (1998) on aesthetics and DBAE; Perkins (1994) and Stewart (1994) on teaching and learning; Greer (1993) and Wilson and Rubin (1997) on implementation; Parsons (1987) and Rush (1997) on artistic and aesthetic development; Day

(1997) and Schwartz (1997) on professional development; Collins and Sandell (1988) and Blocker (1993) on issues; and Osborne (1985) and Csikszentsmihalyi (1991) on museums and museum education.

The literature of discipline-based art education raises a number of critical issues that any philosophy of art education must seriously address, not least of which is the challenge of new ideologies. The Getty initiative appeared in the early eighties at a time when the cultural and educational atmosphere was becoming politically charged. The critical literature produced in this atmosphere, variously termed postmodernism, cultural studies, social reconstructionism, and deconstruction, was largely critical of twentieth-century modernism and the cultural and intellectual values of Western civilization. This literature, moreover, was often dense, esoteric, difficult, and intimidating. It is fair to say, I think, that many in the field of art education were ill-prepared to digest the complexity of its ideas or to realize some of their consequences. It was difficult, for example, to know how to respond to charges of racism, sexism, and elitism that were often directed at DBAE by its critics, and so a few words are in order about such criticism.

Elsewhere (1995) I have said that although there is something important to say about a coherent and judicious multiculturalism, an unchecked and uncritical multiculturalism is in danger of evolving into a cultural particularism that could split apart a democratic pluralism held together by shared common beliefs and values. Similarly, while it is possible to say something interesting about works of art in terms of race, class, and gender, a possible consequence is reductionism and the devaluing of what is most special and precious about art and art education. As for the charge of elitism in its pejorative sense, it is relevant only so long as it insists on restricting access to the best that has been said and created; in short if it is a closed elitism. An open elitism, however, provides opportunities for all to aspire to excellence. What is more, the inclination to denigrate outstanding accomplishment in favor of egalitarian standards that are nonjudgmental encourages mediocrity and furthers cultural decline. Finally, the extreme premises of some of the critical literature in question, for example the premises of deconstruction, are inherently nihilist in nature in that they not only constitute a major assault on such foundational concepts as meaning, objectivity, truth, intention, rationality, and

reason, but carried to their logical conclusion they deny the existence of what is commonly called art (Wilson, 1987).

What the literature of DBAE reveals is the need for a better understanding of the relationships of art, society, and art education. Such understanding should acknowledge what is obvious: on the one hand that art is an important social strand of several segments of society and that, on the other, that art is distinctive in its capacity to enrich human life. With such acknowledgements goes an obligation to guard against forces that would distort or trivialize its significance (Beardsley, 1981).

I said that the Getty arrived on the scene at a time of cultural and educational turmoil. It also arrived during the excellence in education movement with which the Getty initially aligned itself. I can think of nothing more appropriate at the onset of a new century than a renewal of a commitment to the pursuit of excellence. Such a commitment would not change some of the things now being done, but it would mean making a special effort at appropriate times and in pedagogically relevant ways to introduce the young to the artistic riches of the past and present for the sake of their inherent values and to pay greater attention to the principles of art criticism and the uses of aesthetic theory. By inherent values is not meant the political objectives of interest groups but rather what an appreciation of outstanding human creativeness can tell us about the human condition and the values of art. At a time when the culture is in a deep depression the study of serious and worthwhile works of can revive memories of human accomplishment and help alleviate cultural amnesia. In many of its statements DBAE expresses the traditional ideal of humanistic learning that stresses the importance of excellence and its recognition. Yet the persistent defining down of artistic standards in both the high and popular cultures puts that ideal in jeopardy, as does the tendency of justifying art education in terms of non-arts outcomes that purportedly improve reading and mathematical skills and other non-arts effects. Art education should do what art education does best—refine perception, judgment and imagination in the domains of art and the aesthetic with a view to raising the level of personal well being and the aesthetic welfare. To be sure, such a justification would be a function of an instrumental theory of art, but it would be one that derives from the realization of art's inherent values, not its indi-

rect, incidental, or extra-aesthetic effects. One of the traps the Getty fell into was the pressure to claim important non-arts outcomes for its programs, sometimes, as the educational director acknowledged, as a hook to secure support for its policies. However, in the director's summary of the successes and failures of the Getty venture an inflated instrumentalism was rejected in favor of a justification that features art's inherent values (Duke, 1999).

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Note

The DBAE Bibliography was initially available on line from the Getty Center but later was discontinued. Efforts are underway to make it available for downloading from the National Education Association where it can be a valuable source for ideas and research.