Out of Cite, Out of Mind:

Social Justice and Art Education

Published in

The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education

2006

Vol. 26, pp. 282-301

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It is your responsibility to change society if you think of yourself as an educated person.

James Baldwin, *A Talk to Teachers*, p. 11

What's a little "Lifestyle Statement," between friends? When the friendships are contingent, based on our common status as colleagues in education, and we are charged with reviewing the teacher education programs of a Christian college that lies a few hundred miles to the west of my home city (all quotes about the school, which I will leave unnamed, are drawn from its website), it turns out to be the deal-breaker.

The "Lifestyle Statement" is really an agreement or contract that staff, students, faculty members, and administrators are required to sign; it is posted on the college's website, linked to the undergraduate application, and included in the faculty and staff application for employment and student handbook. The statement includes a list of "behaviors" that must be avoided, including homosexual behavior, which is defined in the school's documents both as a form of sexual promiscuity and immoral sexual conduct. Social dancing is also banned, although curiously the school's standards of behavior allow "ethnic games" and "folk dance."

But maybe that's not so curious—in general, the college condemns prejudice. For example, it sponsors anti-racism trainings and is sensitive to and respectful of cultural and multicultural diversity. The theme of its teacher education programs is "Preparing Teachers to Serve in a Culturally Diverse World"; the campus seeks to "enhance, promote, and support" multiculturalism through Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific American and disability awareness, history, and heritage months. Documents posted on its website support both "affirmative action and racial harmony" as biblical mandates (Racial

Harmony Council, n.d.). But the college also makes it clear that some bigotry is okay, even necessary; only "harmful discrimination" and "prejudice based on sex, race, and socio-economic status" is specifically denounced in the "Biblical Expectations" section of its "Responsibility for Behavior" statements. The "College Expectations" section expands this list to ban discrimination based on disability and national origin. Students are encouraged to gain "cross cultural" experience, and the college lets them choose from off-campus study options that include Latin American, Russian, and Middle East Studies, and a semester with the Institute for Family Studies: Focus on the Family. Perhaps you remember that right wing, evangelical Christian organization; under the direction of James Dobson, it helped lead the push to restrict the civil rights of gay and lesbian people in Colorado in the early 1990s (Keen & Goldberg, 1998). It, along with a consortium of other organizations, including Phyllis Schlafly's anti-feminist Eagle Forum and Pat Robertson's powerful Christian Broadcasting Network, worked to bring Colorado voters Amendment 2, which disallowed any claim of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation; the proponents of the measure based their support on the idea that laws that ban discrimination against homosexuals interfere with the freedom of religion (Keen & Goldberg, 1998). The ballot measure was approved by state vote in 1992, but overturned by the Supreme Court in 1996 for violating the 14th amendment's equal protection clause (Keen & Goldberg, 1998).

I note all this because the rhetoric of Focus on the Family and similar evangelical groups, or those believing in conversion and the absolute correctness of the bible (Wordnet, 2005) is present throughout this college. It is evident in the curious way homosexuals are condemned as promiscuous, for having, as Dobson puts it, "sex outside

of marriage," as if queers could freely marry. It is also clear in its condemnation for some, but not all prejudice, on religious grounds. And it explains how the college can celebrate culture, albeit narrowly defined; while Dobson says that multiculturalism is about "moral relativism…not respect for different cultures" (Dobson, n.d.), the college includes Focus on the Family on its list of places students can go for cultural learning.

I became familiar with the college when, with two of my work-mates in an art teacher education program, I attended a weeklong "Institutional Review Team Member Training" sponsored by our state's Board of Education at the college this summer. Our state, like many others, has aligned its accreditation processes with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and the training focused intensively on the organization's Professional Standards (2002). We analyzed them and tried to actualize them, using the Christian college as our test case. In total, about forty people, mostly administrators for colleges of education, attended the training. Our instructors divided us into three work groups, and we set about the task of understanding the standards and applying them to every aspect of the college's teacher education program.

I was assigned "Standard 4: Diversity" (p. 29), which allowed me to spend the long hours—8:00 AM to 8:00 PM, most days—on campus thinking about the dissonances between the college's teacher education theme and the "knowledge, skills, and dispositions" these fledgling teachers were expected to develop and perform during the certification program. NCATE's (2002) definitions of cultural background, diversity, and multicultural perspective each include a version of this phrasing: "based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area" (pp. 53, 54). How could the college's teacher

candidates become disposed to "teach all students," as the NCATE catch-phrase puts it, after first agreeing that homosexual "behavior" is immoral? How could the college claim to provide its students with a richly diverse faculty when the Lifestyle Statement must preclude queer people from teaching at the school? Could the college meet NCATE's diversity standard without apparently ever using the words—sexual orientation—in any program materials, including the syllabi for all of its teacher education courses? To put it another way, could any teacher education program anywhere fulfill the accreditation mandate to address diversity without ever mentioning race? Or if it systematically excluded female students and faculty? Or those with disabilities? You get the point.

My partner trainees, for the most part, did not seem to understand the relevance of these comparisons, or, at least, would not support the critique "publicly." One person approached me away from our work group to say she thought I was right to raise the questions, but added that she thought the college was doing all it could, under "the circumstances," those being fundamentalist Christianity, I guess. In our group, others said they thought the issue was "just your agenda." Those words brought the subtext to the forefront: Whose "agenda" is so troubling these days? According to Focus on the Family, "in recent years, the gay agenda has managed to strong arm its way into nearly every aspect of life" (Focus on the Family, 2005). Well, not at this Christian college, and certainly not in its teacher education programs. What is out of cite, can be out of mind. And that's the point.

The Christian college had already been successfully reviewed; my questions about the difference between the NCATE definitions and the ones used by the college, weren't answered by our "trainers" from the state. They weren't answered later, either, when I

emailed and snail-mailed them to NCATE. After waiting two months for a response I called NCATE, and talked to a person who told me the problem of how broad or narrow "diversity" should be in practice had been raised before, and now they knew they would have to clarify their standard. They are working on it.

But you know, as I know, that the real answer is in action—the exclusion of lesbian and gay people from teacher education programs is safe and it is probably common. It wasn't considered a problem that the Christian college is preparing teachers for public schools, where they will be responsible for teaching "homosexual" students, communicating with "homosexual" parents, and collaborating with "homosexual" colleagues, without preparation beyond notable absence—not by my co-trainees who voted that the college should "pass" our mock review without areas for improvement and not for the State Board of Education review team which initially approved their program for accreditation. The program formally affirmed diversity but fundamentally assumed and practiced something else.

For the Christian college I describe above, the devil is in the details, so what offends is exorcized, first put out of cite and then put out of mind. The college crafted its teacher education program around ideas, from racial harmony and affirmative action, to anti-racism and cross-cultural understanding, stemming from the work of social justice activists. In many ways, multiculturalism is the very heart of the college's teacher education program; remember its motto about preparing teachers for cultural diversity. Multiculturalism is, at core even if not always in practice, about the struggles of people for civil rights and full "freedom, political power, and economic integration" (Sleeter & McClaren, 2000, ¶ 2; Stuhr, 1994). The college, however, didn't cite movement for social

justice as foundational to multiculturalism; they echoed Dobson's critique and defined the term in practice as celebration. Crediting social justice activism would open the way to other stories about our lineages of struggle right up to the present; students learning about the civil rights bus boycotts might ask where an activist like Rosa Parks learned how to do what she did, a question which would lead to Myles Horton and the Highlander School, which would open the way to learning about the labor movement, and Citizenship Schools, and eventually, the birth of gay rights at Stonewall, with multiple other freedom story "stops" along the way.

The Christian college is particular in its fears and the details of its exclusions; in this essay its story serves to indicate a perennial question in public education: In our democracy, to what form of citizenship should public education lead? And how can our teachers help develop those citizens? Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne (2004) have described three specific kinds of democratic citizenship: the personally responsible citizen, who follows the rules of society, and contributes to the well-being of others through individual help, such as by making donations to a canned food drive; the participatory citizen, who participates in civic organizations and their projects, for instance, working with others to organize a canned food drive; and the justice-oriented citizen, who, like the participatory citizen, values collective work and solutions, but focuses more on analysis of root causes of social injustice and action to address the structural problems, such as systemic food insecurity and poverty. They note that there is "nothing inherently *democratic* about the traits of a personally responsible citizen" (p. 9); while some character traits, such as honesty, associated with personal responsibility are important for everyone, others, like obedience and loyalty, can "work against the kind of

critical action and reflection many assume are essential in a democratic society" (p. 6).

The reviewers and reviewers-in-training who certified the Christian college's teacher education program fit comfortably in the "personally responsible" category—nice people who would probably be loathe to personally discriminate against anyone (in fact, one regaled me with the cliché about all her good gay friends), but weren't troubled, or troubled enough, by the college's bigotry to speak, work, or vote against it.

Unfortunately, personal responsibility may be the most popular form of citizenship: According to a 1999 study by the National Association of Secretaries of State, 94% of young people between the ages of 15-24 (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 9) believe that "the most important thing I can do as a citizen is to help others," while less than 32% in that age group voted in the 1996 presidential election (p. 6). Westheimer and Kahne warn that:

[G]overnment leaders in a totalitarian regime would be as delighted as leaders in a democracy if their young citizens learned the lessons put forward by many of the proponents of personally responsible citizenship: don't do drugs; show up to school; show up to work; give blood; help others during a flood; recycle; pick up litter; clean up a park; treat old people with respect. These are desirable traits for people living in a community. But they are not about democratic citizenship (p. 6-7).

They go on to stress that different conceptions and practices of citizenship in education lead to different ends and values; to achieve justice-oriented citizenship,

educational programs must declare and prioritize "the pursuit of justice" (p. 21).

Their research can't be, I think, applied to religious education, which doesn't aim at the development of a secular democratic citizenry. I would not place the teachers developed through programs like the Christian college's anywhere on Westheimer and Kahne's scale; its program excludes categories of people from participation and for that reason can not be said to model or foster democratic means or ends. And it should not be allowed to certify teachers as public educators. But Westheimer and Kahne's work has implications for art education.

Artists make lousy slaves, according to the 1996 album of the same name by musicians Michelle Shocked and Fiachna O'Braonain. Or, to put it another way, art, a particular kind of education, particularly unfits its practitioners for slavery, to paraphrase Frederick Douglass (1987).[i] Scholars who theorize about art and education have expressed similar ideas, noting how art stimulates its participants against complacency and toward possibility. For example, in *Art and Experience* (1934), John Dewey claimed for art a central place in education, describing how "imaginative vision" and "the first intimations of a better future are always found in works of art" (pp. 345-46). Building from Dewey, Maxine Greene has written eloquently and often about the relationship of the arts to social transformation. "[T]he arts," she says, "will help disrupt the walls that obscure…spheres of freedom" (1988, p. 133).

Dewey, Greene, and others have influenced strands within art education that address the importance of linking the arts to social change; for example, these perspectives have been articulated as social reconstructionist (Freedman, 1994a), multicultural (Cahan & Kocur, 1996), and critical art education, which has been

described as "explicitly in the service of social transformation" (Siegesmund, quoted in Holloway & Krensky, 2001, p. 361). In addition, social justice movements including feminism (Collins & Sandell, 1996), lesbian and gay liberation (Lampela & Check, 2003), and disability rights (Blandy, 1994, 1999) are reflected in art education literature. Despite the availability of these examples, art education curricula in most United States' schools are still dominated by "formalist/modernist model[s], in particular, Discipline-based Art Education [DBAE], in which aesthetics is taught disconnected from its social context" (Alexander & Day, 1991; Holloway & Krensky, 2001, p. 359). And in those modernist models, social movements for justice are usually invisible.

There are many different ways of conceptualizing "social justice" within education. For this writing I use definitions from Ayers and Quinn (2005), Lipman (2004), and Cochran-Smith (2004). Ayers and Quinn portray teaching for social justice as "always more possibility than accomplishment" (p. viii) but note that it includes these themes: democracy, activism, history, public space, self-awareness, social literacy, and imagination. Lipman describes four "social justice imperatives": equity, agency, cultural relevance, and critical literacy (p. 16). Cochran-Smith offers a brief outline of the lineages of social justice education in critical theoretical and social movements for justice, and claims that while "teachers cannot *substitute for* social movements aimed at the transformation of society's fundamental inequities, their work has the potential to *contribute to* those movements in essential ways by being part of collective projects and larger communities for social justice" (p. 19, emphasis in original). Like Westheimer and Kahne's justice-oriented citizen, each of these definitions emphasizes *analysis and action*. Ayers and Quinn employ the equivalent terms "social literacy" and "activism" (p.

ix); Lipman uses "critical literacy" and "agency" Lipman, (p. 17); and Cochran-Smith underscores the role teachers play in fostering critical understandings that contribute to social movements.

From social theory more broadly, I take ideas about the goals of social justice put forth by Iris Marion Young (1990) and Nancy Fraser (1997), in which they delineate and debate two primary aspects of justice.[ii] For Young, these are the "distributive," which is a traditional, and she claims, inadequate (by itself) way of conceiving of social justice that looks solely at the equitable allocation of material goods, and the "cultural," which acknowledges that social conditions are shaped not only by class and labor, but by other social structures including non-recognition or disrespect based on race, gender, and other aspects of culture (p. 14-16). Similarly, Fraser has argued that the goals of social justice are "redistribution and recognition" (pp. 13-16). While their specific conceptions are nuanced and differ, both acknowledge (albeit in different ways and within different framing definitions of concepts like power) the need for social justice movements to pay attention to both economic (sometimes described as "material") and cultural realms. For this paper, I propose a definition of social justice that emphasizes analysis and action, and addresses both cultural and economic equity. In other words, working for social justice (through teaching and other ways) requires attention to the complex contexts of people's lives, and then, engaged responses aimed at change.

Despite its potential agreement with these conceptions of social justice, the move in the field of art education toward a "visual culture" approach, a focus within cultural studies which advocates an exploration of all that is visual in culture, including and exceeding art, (Freedman, 2003) seems unlikely to consistently encourage more

educators to link the arts to social justice or plan arts curricula around conceptions of

citizenship in a democracy. Cultural studies is linked to the left through its earliest British

theorists (Wikipedia, 2005), explores "cultural practices" and is committed to "a radical

line of political action" (Sardar, 2005). However, while a focus on visual culture also

emphasizes context, what is potentially justice-oriented about that approach, because it

isn't foregrounded—in the words "visual culture," for instance—can too easily be lost or

avoided. Compare this possibility to the way that the terms "diversity" and

"multicultural" in art education can't be assumed to imply projects promoting antiracism

or exploring complex considerations of how race interacts with class, gender, ability and

sexuality. Sleeter and McLaren (2000) have described how "'multicultural education'

broadened the umbrella [of multiethnic education] to include gender and other forms of

diversity" (¶ 2). They note that the term "culture" was used, rather than "racism," to

avoid alienating white educators, but describe how this shift allowed these educators to

redefine multiculturalism as "the celebration of ethnic foods and festivals" (¶ 2). Today,

despite theorizing about the importance of understanding the intersectionality of

oppressions and the irrelevance, at best, of "foods and festivals" multicultural curricula,

and despite the deep historical connections of those terms—diversity and

multiculturalism—to liberation work, we still see a plethora of arts education projects

that delink the concepts from social justice. Because it doesn't place justice and an

examination of power at the center of its definition, *multicultural* alone is a weak vector

for that goal (Garcia, 1999; Watkins, 1994). Sleeter notes that educators have attempted

to redress this by appending "critical" to "multicultural" (Sleeter, 2004), as it has been

connected to many other phrases in education, when an emphasis on justice, through a

focus on power, needs to be made clear. Similarly, Efland, Freedman, and Stuhr (1996) describe multiculturalism paired with social reconstructionism as a way to "challenge social structural inequality"(p. 83), though, unfortunately, their listing of "factors" that this approach would address excludes sexual identities. *Visual culture* has the same problem.

Social justice is not a foundational or integral concept in visual culture (see Boughton, et al, 2002; Duncum, 2001; Freedman, 2003, pp. 20-22; Mirzoeff, 1998). None of the often-cited and early writings about the emerging field mentions social justice as a central aim of visual culture or visual culture education. In a 2003 issue of *Studies in Art Education* focused on visual culture, Tavin (2003), like Sleeter with multiculturalism, advocates pairing visual culture with "critical" to "promote democratic public spheres and ethical imperatives" (p. 210), a suggestion that points to the otherwise frail connection of visual culture to social justice. However, this use of "critical" may not be as familiar to classroom teachers as to academics, and thus, pairing the terms may not signal to teachers that "critical visual culture" is connected to social justice concerns. For example, I asked four teachers working at a public school that is described by its founders as using a "critical multicultural arts" curriculum to define "critical." These are their definitions: "something that's necessary"; "individual analysis"; "of utmost importance"; and "essential." Returning to the defining characteristics of social justice—analysis, attention to the cultural *and* the economic, and action toward change—as a guide, it seems that a visual culture approach, at best, gets us only partway to there, and linking it with "critical" isn't a guarantee to get us closer. Visual culture's primary expressed focus on culture, indistinct connections to justice, and "null curriculum" (Eisner, cited in

Schubert, 1986, p. 107) of power and activism, indicate its weakness as a tool to connect art education to social justice work.

Visual culture, with its breadth—everything around you matters—gets closer to the goal of teaching that connects to students' lives, and in education that is always a move in the right direction. However, while it is necessary, it is not sufficient as an indicator that visual culture will lead to more justice-focused teaching or curricula. Visual culture education may ultimately displace DBAE and other dominant forms of art education in most art classrooms, but because it doesn't cite justice upfront and center, and is not connected to it deeply and originally, it isn't likely to carry with it into those classrooms an emphasis on developing citizens who can and will act together in its pursuit. However, *social justice art education* might.

There are, as I've noted, visual culture theorists and practitioners who encourage critical, democratic, social theory and social justice engagements through visual culture (Amburgy, Knight, and Keifer-Boyd, 2004; Tavin, 2003), just as there are those who link multiculturalism with movements for social justice. And there are also instances of justice-oriented analyses of visual culture that don't use the phrase social justice (see, for one recent example, Nancy Pauly's (2005) work exploring the images of Abu Ghraib; she offers curriculum ideas that prompt analysis and action). But I have argued here that visual culture, like multiculturalism, is easy to delink from critical or justice perspectives. And the pressure to do that delinking can be powerful. Teaching for social justice is "teaching against the grain" (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 28), and even teachers committed to this kind of pedagogy can feel fearful and alone (Salas, 2004). These art educators, and others, including those who are not already committed to or do not yet have a language

for their interest in social justice movements and projects, will benefit from clearly articulated rationales and support for taking up that work in their classrooms. This support should include forms that are already present (although perhaps not widely known or supported) such as sharing ideas about how to infuse curricula with critical ideas and building connections between social justice-focused teachers. And it should include explicitly naming and describing the field.

Some reading this may insist that we've done this before—named the field. Art educators may feel that social reconstructionism, which has been an umbrella for theorizing about art education's role in social change, is already a clearly defined home for our justice work. For example, an issue of Studies in Art Education, "The Social Reconstruction of Art Education," edited by Kerry Freedman (1994a), features papers addressing workplace conditions (May, 1994), community (Hicks, 1994), gender (Freedman, 1994b), multicultural education (Stuhr, 1994), and disability rights (Blandy, 1994). I agree that art education social reconstructionist work has been strongly connected to social justice goals. But I think it is presently an inadequate frame for this work. First, social reconstruction also suffers from vernacular weakness; reconstructing society is a means, not an articulated end. Next, social reconstructionism is not an ascendant or currently much present model either within art education or the larger field of education. For example, I was unable to find even one use of the term in the session schedule for the 2006 NAEA Annual Convention; there were four that described their focus as social justice. In contrast, the 2006 meeting program of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) lists 111 sessions that focus on social justice (there were none found using social reconstruction). In addition, the organization has two

Special Interest Groups (SIGS) that use the phrase social justice in their description

(Peace Education) and title (Critical Educators for Social Justice) and even has a

staffperson with the title "Director of Social Justice and Professional Development."

There are no SIGs focused on social reconstruction and no official positions with that

focus. Clearly, if art education took up social justice as an explicitly named and described

direction for the field, we would not be alone, and as activists know, numbers matter. But

most importantly, art education explicitly focused on social justice is good education; it

leads to the biggest questions for both teachers and students—What are the deepest

human values to which we aspire? What are the barriers to human fulfillment?—and

offers the possibility that we can find answers together. A social justice art education is

utopian *and* practical; it looks ahead to the more democratic society we can practice to

build in our classrooms, as Westheimer and Kahne (2004) suggest, and at the same time,

is grounded in the day-to-day.

Social justice art education would necessarily address the kind of contextual

issues raised via visual culture, but would also require engagement with the political,

social, and economic structures that are our surround, through investigation of what

matters in the lives of teachers and students, and emphasis on collective action for social

change (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). A justice-focused art curriculum has many of the

traits that define a "quality art curriculum" according to Gude's rubric (n.d.); for

example, it is anti-technocratic and pro-exploration; it is rooted in "life experiences"; and

it is always both critical and multicultural. A justice-focused art curriculum also seems

aligned with at least some articulations of postmodern approaches to art and art

education, for instance, by focusing on the connections between power and knowledge

(Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996), and with some tendencies in contemporary cultural practice, like a move away from art as product and solo endeavor, toward collective work not (always) aimed at artifact creation, including temporary, activist, and online projects (see Gregory Sholette's (2002) essay exploring such projects including RTMark, Critical Art Ensemble, and The Center for Land Use Reclamation). Through its clearly stated and prioritized connection to the goal of justice, it always opens conversations and debates about both culture and economics, about recognition and redistribution. Finally, and maybe most importantly, a justice-focused art curriculum is linked to the continuum of historical movements for social change, reminding us that our collective work continues. As Greene, Dewey and others have told us, reimagining the world is an occupation for which artists are uniquely suited.

Of course, what shape that world is given is a political decision, and what constitutes justice is, too. Our debates over meaning, values, and "lifestyles" won't end with the institution of social justice art education, any more than multiculturalism settled schools' issues of representation and inclusion, but I anticipate that they will be more keenly focused. In their paper, "Schooled in Silence," Amburgy et al. (2004) ask art educators to "listen to silence, look for the unmarked and erased" (97). We should accept this invitation, but with a sense of urgency about the mission, and at the same time set about making what is invisible or obscured more clear, and what is absent, strongly present[iii]. With justice at center and cited, it is more likely to be sited in our classrooms.

Social justice art education. It's a difference of stress; it addresses the biggest questions directly: Art education, to what end? All education, toward what lives? Visual culture is all around us; contextual teaching is strategic; the goal should also be in cite

and in sight. For me, that aim is always social justice.

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i   Frederick Douglass said, "knowledge unfits a child to be a slave" (p. 92).

ii   I apologize to Young and Fraser, and readers who want more of them; this paper doesn't offer a deep exploration of their work. However, I am grateful for their definitions of the requirements of social justice.

iii   Michelle Fine (2000) describes, in "The Politics of Urgency," why attention to justice in urban public education is essential and urgent; she notes, for example, that urban youth, especially low income and of color, are criminalized, low-tracked, and high-stakes tested in their schools. If anything, the situation of public education is even more dire today, after years of under-funding and privatization efforts (Lipman, 2004) and an increasingly narrowed curriculum resulting from the No Child Left Behind Act's focus on standardized testing of some "core" subjects (Dillon, 2006).