Art Education and Collaboration: Disconnect/ed.

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Abstract

This research attempts to address the issue of the absence of collaborative curriculum in Art Education throughout most of the 20th century. Although prominent social development theory supports a classroom based in interaction, the art classroom nurtured the Modernist, autonomous view of the artist in society for most of the 20th century. This research acts as a survey of the differing artistic theories, artist contributions, and educational theories that either contribute to a collaborative model for art education, or hinder its development as a mode for learning in the art classroom.

Collaborative Studies: A History

For the purposes of this research, the term *collaboration* is defined as: *interactions between the artist and others for the production and execution of art; others being defined as individuals, artists, audience, and community.*

Introduction

> "Over the next few decades, I think we will see more art that is essentially social, that rejects the myths of neutrality and autonomy, as the notion of atomic individuals discreetly divided from each other gives way, within an ecological paradigm, to a different notion of the self" (Gablik, 1992, p.6).

Throughout the 20th century, recurring themes related to the modernist, autonomous ideal for the artist has permeated the art classroom, clinched it, and haven't let go (Gablik 1992; Irwin, 1999; Milbrandt, 1998; Muschinske, 1976). Teachers and classrooms focused on progressive ideals of developing the creative spirit within or modernist approaches of autonomous art by way of creative freedom (Gablik, 1995; Muschinske, 1976). The art classroom, a space based in experience (Houser, 1991), had fabricated an ideal disconnected from the outside world, where students were mentally isolated from one another, with little attention to social and collaborative learning (Ament, 1998; Houser, 1991; Irwin, 1999). Theories and approaches for collaboration and collaborative artworks were all but absent from the curriculum, until the late 1980's.

Despite the veil of independence and autonomy, collaboration in art makes an eloquent appearance throughout the 20th century. This time in history is laced with examples of artist collaboration, with artists working together, creating collaborative works, and participating in artist collectives (Doss, 2002; Gablik 1992, 1995; Macêdo 1999). However, these collaborative models; notably the Ashcan School, Sophie Taueber and Hans Arp, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, Neo- Dadaists and Happenings, and Andy Warhol's *Factory*; seem to have been neglected, discarded as important concepts or movements to bring into the art classroom. For the most part, K-12 art education perpetuated the Modernist notion of individuality and self-expression (Ament, 1998; Gablik 1992; Irwin, 1999; Milbrandt, 1998; Muschinske, 1976; Simspon, 1996). Art education and collaboration seemed to be on a separate path, and the puzzle pieces weren't fitting into place.

The opening statement by Suzi Gablik in 1992 marks a pivotal point in the paradigm of art education. Postmodernism forced the art world to look beyond the internal conscious, creative genius, and individual freedom of the artist, and to begin exploring the connection between art and life (Doss, 2002; Gablik, 1992; Irwin, 1999; Macêdo, 1999; Milbrandt, 1998). Previous notions that considered the realm of art as an autonomous, and primarily individual act created for critique and pleasure were called into question and arguments for a more social, interactive, and interconnected model for Art and art education began to surface (Gablik, 1992, 1995; Irwin, 1999; Milbrandt, 1998).

Collaboration in the art classroom is rooted in postmodern, social, and feminist theories to art and education (Ament, 1998; Houser, 1991; Irwin, 1999; Muschinske, 1998). New and emerging Postmodern approaches to art and art education in the late 20th century opened the door for studies in collaborative learning, collaborative art, and collaborative inquiry within the Art classroom. Postmodern artists were no longer interested in the artist genius approach, a new emerging body of artwork emerged (Doss, 2002; Milbrandt, 1998). Educators craved a connecting link between their world in the classroom and the currently changing status of Art, and began looking for connections between art and community (Gude, 1989, Irwin, 1998), social issues (Simspon, 1996, Mattern, 1999; Muschinske, 1976), and aesthetics (Ament, 1999, Gude, 1989, Irwin, 1999). Consequently, the studio art door flew off of its hinges, allowing for a flood of new social approaches to art education. With the genesis of the art classroom looking beyond the individual student artist for learning and creative growth (Muschinske, 1976; Houser, 1991), collaboration efforts and studies within the art classroom began to surface.

In attempts to answer the question of why collaboration was absent from the art classroom until the late 1900's, the following research attempts to discuss and explore the disconnect between art, art education and collaboration throughout the first half of the 20th century; and then discuss the conditions and connections throughout the later half of the 20th century that make collaboration a highly relevant, studied, and practiced theory today.

Collaboration and the Art Classroom: Historical Disconnections

Throughout the 20th century, the art classroom, and art education curricula underwent many radical changes and developments. However, one prevalent theory seems to be interlaced and predominates under the surface; the theory of the isolated, individual genius of the artist, and fine art is only created through the mind of the individual, with no connection to the outside

world (Ament, 1998; Gablik, 1992, 1995; Houser, 1991; Irwin, 1999; Milbrandt, 1998). Despite alternate social theories in child development and education during this same time (Mattern, 1999; Muschinske, 1998; Steiner & Mahn, n.d; Vygotsky, 1929), the dominant Western ideal of the artist as an isolated creature remained.

In 1983, Georg Baselitz defined the role of the artist as, "the artist is not responsible to anyone. His social role is asocial; his only responsibility consists in an attitude to the work he does. There is no communication with any public whatsoever" (as cited in Gablik, 1992, p.2). Film Director Ingmar Bergman describes the artist's belief in his own isolation and subjectivity as sacred (Gablik, 1995). Collaborative artist Christo even indulges in the sacred notion saying, "One of the greatest contributions of modern art is the notion of individualism. I think the artist can do anything he wants to do. …Independence is most important to me. The work of art is a scream of freedom" (as cited in Gablik, 1995, p.76). The implications of this belief occur over and over again throughout the 20th century, and its effect on the art classroom is profound.

The theory of "art for art's sake" can be traced back to 19th century France (Egan, 1921), and continued to resonate through the better part of the 20th century (Macêdo 1999; Milbrandt, 1998). These notions seeped into Western thought into the beginning of the 20th century, and were predominant in Walter Smith's industrial drawing curriculum in the late 1800's. Stankiewicz (2001) describes the introduction of art education in American schools as a realization that with practice, everyone could learn drawing technique. She states, "only a few Americans might be artistic geniuses, but, with hard work, everyone with ordinary abilities could learn how to draw" (Stankiewicz, 2001, p.1). This statement separates the initial purpose of art education in schools with the "high art" of the Guilded Age (Doss, 2002), thus beginning the disconnect art education has with social and collaborative learning. Art education, or the drawing curriculum, was established based on needs for drawing abilities and technique during the Industrial Revolution, not a social exploration of the melting pot of immigrant workers flooding to the country (Stankiewicz, 2001). "Art" remained elite and superior, available only to artistic geniuses, and continued to be out of reach of working and lower class (Doss, 2002).

Modernist theory and the Progressive era of art education worked closely together during the first part of the 20th century. Gablik (1992) states "Modernism carried us away from a sense of community focusing only on individual experience" (p.6). As modernist theory emerged in the art world and dominated, it celebrated the so-called genius, freedom of artistic expression,

creative self-expression, and glorified the theory of "art for arts sake" (Ament, 1998; Gablik, 1992, 1995; Houser, 1991; Irwin, 1999; Milbrandt, 1998). Modernism separated the artist from social responsibility, social interaction, and expectations (Milbrandt, 1998), and encouraged the artist to alienate himself from the world for the sake of his art (Gablik, 1992; Irwin, 1999).

Similarly, Progressive educators followed suite, and cultivated the art education curriculum to encourage "inner creativity" (Stankiewicz, 2001). Progressive educator James Hall argued that, "respect for each child's individuality, encouragement of self-expression, and support for seeing and creating beauty should permeate art teaching" (Stankiewicz, 2001, p.28). Progressive educators were also concerned with outside influences hindering the child's expressive development, rather than using outside influence to aid in development; their goal was to preserve the child's inner creativity and free self-expression (Stankiewicz, 2001).

After World War II, post war avant-garde and abstract expressionism further contributed to the belief and theory of social alienation and individual styles (Doss, 2002; Stankiewicz, 2001). Early avant-garde artists were fascinated with children's drawings (Stankiewicz, 2001), and glorified the accomplishment of a personal, unpredictable, childlike style, unique to only themselves (Doss, 2002). Post-war abstract expressionists focused on internal emotions and were largely self-reflexive (Doss, 2002). Because collaboration insinuates social interaction and peer participation, and involvement of someone other than the artist (Gude, 1989; Houser, 1991; Irwin, 1999;), the Modernist movement, progressive theory, and abstract expressionism suppressed the notion of social and collaborative learning, and adored the ideal of the individual, creative freedom of the artist within.

Clement Greenberg, an influential art critic through the 1960's, also contributed to the disconnection between collaboration and the art classroom through his persistent formalist views and autonomous argument for the arts (Doss, 2002; Macêdo, 1999). Greenberg's ideas resonate the "art for art's sake" ideal, encouraging self-absorption in formalist technique and self-sufficiency (Macêdo 1999). Greenberg pressed to keep fine art and popular art separate, and battled to revitalize the division between high art and low art. He believed in focusing on formalism in critique, and criticized the inclusion of anything that would keep art from its autonomous purpose (Doss, 2002; Macêdo, 1999). This view kept the artist in their studio, rejecting social inclusion or collaboration; "condemn[ing] art to social impotence by turning it into just another class of objects for marketing and consumption" (Gablik, 1995, p.74).

Finally, John Dewey, who was labeled a Progressivist, but later distanced himself from that label in the 1930's, claimed the disconnect between social and interdependent learning theories and the classroom lies with the structure of the school system (Muschinske, 1976). According to Muschinske (1976), Dewey claimed that a classroom constructed with consumerist ideals of individualism, competition, and economic capitalism, "discouraged the development of habits of participation, sharing, and communication" (p.342). This classroom defined by "individualism, inequality, pecuniary competition, and non participation" (Muschinske, 1976, p.342) was detrimental to educational, and social advancement. Dewey believed society was interdependent, and constructing a classroom around American capitalism was encouraging anti-social, anti-communicative behavior.

Collaborations Among Artists throughout the 20th Century: A Brief Summary

It is important to mention briefly the history of collaboration within the arts specifically, and some of the artists and artist collectives that broke away from the popular, modern, formalist status quo. Collaboration in art is not a new phenomenon, and throughout the expansion of the history of art, collaboration not only within communal settings, but also among artists has existed the entire time (Ament, 1998). Ament's (1998) research confirms that communal and artwork surrounded by social interaction dates back to prehistoric times. Ament (1998) also suggests the interconnected and collaborative nature artists have with each other and their colleagues, dating back to Michelangelo. The 20th century is laced with collaborative occurrences (Doss, 2002), yet despite a history of community, collaboration, and social interaction within the arts, "prevailing discriminatory Western values about art remain deeply imbedded in our thinking and inhibit our teaching practice" (Ament, 1999, p.59).

Important artist collectives within the scope of the 20th century include:

- The Ashcan School: The Ashcan school in the early 20th century rejected "high" art ideals of the Guilded age and exclusive culture; instead, these eight artists worked together to break the superior boundaries of art as untouchable to the public, and worked collectively in the belief that art was located in the real life experience of the growing industrial age (Doss, 2002);

- Neo-Dadaists: Neo-Dada artists became entrenched in the collective spirit between artists and audience. Happenings, a theatre-like social commentary produced by Neo-Dadaists in the 1960's, blurred the lines between the audience as mere spectator, included them in

the collaborative process in the creation of the artwork, and embraced an anarchist style of art (Doss, 2002, Macêdo 1999).

- Feminist groups: Feminism and feminist groups emerged in the 1970's, challenging dominant Modern formalist theories and mainstream art. Many artists worked collaboratively on a number of politically charged performance and installation works, while others explored the divisive notion of "art" vs. "craft," questioning Greenberg's theories (Doss, 2002).

Individual artists were also breaking the Western mold throughout the 20th century, and participating in collaborative projects. Some of these examples include:

- Sophie Tauber and Hans Arp: These two artists collaborated for over 25 years in the early 20th century; creating collaborative drawings, sculptures and collages. Hans Arp stated, "I believe that collaboration is the solution and may bring us the harmony which would liberate art from its boundless confusion" (as cited in Macêdo, 1999, p.18).

- Andy Warhol: Warhol and Gerard Melanga created *Screen Tests/A Diary*, a collaborative collection of portraits of artists with their audience (Macêdo, 1999). Furthermore, Andy Warhol's Factory challenged ideas of authorship, with many hands contributing to the finished product (Macêdo, 1999).

- Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg: Johns and Rauschenberg were in a unique collaborative partnership in the late 1950's, and influences from one another, and their struggle as gay artists, resonated throughout their artwork (Katz, 1993).

- Suzanne Lacy's *The Crystal Quilt, 1987*: Lacy brought the audience into a critical perspective, using them as a necessary component to the creation of her work. In her piece, the audience it not only necessary to the artist for the execution, but their collaboration with one another as active roles within the work also plays a vital role (Gablik, 1992, 1995).

All of these moments in history challenge modern formalist views of autonomy and individualism, the predominant theory obstructing collaborative practices in the classroom. These are only a few examples, but shed necessary light on the recurring nature of collaboration in many different forms, and the fallibility of Western autonomy and values.

Postmodern, Social and Feminist Theories: Implications for Collaborative Practice

Despite the popular, modern view of individualist creativity throughout art and art education (Gablik, 1995), the 1980's saw a paradigm shift in art, as well as in art education. Gablik (1992) suggests and explains how art and art education seem to have matured beyond that of traditional Western autonomy, and were now looking for a way to connect. She states, "we seem, however, to have finally come up against the limits of that particular paradigm, and now there is a real yearning for a sense of community and intimacy that has been lost in modern culture" (Gablik, 1992, p.3). Artists and educators were now turning to existing social theorists and community approaches to art and education, shedding light on the profound interconnectedness of the world, and the people within it (Gablik 1992, 1995; Houser, 1991; Milbrandt, 1998).

Postmodernism and postmodern artists of the mid-1970s onward mark a critical and radical shift away from autonomous artistic creation (Doss, 2002; Gablik, 1992; Irwin, 1999; Macêdo, 1999; Milbrandt, 1998). Irwin (1999) states "In a postmodern era, a shift is occurring from' a locus of creativity within an autonomous individual to that found within dialogic collaborative, interactive, and interdependent processes (p. 36). Postmodern art began a search for a purpose through its relationships and connections with the world (Gablik, 1992; Irwin, 1999; Milbrandt, 1998), and began to recognize the importance of "the interconnectedness of knowledge, learning experiences, international communities the natural world, and life itself" (Slattery, 1995, as cited in Milbrandt, 1999, p.52). With modernist ideals up against a wall (Gablik, 1992), and artists looking for connections between their artwork and the life outside of his studio, new approaches and theories opened the door for collaborative practices in the art curricula (Gude, 1989; Houser 1991; Irwin 1999).

One of the first major arguments for social and community learning, leading to a field in collaborative curriculum, originates with John Dewey. John Dewey explored community approaches to education in depth, and suggested that through working together, and building a classroom like a community rather than a capitalist industry based on the individual, that students would emerge as democratic citizens (Mattern, 1999; Muschinske, 1976; Simspon, 1996). Through his Laboratory School in the early 20th century, students participated in joint activities, and Dewey emphasized that learning "occurred not only through individualistic and competitive effort but also through collaborative and cooperative undertaking" (Muschinske, 1976, p.344). Dewey believed that in order for society to progress, schools need to recognize

community interaction, multiple perspectives, and shared experience in the curriculum (Mattern, 1999).

John Dewey also applies these same implications and theories for the art classroom (Mattern, 1999). Simspon (1996) summarizes, "Dewey saw art as a series of interactions between organism and environment, an experience that invests the whole creature" (p.53). Dewey discounts autonomous individualist views of artistic expression, arguing that the basis of human identity is rooted in social experience (Mattern, 1999). John Dewey believed that art played a potentially critical role in emphasizing a shared experience, recognizing different perspectives, and synthesis of the verbal and visual language (Mattern, 1999); contributing to a students understanding of others and the world (Simspon, 1996). Dewey's emphasis on shared experience, community interaction, and social development all point to beginning of a classroom recognizing collaborative practices within art.

Lev Vygotsky (1978), leading child developmental psychologist during the 20th century, grounded his theories and beliefs in socially mediated development (as cited in Houser, 1991). Lev Vygotsky believed all learning is based on social influence, interactions, and process of interpreting the world; and learning begins through these interactions with others and the environment, not within a linear vacuum (Houser, 1991; Steiner & Mahn, n.d; Tudge, 1992; Vygotsky, 1929). Only after children gather experience from their environment, can they begin to internalize this experience, and express their learning through culturally practiced actions (Houser, 1991; Steiner & Mahn, n.d).

Vygotsky's theories, most notably his concept of the *zone of proximal development* (Steiner & Mahn, n.d; Tudge, 1992; Vygotsky, 1929), and the achievement of *higher psychological functions* (Houser, 1991), further provide a successful argument and pathway for collaborative practices to emerge in the art curriculum. The *zone of proximal development* focuses on the notion that "developmental processes…are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in collaboration with his peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.90, as cited in Tudge, 1992, p.1365). Additionally, Houser (1991) argues that through collaboration, art is a uniquely perfect medium for mastering cultural tools, central to acquiring independent intellect, or *higher psychological functions.* Both of these ideas, central to Vygotsky's developmental framework, contribute to a classroom focused on social interaction and influence.

Feminist theory surrounding the arts emerged with the Feminist Movement in the 1980's, and with it implications for classroom practice. Elizabeth Ament (1998) defines feminist theory as "theories grounded in feminist scholarship rather than referring to art created by women" (p.58). Feminist theorists question and examine the socially constructed definition of who is considered an artist in Western society (Ament, 1998). Feminist theory rejected Western belief of the genius artist, and Estella Lauter (1990) emphasizes the communal importance of the arts dating back to prehistoric times (as cited in Ament, 1998). Based in the communal and interdependence of the arts and community throughout history, feminist theory also rejects formalist, detached views for viewing artwork, and instead suggests that art is more like a web, "fragile, yet resilient; interconnected, yet also connected to the exterior world" (Lauter, 1990, as cited in Ament, 1998, p.60).

Feminist theories in the classroom suggest a focus on art's extensive connections with the culture and the community. Ament (1998) argues that in a curriculum based in feminist theories, "Students would learn to make and appreciate art by working in an interactive system paralleling the collaborative working tradition of many artists" (p.61). Another approach within feminist theory includes Suzi Gablik's (1992, 1995) theory of connective aesthetics. Through connective aesthetics, "interaction becomes a medium of expression" (Gablik, 1995, p.82) and explores the web-like theory of art as intertwining between self, other, and society (Gablik 1992). The artwork as product no longer becomes the focus, but rather the relationship and interaction built within the creation of the work takes center stage (Irwin, 1999).

Collaboration Research Emerges: Falling Into Place

In the late 1980's and into the 1990's, all of the different pieces to the puzzle seem to connect and fit into place, creating a larger picture that point toward the study of collaboration in the classroom. With the impact that major feminist theory had on art education (Gablik, 1992, 1995; Irwin, 1999), along with postmodernism in art (Doss, 2002; Gablik, 1992; Irwin, 1999; Macêdo, 1999; Milbrandt, 1998), research began to focus its attention toward collaborative projects, connecting social and community learning theories to the classroom. Ideas and theories concerning "what is art?" begins to change in the classroom, and teachers being exploring new avenues that focus on interaction, including the audience, other peers, and society in the creating of artwork (Gude, 1989; Houser, 1991; Irwin, 1999).

In 1989, muralist Olivia Gude explores collaboration in correlation with murals and

community participation. She explores the idea of the *aesthetics of collaboration*, where she states, "the goal is not subordination of the individual, but the harmonizing of alternative visions" (Gude, 1989, p.323). Gude (1989) also noted the importance of collaborative work was not to derive one answer from the group, but rather share a vision which included the multiple viewpoints of its community and its creators. Through community murals and as a community artist, Olivia Gude (1989) recognizes and validates the community's vital role in idea development and production; how a mural created in collaboration with the community emphasizes the interconnection of community history, ideals, and concerns.

      In 1991, Neil Houser proposed a collaborative curriculum for art education, rooted in Lev Vygotsky's social development theories. Houser (1991) recognizes the disconnect between the art classroom, and social theories to learning that contribute to art educations "experientially based pedagogy" (p.33), and argues that contrary to the status quo, the art classroom is a perfect place for acquiring Vygotsky's *higher psychological functions*. Throughout his research, Houser (1991) argues that a collaborative model "stimulates development of higher psychological functions in the construction of related meaning" (p. 35). In addition, Houser (1991) reveals additional benefits of a collaborative curriculum that include social awareness, cultural understanding, and recognizes the students active role in learning.

      At the turn of the 21st century, Rita Irwin (1999) and Judith Fowler (2001) further explore artistic collaboration within the art classroom. Irwin (1999) participated in a collaborative quilt-making project with other artist-teachers, and explored the idea of connective aesthetics, suggesting that time, nurturing, speaking and listening throughout the artistic process is as much a part of the work as the final product. Irwin (1999) emphasizes "multiplicity within unity" (p.38) and a new understanding of the "depth and complexity of our acquired understandings" (p.38). Judith Fowler's (2001) Sole-Mates project bravely incorporates collaborations between teachers, middle school students, and art education majors. Fowler (2001) notes that throughout the project, students experienced "increased individual participation, a stronger sense of accountability among group members, higher project expectations, and shared responsibilities in gathering information" (p. 22). Finally, Lauter's (1990) web (as cited in Ament, 1998) has expanded, connecting the interrelatedness of art to the teacher, the student, the classroom, and the community.

Conclusion

Profound theories within the later half of the 20th century questioned radical individualism in art, and instead investigated a philosophy based on our radical connections, entwined through history, community, and society. Art and artists previously indulged in the ego-self, and relished in the antisocial nature of Modernist thinking. Those ideals, while serving its purpose for the time, have arguably run its course (Gablik, 1992). Postmodern ideals, feminist theory, and social learning have come to the forefront of art and education, investigating and uncovering everything that is seemingly anti-modernist.

Current research for art education is annoyed with dominating Western modernist theory of the 20th century, and protests its controlling grasp within the classroom (Gablik, 1992, 1995; Gude, 1989; Houser, 1991; Irwin, 1999). Gablik (1992) expresses a shifting need of art and society stating, "individualism and freedom were the great modernist buzzwords, but they are hardly the most creative response to our planet's immediate needs, which now demand complex and sensitive forms of interaction and linking" (p.4). Furthermore, Milbrandt (1998) expands on this shifting need stating, "art education must provide means to present a more holistic approach to education, presenting models of the artist-collaborator rather than the artist as solitary maverick or hero" (p.52). Collaboration in art education may be a fairly new phenomenon in the classroom, but its roots reach far back into history, and I believe it is here to stay.

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