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1. CHILDREN'S CONTEXTUAL ART KNOWLEDGE: LOCAL ART AND SCHOOL ART CONTEXT COMPARISONS

After a series of classroom lessons on linear perspective, a student is unable to render this type of perspective in drawings done in the natural environment. A graduate student prepares an exhibition of art work for review, but she does not include drawings that she works on during her spare time. A natural history museum exhibition of fishing equipment and related art forms draws record crowds of people from a wide range of occupational backgrounds; an exhibition of abstract art at an art museum is attended primarily by art professionals and students.

These familiar occurrences illustrate discrepancies among differing art contexts, each of which relies upon and perpetuates specific types of art knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes. For example, there are various knowledge bases and assumptions from which classroom art instruction can proceed. Left to their own devices, young children commonly copy sophisticated artistic conventions of cartoon characters but in school settings, they produce work that conforms to the expectations of child art developmental levels (Wilson, 1974, 1985; Wilson & Wilson, 1977). In the history of art education, one can identify child psychology, the aesthetics of fine art culture, modern industrial principles, and formalistic art values as contributing toward some of our art education theories and practices (Logan, 1955). These and other constellations of meaning and value have constituted formalized, school art.

School art is often discussed as differing from other subject areas in that studio art lessons involve the concrete manipulation of materials and the direct experience of visual qualities. It seems that art instruction does not deal with abstract concepts and rules to the extent most school subjects do. In a relative sense, this might be so. However, when *art* contexts are compared, school art can be seen as rulebound and as offering few occasions for transfer to the interactions of individuals in other art contexts. In this chapter I propose that a great deal of formal art instruction in grades K–12 may consist of highly specific, if not false, models of art learning that ill-prepare children for participation in either professional art worlds or informal, local art experiences.

To provide the rationale for rethinking school art practices in terms of differing art contexts and of children's nonschool art expressions, I will discuss the following: (a) assumptions of transfer in general education and art education; (b) characteristics of school art, local art, and professional art contexts; (c) models of institutional and informal learning contexts; (d) research on local knowledge; and (e) areas of nontransfer between school art and the local art of children.

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEXTS OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, as they are appropriate to specific learning contexts, have been variously discussed as school culture, child culture, situational learning, situated knowledge, contextual knowledge, local knowledge, everyday knowledge, subcultures of learning, formal and informal learning, school subject domains, and so on. For research in general education, as reviewed by Perkins and Salomon (1989), context is most often limited to school domains or what is more commonly known as school subjects, wherein the concern is with the character of school instructional contexts and with whether there is any transfer *among* school domains. In particular, Perkins and Salomon (1989) explored the research and theoretical basis for teaching generalized cognitive skills as opposed to teaching domain-specific cognitive skills.

In most research, the question of whether cognitive skills transfer to other contexts is limited to whether transfer occurs *within* formal school learning contexts. For example, problem solving and analysis as general cognitive skills are often taught with the belief that they will be utilized in math, science, and other classes. However, the case can be made that problem solving and analysis can differ in kind from one subject domain to another—and even differ within a domain. For example, after nonart majors had completed a series of successful drawings from live models, it was found that these students were unable to incorporate learned drawing skills to other models and other drawing lessons (Wilson, 1974; Wilson & Wilson, 1977). This led Wilson to suggest that for students not talented in art there may be limited transfer even among highly similar activities within the school art curriculum and that students may learn to draw *particular* subjects or objects rather than learn drawing skills *per se*.

Issues of transfer, domain-specific cognition, and general cognition have become embroiled in the wide-ranging and often media-oriented debate involving the merits of teaching cognitive processes as opposed to teaching the content of subject domains along with their domain-specific cognitive skills (Eisner, 1997, 1998; Hamblén, 1993b). Colleges of education and programs for teacher preparation have come under attack for focusing on methods of teaching to the detriment of subject content (Holmes Group Executive Board, 1986). Proponents of cultural literacy identify the knowledge of Western traditions as constituting a particular, desired content for curricula (Bloom, 1987; Hirsch, 1987). While head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Cheney (1987) faulted education for teaching thinking skills without attention to information on literature, historic events, philosophies, etc. Cheney suggested that teaching thinking processes is specious unless there is substantive content about which to think. The back-to-basics thrust of current reform poses questions not only about whether there is transfer across subject domains but even whether cognitive processes should be the core of emphasis in any subject domain.

OCCASIONS FOR TRANSFER

In studio-based and child-centered art instruction, art educators have been particularly fond of emphasizing the benefits of process over product and the many

possibilities of cognitive and attitude transfer. Some art educators have claimed that art study involves the general thinking skills and behaviors of creativity, problem identification, problem solving, tolerance for conceptual ambiguity, etc. (see Eisner in Getty, 1985), and that these will transfer and translate into an increase in mathematics test scores, a rise in reading levels, job-related skills, and a generalized creative attitude toward life (The Arts, Education and American Panel, 1977; Boston, 1996). According to Eisner (1997, 1998), many of these claims have their basis in the desire to secure art's place in the core curriculum. Unfortunately, these claims also tend to obscure or call into question the actual, research-validated benefits of art study (also see Hamblen, 1993b; Winner & Hetland, 2000).

Since the turn of the twentieth century, there have also been various claims that art instruction will result in moral behavior, psychological well-being, and life-enhancing insights unavailable from other types of study. Although such optimistic claims have a tenuous basis in research (Hamblen, 1993b; Lanier, 1970, 1975; Winner & Hetland, 2000), they do indicate that the issue of transfer goes well beyond the school contexts that have been the usual concern in general education (Perkins & Salomon, 1989).

Transfer has been discussed in terms of specific skills, knowledge, strategies, attitudes, and values. Broudy (1982) studied the everyday uses of schooling in terms of replication (recall), association, application, and interpretation. Relevant to this paper, there are four occasions for transfer: (a) within a particular school domain; (b) among school domains; (c) between a school domain and everyday contexts in general; and (d) between a school domain and the local, everyday context of that domain.

Relatively little research has been devoted to how school-based knowledge and skills translate into nonschool settings or vice versa. For example, children's developmental levels are often discussed as something to overcome or as deficiencies, e.g., a child is described as unable to draw objects perpendicular to a baseline, a child seems unaware that human figures have jointed limbs (Hamblen, 1993 a). Art education research has tended to focus on school learning as preferable, with nonschool art knowledge and responses considered "unschooled"; i.e., criteria for success is set up in terms of school art learning (Hardiman, 1971). In a tautology of school learning and school success, student assessments are based on how well students perform on tasks learned in school and utilized in the school context. Except for correlating occupational success with school learning, there is little follow-up research on how specific school-learning "items" are utilized outside the school context (Rogoff & Lave, 1984) and more specifically, how domain-specific learning, such as art, transfers to other art contexts. Some studies of everyday, out-of-school cognition suggest that not only is much learning and application context-specific but that transfer of some skills and knowledge from school (a) does not occur or (b) is not considered useful for any of the events that occur in nonschool settings (Rogoff & Lave, 1984). Employers note the absence of basic work skills among entry-level employees, and school-aged children have long protested the irrelevance of what they are required to learn in school.

The concern in this paper is not with business and industry's complaints that schools should provide on-the-job training in both basic and job-specific skills. Such complaints are based more on seeing the schools as conduits for business and industry, and on students not learning basic reading, writing, and computational skills. (For a

highly publicized and widely distributed polemic on how art learning may support business and industry-related job requirements, see the Getty Education Institute for the Arts' publication, *Education for the Workplace through the Arts* [Boston, 1996]). Rather, the concern in this paper is that what is *actually learned* in formal institutions may not transfer to or have relevance in other *domain-related* contexts. Students entering professional art training are often asked to unlearn or ignore what they have acquired in their K–12 art training; art students in K–12 art classes must often censor images from the popular arts and their fantasies (Michael, 1983; Smith, 1989; Wilson, 1974; Wilson & Wilson, 1977). In describing traditional studio-based art instruction, Efland (1976) bluntly stated that such art “doesn’t exist anywhere else except in schools” (p. 38). Unless such school art incorporates *principles* applicable to other art contexts, children may be losing contact with their own art worlds as well as access to the art of professionals.

THREE ART CONTEXTS

Ultimately, all of education is concerned with how well students will be able to apply what is learned in school to everyday living and to the skills required in particular professions or vocations. In this sense, there are three basic learning settings: (a) professional communities, (b) school contexts, and (c) the local context of everyday life experiences. Art that is made and/or responded to in these three contexts will be referred to in this paper as *professional art*, *school art* and *local art*. Although reference will be made to disjunctures among the three contexts, the focus will be on differences between school art contexts and the local art contexts of children.

Professional art is the art of galleries, museums, academic settings, and commercial art businesses in which socially designated art experts exercise the behaviors, skills, and attitudes of institutional art knowledge. *School art* is formalized art instruction that occurs in K–12 classrooms. The training of artists at professional art schools and at universities is not being included in this discussion; such formal learning contexts have more kinship with professional art contexts than with the school art of grades K–12. *Local art* is the art of everyday experiences, wherein art responses and production are learned through informal processes. This is the art one meets as one goes about the business of life. Popular, commercial, environmental, etc., arts may be produced as part of professional contexts but experienced as local art. Domestic art, folk art, child art, the hidden stream art of the homeless, and other similar types are created in and may always, remain in the context of local, everyday experiences.

The three art contexts identified have fluid boundaries and are themselves composed of many subcontexts (Becker, 1982). For example, local, everyday art consists of popular, commercial, folk, environment, and child art as well as communal and individual expressions and responses to art. These art forms can also be found within professional contexts of experience, but they would probably be understood and responded to differently there.

CONTEXT MODELS

Brown (1989) and Feldman (1980) developed theoretical models of how societies develop different learning contexts and how individuals create, experience, and give meaning to those contexts. Brown examined three cultures of learning which are highly similar to the three art contexts discussed in this paper. According to Brown, learning occurs in the cultures of (a) experts, (b) students, and (c) "just plain folks". Each of these learning cultures has different goals, focuses of action, and cognitive processes. The culture of experts is goal focused, and action is based on (more-or-less) professionally agreed-upon values and assumptions. The culture of students is characterized by individual cognition, an emphasis on abstract thought, abstract symbol manipulation, explicit rules, and context-free abstractions and generalities. These are the learning characteristics of modern industrialized societies that are based on patriarchal, hierarchical systems of organization. In contrast, learning in the local contexts of "just plain folks" tends to be collaborative, involve the manipulation of concrete materials, and be experiential and situation-specific. These are characteristic of the actions of pre-K children and youngsters before they internalize the demands of school contexts. These are also the learning characteristics often attributed to nonindustrialized, traditional cultures based on matriarchal systems of organization.

In much the way individuals learn varying forms of etiquette for different social settings, individuals experience and learn socially sanctioned forms of knowledge in different learning contexts—and responses vary accordingly. How a particular phenomenon, such as art, is experienced and understood in highly divergent but co-existing contexts is suggested by Feldman's (1980) developmental model of subject domains. According to Feldman, development does not occur within the cognition of the individual. Rather, development exists within the way a particular domain is experienced in different contexts. In other words, development is socially situated, which may explain why children exhibit different developmental levels within school from what they seem to be capable of doing outside the school context. At times, learning may involve figuring out what is appropriate, not what one is literally capable of doing.

Feldman proposed a continuum of five contexts for domain development: the universal, the cultural, the disciplinary, the idiosyncratic, and the unique. These contexts extend from what humans universally experience, such as the acquisition of a verbal language, to what is considered professionally unique, such as the creation of a new form of poetic verse.

Applied to art, Feldman's model accounts for the universal production of graphic symbols by children and for the universal presence of art throughout time and space. From the universal, art expression and response move to the learned experiences of art in cultural context. Everyday art experiences and visual forms of communication constitute particular, culturally sanctioned forms of art. Specific study of art in the formal contexts of school results in understanding art as a *discipline* or body of knowledge and skills. The development of an individual artistic system is *idiosyncratic* to the discipline. Innovations which might change the discipline, and, perhaps, eventually become everyday cultural experiences of art, are considered *unique* to the subject domain. For example, Pollock's abstract expressionist style would qualify as a

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