

2010 Lowenfeld Lecture

Creativity and Art Education: A Personal Journey in Four Acts

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Over these years, I have noted the ebb and flow of support for creativity in art education with a high point in the 1960s and 1970s, to its fall during the 1980s, and until recently when it has been rising again. In the 1960s, I began as an art specialist teacher in elementary schools in New York City, then became a coordinator of my own art school in upper state New York, and finally was an art educator at a university in the Midwest United States).

I have always been an advocate for creativity in art education even when it was not popular. Hefeli (2009) explains that art education has failed to approach research and practice as a “family of ideas” (p. 369), with themes that date back to the years 1950-1970, and spotlight personal histories to create a dialogue through past to the present. I therefore will present my own personal journey with creativity over almost half a century as a play in five acts to insert some drama in what might be a rendition of facts. In each act, I will begin with my personal journey and reflections from the past and compare and contrast these with contemporary scholars’ points of view.

There are a few basic assumptions about creativity that provide a supporting role for my journey (Zimmerman, 2009b).

- There are no common definitions of creativity and related dispositional factors.

- Creativity is a complex process with relationships among people, processes, products, and social and cultural contexts relevant to a domain of knowledge.
- People are not creative in a general sense; they are creative in particular domains such as the visual arts.
- Creativity, based on models developed in art education and other fields, can be enhanced and teaching strategies can be developed to stimulate creativity.
- Creativity for visual art education should be inclusive with all students viewed as having abilities to be creative.

Act One: The Lowenfeld Era- the 1960 and 1970s

When I was a new art specialist teacher in New York City in the early 1960s, the text that I used that influenced my conception of creativity and art education was the third edition of Lowenfeld's *Creative and Mental Growth* published in 1957.¹ Burton's (2009) insight that "Lowenfeld's vision was at the root a prescription for repairing the world" (p. 324) has meaning for me as Lowenfeld and I share a similar Jewish heritage and I am inspired by a social action notion of *tikkum olam*, repairing the world. I believe it is the obligation of each individual and groups of individuals to help perform this repair. This can be interpreted today as having each student find personal meaning through his or her study and making of art in which processes and outcomes are socially relevant and allow for creative expression.

Today, some of Lowenfeld's ideas may appear outmoded, but it must be remembered that they were influenced by theories held at the time and his background as a psychologist

concerned with art therapy and child development in art. The purpose of art education for Lowenfeld was to develop creativity so that it could transfer to other subjects and spheres of human activity (Efland, 1990). He viewed the role of art education ultimately as a means for development of students' creative self-expression and not necessarily as an end in itself.

All students, not just those who were artistically talented, were encouraged by Lowenfeld to have their creative abilities unfold over time. His focus was on creative self-expression as a form of individual personality and identity formation as well as development of relationships with others. In any art program, interactions between art teachers and students were of prime importance. Little teacher intervention was required or expected in the early stages as students built skills through their own experiences with materials. As students became older, some direct teacher intervention became important for conveying knowledge and understandings about art making and the art world.

In Lowenfeld's schema, creative and mental growth took place in hierarchical stages that included social, emotional, perceptual, intellectual, aesthetic, and creative components.

All children passed through the same stages in the same ways at more or less the same ages. Emphasis was on students' own experiences with modest regard to affects of a student's culture or the influence of other cultures including contemporary culture.

According to Lowenfeld, it was only at adolescence that social influences played a role in creative development.

A Critic's Review

Burton (2009) acknowledges that today “all facets of children’s development are not only situated within the culture of which they are apart, but also are shaped by the practices, skills, and expectations of that culture” (p. 328)

Act Two, Scene One: A Holistic Art Education –the 1980s

In the 1980s, Gilbert Clark and I (1983) conducted research about art education programs in which creative self-expression was supported within a holistic framework. Curriculum has traditionally been represented by three orientations to schooling: society-centered, child-centered, and subject-centered. In a society-centered art program emphasis is on meeting a community’s social needs through learning values and content derived from broad social issues and concerns through multicultural, global, community-based, and intercultural understandings. In a child-centered art program, expressed interests and needs of students determine content and structure of a curriculum. In a subject-centered curriculum, emphasis is on classified and organized disciplines of knowledge and learning activities that emphasize methods, techniques, and findings within subject-matter disciplines.

In a holistic art education program, teachers’ own backgrounds, cultural practices, understandings of the art world and the greater world about them all influence students’ art learning and their abilities to express themselves. Students’ readiness for art learning at personal levels of development, as well as their engagement in art learning processes and producing art products, are part of a holistic art education program. Because creative

growth is influenced by what happens in classrooms and beyond, of concern in a holistic art program is an educational setting for art learning including classrooms, schools, communities, and society with related administrative climates and support mechanisms as well as materials, equipment, resources, and time allocated for art study.

Act Two, Scene Two: DBAE - 1980s and 1990s

There was a reaction to Lowenfeld's child-centered emphasis by discipline-based art education (DBAE) supporters in a 1980s curriculum reform movement in which DBAE's subject-centered advocacy was in tune with social and economic trends of the time. The DBAE screenplay, supported by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, consequently came into the spotlight as a model for most state art education programs in the United States. The timing was well choreographed as the standards movement, rubric-mania, and the arch villain of stage and screen, No Child Left Behind legislation, influenced state curricula changes across the United States. Art education was not exempt from this sweeping reform in which creativity was sent backstage and art learning that could be assessed by standard measures were placed on the proscenium. I attended many Getty rehearsals and final performances at a myriad of locations and the following is my response to some of DBAE's constructs about creative self-expression.

DBAE was presented as a conscious antithesis to Lowenfeld's child-centered approach (Smith, 1996). The title of a 1985 report by the J. Paul Getty Trust, *Beyond Creating: The Place for Art in America's Schools*, leaves nothing to the imagination about the place of creativity in the Getty agenda. In a 1987 script by playwrights Clark, Day, and Greer,

supported by Getty, Creative Self-Expression (CSE) was described in opposition and as an alternative to DBAE. Some major CSE and DBAE oppositions were: In CSE development, creative self-expression, personality integration, and focus on the child was contrasted with the DBAE concept of art as a focal point of study. CSE curricula were deemed non-sequential and non-articulated as compared with DBAE's sequential, cumulative, articulated, and district wide implementation. This assumes that across any school district student needs and backgrounds could be assessed similarly. Some aspects not taken into consideration were that students come from diverse backgrounds in which variables such as socioeconomic status, gender, culture, and racial differences play important roles.

According to the DBAE script, CSE learners were considered innately creative and expressive and in need of nurturing and direct instruction and imposition of adult images were conceived of as inhibiting self-expression. In contrast, in DBAE students were to develop art understandings and be exposed to adult images that would enhance their learning. It was not taken into account, however, that sometimes intervention of adult images can hamper children's self expression if they are limited to teachers' self selected images and outcomes, rather than those accessed by students in respect to art work that has meaning for them. Teacher imposed adult images, therefore have a place in a holistic art program when appropriate, but there are times when they might play havoc with students' creative self-expression.

Evaluation in CSE was described as based on a student's own growth and art making outcomes. In contrast, students' skills, knowledge, and understandings in DBAE were subjected to imposition of standardized outcomes in which end products were predetermined by the teacher and formalized through a district and state-wide curriculum. Underlying DBAE's assessment initiatives is a mistaken notion that student progress should always be measured by achievements of other students and pre-set goals that affirm a program's ability to meet rubrics and other forms of conventional outcomes set forth by outside experts. In 1991, Gilbert Clark (1991) reconsidered the DBAE playbook and wrote that although DBAE set forth content to be learned, it failed to include "student self-expression, levels of student development, and their readiness to learn; teachers' roles and methodologies related to learning in the arts; and specific educational settings" (p. 19).

A Critic's Review

Jan Jagodzinski (2009) suggested that in creative democratic societies, "Teacher-centered knowledge is replaced by student centered approaches that emphasize the active constructed character of knowledge" (p. 342).

Act Two, Scene Three: Gifted and Talented Education and Stages of Development - 1980s through 1990s

In the 1980s, after having several of my proposals that placed creativity on center stage rejected by NAEA, I switched hats and found a new audience for creativity research and

practice in the field of gifted and talented education where my research and practice was readily accepted. I have always believed what is learned from best practice environments for talented art students should be adapted as outcomes for all art students and in a variety of educational settings.²

In 1986, Gilbert Clark and I used a Technicolor lens based on David Henry Feldman's (1980) conceptual model to reconstruct Lowenfeld's classic black and white conceptions about child art development. In his Universal to Unique Continuum Feldman described children's' cognitive development through a series of phases that are continuous rather than distinct. Levels of achievement within a particular field of knowledge are represented through a gradual transition of creative behaviors that are layered in complexity over time. This is in contrast to Lowenfeld who viewed stages of development as structured wholes existing in a child's mind.

For Feldman, stages are not lost as a child progresses in the sequence of phases, but are integrated into each successive phase. His Universal to Unique Continuum is composed of five developmental regions: universal (experienced by all children), cultural (when children's environments exert influence on their art development), discipline based (with knowledge and skills found within a specific art domain), idiosyncratic (referencing expertise within an area in a domain), and unique (adult contributions that exert change in a culture). These regions are attained by an increasingly smaller number of people and students within a culture are expected to acquire certain domains of knowledge found in

the cultural region. Feldman is explicit that students do not progress along the continuum without direct, intentional instruction.

A Critic's Review:

Ivashkevich (2009) states that images produced by students are considered as evidence of the influence of cultural, pictorial conventions that “shifted from a natural, universal evolution of graphic forms to non-linear development models that account for both socio-cultural and individual differences” (p. 51).

Act Two, Scene Four: A Body of Work-mid 1990s

In 2000, Neil Brown invited me to speak at a conference, Bodies of Work and the Practice of Art Making, at the University New South Wales, Australia. In the mid 1990s, I published about a body of work produced in and outside school by a talented art student from pre-kindergarten through his college years (Zimmerman, 1992, 1995, 2000). I traced this student's developing creative practice and his engagement with his own body of work that demanded he be involved in arts-based research that demonstrated his engagement with meaningful content over a sustained period of time. Influences from past and contemporary cultures, including new media and forms of communication, were encouraged as a basic foundation for his study and interpretations. This student's in-depth, creative self-expression developed a result of a vast amount of work, practice, and study, coupled with teachers' guidance, and encouragement. At the conference, Brown (2000) challenged the notion of what he termed the “the romance ... of the façade of a

single art work” as evidence of “inauthentic representation” of accomplishment of a student’s visual expression (p. 33).

Teachers and students need to be risk-takers and allow bodies of work to evolve over time through self-directed learning because this is where true creative self-expression can be supported and valued. There are times when specific skills need to be taught and teachers can predict outcomes of art learning. Of deep concern is that this is the point where art teaching and learning in many contexts do not progress further. Sometimes art teaching proceeds to a next step where an art teacher still has a firm notion about types of student products that meet more open-ended criteria for success. It is only at a next level that creativity takes place; that is when teachers cannot predict results and are surprised by their student outcomes. To reach this level, students are encouraged to conduct art-based research that has direct application to their own interests and abilities and where they establish their own bodies of work.

A Critic’s Review

Thomas (2009) explains, teachers play significant and starring roles in the creative performance of their students and the art works they produce. “Creativity is a kind of social reasoning that is translated between an art teacher and students in the cultural context of the art classroom” (p. 65).

Act Three: Creativity – 2009-2010

Although creativity was not at center stage in art education in the US until recently, I found in many other countries that creativity was embraced in art education programs.³ In 2008, as a keynote speaker to the World Creativity Summit in Taipei, Taiwan, I addressed the topic of a contemporary consideration of the role of creativity in art education (Zimmerman, 2009a). InSEA convened this summit with support of the international organizations of dance, music, and drama education. This was one of the first opportunities in decades that art educators from around the world participated in an arts education dialogue convened around the topic of creativity. At this summit, Steers (2009) commented, “ I am old enough to remember that creativity was an item on the agenda in the 1960s and early 1970s [in the UK] but then it seemed to disappear from view ...it has reappeared amid increasingly supportive rhetoric to a point where it is center stage in the educational and political agenda” (p. 20).

Until the past few years, creativity did not have a starring or even a supporting role in the National Art Education Association (NAEA) agenda.⁴ The dust cover has been removed and creativity research and practice in art education are being reconsidered. Included in the 2009, 50th anniversary issue of *Studies in Art Education*, edited by Doug Blandy, were two articles that featured creativity. One was by Burton (2009) about Lowenfeld’s notions of creative intelligence and creative practice; the other was one I wrote about reconceptualizing the role of creativity in art education theory and practice (Zimmerman, 2009).

In 2009, Flavia Bastos, Senior Editor of *Art Education*, invited me to be guest editor of the March 2010 issue of *Art Education* devoted to creativity; she and I also are co-editing another NAEA publication focusing on creativity. The thirteen articles accepted for these two NAEA publications offer evidence of passion and commitment of art educators to support creative self-expression. The venues where their students' creativity experiences unfolded were in art classrooms, museums, social network communities, and community art centers. The work of many researchers inside and outside the field of art education provided a variety of conceptual models for these educators' creativity praxis. As with a singular definition of creativity, the notion is quickly dispelled that creativity in art teaching and learning is based on one singular process or methodology. Although the authors often referred to a creative process, it became apparent as their creativity themes were explicated that there were a variety of strategies and methodologies used to aid students in their creative performances. Some were problem finding and solving, brainstorming, analogical thinking, transformational thinking, visualization and remote association, distortion, metamorphosis, code-switching, and developing habits of mind.

Kerry Freedman, Arthur Efland, Doug Boughton, and I, in 2009, were participants at an NAEA Super Session, *Reconsidering Creativity: Theory and Practice in Art Education*. In 2011, the topic of the NAEA convention will be Creativity, Innovation, and Imagination. Times have certainly changed as the curtain opens on the final act of my personal journey and creativity once again takes a starring role on the art education stage.

Two Critics' Review

Smilan and Marzilli Miraglia (2009) point to the need for developing creativity in all students because “without creative thinkers, society and culture may suffer, leaving a dangerous gap ...between those who lead and those who blindly follow the status quo” (p. 40).

Final Four: Curb Your Enthusiasm –the future

Hafeli (2009) warns about the “current institutional obsession with new practices and the breakneck speed with which we rush to adopt or discard conceptual rationales” (p. 369). As we honor positive reviews for reconceptualizing creativity for the next decade, we must be mindful of consequences of over zealousness as creativity becomes an important actor on the art education stage.

The current star of stage and screen, visual culture, is beginning to be overtaken by casting creativity in a leading role in post-industrial economies. Creativity now is included in state and federal reports in areas of art and industry and economic and cultural strength is no longer measured by production of goods, but by production of information and creative concepts through innovation, new products, and ideas (Florida, 2002; Freedman, 2007). In report by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2010), creativity is highlighted as needed in an age where “the ability to excel at non-routine work is not only rewarded, but expected as a basic requirement” (p. 10).” Creativity also has been conceived as a “particular kind of performance that entails political application of knowledge” (Brown, 2000, p. 260) and art teachers therefore need to ensure that their

students have access to methods of reading ideological content of visual images (Duncum, 2007).

I agree, that as art educators we should not stand in the wings, but should be aware of political, economic, and socio-cultural agendas to reconceptualize creative practice and concurrently satisfy educational goals. There are critics who challenge an emphasis on a profit motive as a driving force for reconsidering creativity. Barbosa (2008) emphasizes the close relationship of art with real-life politics, but decries a return to ideas of the 1960s in which “neo-liberal and capitalist pedagogues” aimed at “producing a workforce that generated novel ideas for the market place” (p. 10). She advocates thinking about creative processes as linked with understanding the meaning of art, questioning cultural stereotypes, and building intercultural understandings.

Creativity from all these vantage points is being reconsidered with less emphasis on self-expression as in Lowenfeld’s days and more focused on development of cultural identity, technology, good citizenship, and economic entrepreneurship. Still, individual creative self-expression needs to be cast in a leading role with appropriate teacher interventions. I passionately believe that as art educators we should reconceptualize creativity in the framework of a holistic education for the 21st century lest it become a character actor for supporting numerous roles for creativity and neglect the importance of each individual student’s rights to creative self-expression and creating a body of art work based on his or her own abilities and concerns.

While reviews are still pending, there are a few basic assumptions about creativity and its inevitable meteoric rise that I would like to add to the list that I presented at the beginning of this article.

- A holistic art program should focus on creative processes as there is not one creative process, there are many processes and educational models that can influence students' creative development.
- In holistic art programs that support developing skills, understandings, knowledge, and self-expression, teachers should focus on student processes and outcomes that are creative and not predictable.
- Creative self-expression is important in and of itself and not only in the service of therapeutic, civic, economic, or political agendas, although these need to be considered in a holistic art education.
- All art students are entitled to freely develop their own bodies of work, become enlightened through critical thinking and creative art processes, and be able to express their own creative reactions to the world about them.

The journey is not over and there is still much to accomplish through reparation.

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Endnotes

¹ *Creative and Mental Growth*, published in 8 editions from 1947 to 1987. Editions of *Creative and Mental Growth* from the 4th edition to the 8th were co-authored with W. Lambert Brittain)

² After 10 years writing articles and speaking about creativity in art for gifted and talented audiences at venues in the US and abroad, in 2001 Gilbert Clark and I wrote a chapter about creativity and enrichment programs for artistically talented students in *Fostering Creativity in Children K-8: Theory and Practice* grades K-8. In 2005, I had an opportunity to address a general education audience about creativity in art education in a chapter I wrote, "Should Creativity Be a Visual Arts Orphan?" in *Creativity Across the Domains; Faces of the Muse*.

³ In 1999, I presented a paper at an international conference in Taiwan that was published later that year. I also wrote an article in 2006 for an international journal about creativity's role in art education theory and practice.

⁴ In 2002 there were 590 sessions at the NAEA annual convention with 8 that had creativity mentioned in the title or description of a presentation. There were 16 sessions out of 1023 in 2008 in which creativity was the focus. At the 2010 NAEA convention, of 1032 sessions, 28 emphasized creativity with topics such as teaching strategies, social contexts, student learning, models, technology, and definitions. In *Studies in Art Education*, in 2007 there was one article by Freedman directly related to creativity research. In 2008 there were no articles focusing on creativity, but by 2009, there were three articles that focused on creativity with two included in the 50th anniversary issue. In a content analysis of all papers published in the *International Journal of Education Through Art*, Mason (2008) similarly found "associations between art education and creativity were implied but not explicated or theorized" (p. 57).