

# Discipline-based art education curriculum



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The discipline-based art education program relies on several different curriculum theories. At times, the theories overlap and contradict each other, which is a reason why the DBAE has endured much criticism, as well as praise since its inception. The focus of this paper is to connect the theories to the four disciplines of DBAE by using the readings from EDU-707, Curriculum Theory, and Research.

## **Introduction**

The aims of the discipline-based art education are to provide art educators with a curriculum that is equal in vigor as the core curriculum subjects. Noddings(2003) would conclude that the DBAE curriculum, which parallels with core subjects, is rationalized through planned objectives and goals. Constructing a school curriculum, or a set of courses, must begin with a purpose or at least knowing the answer to why is this important to teach and learn? Eisner(1967) states, “ if one is to build curriculum in a rational way, the clarity of premise, end or starting point, would appear paramount” (p. 250). In the early 1900s, school curriculum was questioned and mainly because of the changes that were taking place in society. There was a tremendous growth in popular journalism, the rapid advancement of railroads, and the migration of people from a predominately rural base moving into more urban locations (Kliebard, 2004). The industrial revolution was replacing the farm-based way of life and students needed a different type of education to help society in the future. The purpose of education is summed up neatly by Bobbitt who states, “[Education is] the function of training every citizen, man or woman, not for knowledge about citizenship, but for proficiency in citizenship” (Flinders & Thornton, 2004a, p. 11).

Additionally, Eisner (2001), DBAE founder and Stanford University Professor of Education and Art, offers, “ the function of schooling is not to enable students to do better in school. The function of schooling is to enable students to do better in life”(p. 369).

The DBAE curriculum is shaped by connecting different and at times conflicting beliefs. Few can argue that the main purpose of DBAE is to offer teachers a theoretical framework for learning and teaching the arts(Patchen, 1996). However, the foundations of DBAE have been under constant scrutiny since its inception. The criticism focused around being too prescriptive, eliminating individual creativity, and not representing all cultures. The differing analysis from academic experts is likely because the arts require a novel or creative response. Therefore, developing the particular behaviors needed for students to be successful it is hard to identify (Eisner). Another factor in the construction of the DBAE is how the world viewed art education in the 1960s. During prior decades art was influenced by national and political issues reflecting on post-war thinking. The approach was a belief of independence and democratic personality, which shaped art activities (Freedman, 1987). Therefore, the DBAE creators found a necessity for a disciplined approach. By definition, the term discipline means a field of study, as well as gaining control by enforcing the order. Both descriptions of discipline imply a set of parameters. Setting restrictions on instruction is designed to help teachers uniformly teach art education, which includes a responsibility of providing foundational knowledge. Art teaching in DBAE focuses on four disciplines: art production, art history, art criticism, and art aesthetics.

## **Art Production**

Art production is students learning skills and techniques to produce personal, original artwork. This change signifies a different model from one of creative self-expression which had controlled art education throughout the previous decades and one in which Greene (1995) would contend that “to be yourself is to be in process of creating a self, an identity”(p. 20). Greene is certainly an advocate for individualism, creativity, and an awareness of oneself.

However, the creators of the DBAE saw creativity through the lens of an essentialist. The orientation of an essentialist classroom should revolve around the teacher. The teacher should also be the model to which students should try to emulate. If the teacher is the focus of an essentialist classroom, Counts(Flinders & Thornton, 2004c) believes that they should take the next step and reach for the power and help construct the curriculum. The DBAE founders value the art product by using known exemplary works of art and treat art as a process moving from the outside inward. The founders contend that students view aspects of the exemplary as a process of discovery about responding, understanding, and thus creating. There is a flaw in this methodology because which of the many different societies have excellent pieces of art for students to follow? Kliebard (2004) suggests that what a society values and incorporates it into the curriculum is tough because it cannot take into account the different segments of society and what they feel is worthy of study.

The emphasis of DBAE art production is for students to create art physically. The problem for teachers lies with assessing students levels of achievement in their art creation. Eisner (2001) proposes that creating standards and the

measures of performance help teachers and school administrators to be accountable. Dweck (2000) offers that there are two different types of goals to assess; one is a performance goal or how well students completed the assignment and the second is a learning goal, which assesses what the student learned while creating. In an ideal setting, educators should strive to evaluate both performance and learning goals. An assessable performance goal in a DBAE classroom is the student's demonstration of proper techniques used in the exemplary pieces to create a new work of art. Because art instruction uses exemplary work, teachers can assess the performance of a student who is developing intuition and reasoning behind why a piece is considered exemplary. Assessing a learning goal is more difficult because of individual experiences. Sumara and Davis (1999) suggest learning is an "act of (re) cognition," meaning that people who see things for the first time helps them make meaning to what they already know. Conversely, Greene(1995) offers that students have to develop their imagination for learning to take place. Depending on a student's previous experiences, an art teacher using the DBAE approach would need to create individualized rubrics to assess learning. Furthermore, a student self-reflection would be of great benefit to the assessment process.

### **Art History**

Art history is studying the artistic accomplishments based on culture and history. Students educated through DBAE instruction begin with observing exemplars. The choices of exemplars have received the most criticisms because of the lack of representation in different societies, gender, and minorities. The section of curriculum devoted to art history has roots with

Perennialism qualities. From a Perennialist perspective the exemplars are mainly chosen from Western European artists; predominately individuals who are white and male. The program meritoriously excluded other genres and narrowed student's ability to think critically by telling them the exemplars were the only necessary or worthy pieces of work to study. Taliaferro Baszile's (2008) statement regarding the lack of diversity is powerful as she writes, " Cartesian rationality, which iñ, attens out the role one's racial history plays in considering a " rational" line of thought"(p. 381). What she is offering is without diversity and representation of multiple the points of view, the consumer is knowledge is incomplete, and they forced to take the perspective provided. In effect the lack of representation oppresses, even eliminates many cultures and genders from history. bell hooks (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009) reminds us of the importance of " hearing each other's voices, individual thoughts, and sometimes associating these voices with personal experience makes us more acutely aware of each other" (p. 138). Unfortunately, the designers of the DBAE rely heavily on the " great works" specifically within Western European art history, in essence taking the status quo route of it was good for previous generations, so it must be good for the next generation. The Perennialist teacher is supposed to focus on personal development, but it appears that the art history framers of the DBAE approach are interested in developing one point of view, one level of emotion, and providing one genre of " great work." Wang (2008) would argue this narrow focus further perpetuates the social hierarchy that exists in a predominantly privileged white society. She would advocate for a teacher to use caution, but to introduce other great works by minorities, females, and other marginalized individuals to provide students with a

broader intellect. Additionally, if we look at Freire's idea of an educational banking system, the DBAE is in full compliance. Freire (2003) describes the banking concept as education that " regards men as adaptable, manageable beings" (p. 73). The use of exemplars, solely based on one society, provides students with the knowledge they may or may not need or use. The teacher deposits the notion that " exemplary x" IS a piece of great work and the student accepts and memorizes it and later regurgitates it back to the teacher. There is a complete lack of variety and opinions given toward the exemplars. Freire (2003) believes the students have to work at storing the deposits delivered to them not to develop an awareness which may result in transforming the opinion. Certainly, the teacher engages students in a dialogue, but the conversation revolves around what the teacher believes is important and offers no other alternatives.

The criticism of the art history strand using the DBAE approach is justified. The lack of women, people of color, and modern artist's exemplars gives students a disproportionate view of art history. The heteronormative thinking of art history in DBAE, as Sumara and Davis (1999) remind us, does not broaden a viewer's perception or increase their understanding of what makes a piece of work worthy of being an exemplary. Students need to be able to develop various frameworks; this could occur through the study of designated, restricted art examples. Maybe even more than the advancement of multiple lenses, students need the capability to be instinctive regarding artistic choices and develop relations among those choices to help shape his or her reality.

## **Art Criticism**

The goal of art criticism is to be able to interpret and evaluate for the purpose of understanding and appreciating works of art. To be able to interpret and assess art, students must be able to experience and process the art; additionally, teachers need to place a high level of importance on student perception and decision making. Therefore, art criticism relies on Existentialist and Constructionist theories. An existentialist teacher encourages student responses and desires student self-awareness, and hooks (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009) reflects these traits when she describes her classroom as a place where everyone has a voice and students continually practice self-awareness to reinforce their position on a topic. Baszile (2008) offers that literature suggests reflection is a racially neutral practice. However, she would strongly disagree because of her experiences while attending a predominately White campus for preservice teachers. Her reflection experiences demonstrate a dismissal of race and background, which left a void in her growth process. As a DBAE teacher, it is imperative that their voice and reflection be neutral to encourage honest and open dialogue between the students.

The more students review and discuss art the more they build their knowledge base to think critically about art. Largely based on interest and critical thinking, it is the DBAE teacher's responsibility to foster an environment where students can question ideas and have the flexibility ability to develop competencies in areas that interest them. Doll (1993) uses the term recursion to describe developing competence through reflective practices and building upon previous knowledge, in essence, he is



suggesting that students are critically thinking. Dewey is an advocate for building on prior learning which involves experiential, hands-on learning. He would appreciate students in a DBAE classroom would have ample opportunities to connect art to other subjects during their experimentation and analysis. Dewey offers that school departmentalizes subjects and nothing could be worse for students as they quickly pass from one subject to the next, often with no conscious isolation. For students to effectively interpret and analyze art, they have to be able to draw from many experiences. The experiences must repeatedly occur, because “ the child’s present experience is in no way self-explanatory. It is not final, but transitional” (Dewey, p. 279). Greene (1995) calls the experiences bringing the unknown to consciousness, which can provide pure enjoyment for students. Students who revel in the learning process are far more likely to find success with Bloom’s upper levels of critical thinking skills of creating, analyzing, and evaluating art.

### **Art Aesthetics**

Art aesthetics is defining, making judgments, and exploring the relationships between art and ideology and morality. The existential properties of students working toward finding personal meaning and value in art is a basic foundation of art aesthetics. Students are responsible for determining if the art is beautiful or ugly and if the art is an accurate or poor example of the period it was intended to represent. Doll (1993) proposes that thoughts on thoughts is the way we make meaning. He continues by suggesting for one to have a sense of self they must interact with the environment, with others, and with culture. Addams (Flinders & Thornton, 2004b) defines culture as

things that are passed through generations and have value and meaning. For a student to appreciate and be able to provide an appropriate aesthetic point of view they have to develop a deep understanding of themselves and their culture. Students who have not developed the skills can often base their opinions on preconceptions and biases when they are engaging in objective criticism of art. According to hooks (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009), biases shape the way knowledge is given and received. An incorrect belief on a piece of art does not help a student achieve an understanding of a culture or how that culture fits within the world. Furthermore, ideas based on falsehoods often transfer to next generations that further perpetuate the bias and the need for future correction. The preservation of untruths can be dangerous because as Baszile (2008) offers the false self-system works from within and often convinces people that it is normal or fact.

In the world of art, DBAE teachers have a responsibility to their students to help them understand falsehoods and how to break the cycle of biases and ignorance. In essence, DBAE teachers are Social Reconstructionists in that they are contributing to reshaping society by providing students with necessary skills to make qualified judgments and finding relationships between the art world and real world. Counts (Flinders & Thornton, 2004c) states that if teachers could locate the courage, intelligence, and vision, they could become societal change-makers. At the very least, teachers touch the future each day and have the ability to help students view culture and society in different ways. Counts is adamant about teachers making a stand, making a difference. His statement, " If the schools are to be really effective, they must become centers for the building, and not merely for the

contemplation” (Flinders & Thornton, p. 32) should resonate with DBAE teachers. As their students find new relationships between art and society, and art and their thinking, they are also building a capacity for intellect and appreciation of different cultures. Freire (2003) saw teaching and learning as a method of examination in which the child conceives and reinvents the world. Furthermore, he stresses “ education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information” (p. 79), which is precisely what DBAE art aesthetics strand aims to achieve.

## **Conclusion**

Viewing discipline-based art education from the perspective of different curriculum theories offers the reader a chance to make connections to what and why the founding writers of the DBAE saw to be important. The origins of the DBAE stem from previous decades of art instruction being a break for regular classroom teachers, and an arts and craft slice of the students educational day. By creating an art curriculum that includes rigorous standards, art education benefits art instructors by focusing their efforts, and more importantly all students because of the critical thinking. While there are still flaws within the DBAE approach, the successes require schools to provide the necessary, valuable time for art instruction and learning in mainstream education.

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