International Journal of Education & the Arts

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http://www.ijea.org **ISBN 1529-8094**

Volume 8 Review 5 **September 23, 2007**

Reflective Practices in Arts Education: A Review Essay

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Burnard, P., & Hennessy, S. (Eds.). (2006). *Reflective practices in arts education.* Dordrecht: Springer. ISBN: 1-4020-2702-9

Citation: Blank, J. (2007). Reflective practices in arts education: A review essay. *International Journal of Education & the Arts,* 8(Review 5). Retrieved [date] from http://www.ijea.org/v8r5/.

> The thesis about [arts education] and the major premise of this book is that reflection matters at every turn in arts engagement and even more so in educational settings where artist educators share a passion for facilitating and understanding the 'how' of learners' engagement with particular art forms. (p. vii)

Reflective Practices in Arts Education brings together a multi-disciplinary group of authors who scrutinize conceptualizations of reflective practice, illustrate understandings of reflection-in-action, and illuminate challenges educators face as they attempt to communicate the nature of reflective practice at its most meaningful. Intended to spark reflective discourse among practitioners who work in schools, artists-in-residence, teacher educators, and researchers in arts education, this volume explores meanings of reflection and its applications to a range of arts education contexts. Collectively, the

works presented position reflection at a point of intersection between arts and education, reframing enduring questions about the role of arts in schooling as questions about relationships between the nature of art and the nature of schooling.

The book is organized into three major sections intended to provide perspectives on what reflection is, why it is important, and what reflective arts practice looks like. The first explores multiple understandings of reflection. The second describes tools for reflection. The final section contextualizes reflection by presenting case studies that document reflective practices in arts and learning in a variety of settings. In this essay, I join in conversation with these authors by following a brief overview of each of the three sections with an exploration of themes I find particularly salient.

Perspectives on Reflection

The first section of the book, entitled *Perspectives on Reflection,* addresses the question: "What is reflection and how is it a resource for teaching and learning?" Burnard opens by asserting the importance of having *reflective practice conversations;* that is, posing questions about educational and artistic purposes and exploring related implications for practice. She specifies collective reflection as groundwork for implementing changes to arts curricula and for supporting inter-disciplinary understandings of reflective practices. Because reflection heightens awareness, critical examination of values, and on-going modification of interpretations, reflection facilitates professional agency. Burnard concludes with a call for "a commitment to more systematic forms of reflective activity…with a strong framework for evaluating the pedagogical effectiveness of reflective practices" (p. 10).

The notion of reflective conversation resurfaces as Kushner proposes "reflective curriculum" as a site for conversation. Kushner adds another layer of complexity; his conversation embraces conflict as well as mutuality, taking into account tension and competition as well as shared understandings and tolerance. Digging deeper, Kushner looks critically at reflection, arguing that it is too often presented as a private, individual experience. He acknowledges a political dimension of reflection, and through this lens situates curriculum research and development as the domain of the teacher. Rather than suggesting a systematic framework for reflective practices, Kushner cautions against habitualizing reflection. Reflective practice is "based in inter-subjectivity and mutual exploration of lives. …What we need are reflective cultures to support reflective individuals" (p. 13).

From a music education perspective, Harris also situates reflection as social and dialogic rather than as an individual cognitive process. She describes the teaching of performing

arts with Muslims, aiming to spark reflection about the teaching of multi-ethnic groups. In terms of the teacher/learner relationship, Harris sees reflection as looking inward toward uncovering the implicit (e.g., What are our underlying ideologies?), looking to the pupils we teach, and learning about the pupils' larger culture. One of the goals of reflective practice, then, is empathetic understanding.

Focusing on children's learning, Hilton defines reflective conversation as a "questioning discourse energized by shared experience between pupils and teachers," (p. 33) that reflects what artists do every day. She asserts that curriculum should be built around the child's direct experience with the material world. Further, Hilton points out that sensory experiences in the world stream along side complex virtual experiences: "As children grow and develop within their culture they become increasingly aware that their knowledge of the world is communicated not only through direct experience, but also through complicated systems of signs and representations" (p. 37). Hilton envisions arts curriculum as enactments of *genre* (a set of textual features that can only be understood in terms of specific social communicative practices) that interweave reflective conversation and artistic production, a reformed integrated curriculum framed by the duality of direct/virtual experience.

Voices from music education also emphasize reflection as embedded in direct experiences in the world. Hentschke and Del Ben investigate how music teachers make sense of and reflect upon their every day practices. Drawing from multiple case study data, the authors find that the teachers' constructs constitute interpretive frames, permeated by personal meanings as well as derived from the social setting, that frame their understandings and their actions. A key premise here is that teachers have theories and possess the capability to generate knowledge about teaching. Hentschke and Del Ben suggest that teacher educators support teachers by acknowledging the realities of schools, conceiving of practice as theory in action, and facilitating shared critical examination.

Like Hentschke and Del Ben, Upitis takes into consideration the importance of understanding the nature of learning contexts. Upitis identifies some of the challenges faced by teachers and artists and artist-teachers in education partnerships. In addition to ever-present barriers such as time limitations, classroom teachers saw artists' lack of a "sense of how a classroom operates" to be a barrier (p. 61). At the same time, artists found it challenging to work within the constraints of classrooms because "They felt that their work as artists was not valued by teachers or was so distorted by the educational system that they were no longer producing art" (p. 62). Providing learners with authentic experiences that present the opportunity to engage in the processes practitioners' undergo leads to meaningful learning. Providing such authentic learning experiences is a challenging endeavor within school contexts. Upitis argues that this makes partnerships

with artists in various places (e.g., artist studio, classroom, performing arts centers) important if the partnerships are to bring arts to students and their teachers.

The authors' examination of reflection brings to my mind underlying questions about the nature of *practice*. Like others who frame teaching as something more than the enactment of a given set of technical skills or strategies (e.g., Doyle, 1990; Eisner, 2002; Fendler, 2003; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), the authors in this section suggest that both teaching and art inherently involve reflection. Likewise, Schon (1983) described professional practice as a kind of artistry, in part a process of making sense of a situation, getting a feel for the sound of it, and making adjustments. He opposed this to a technical view, or the assumption that professional practice is comprised of skillful application of theoretical knowledge to problems of practice.

The recurring theme of reflective practice as artistry in this volume also involved considerations about the nature of artistry. In particular, I was struck by distinctions authors made between the kind of art that happens in schools and the kinds of arts that are found outside of schools. The importance of considering the relationship between art and context is particularly vivid when art and schools come together. Upitis, for example, directly addresses understandings of arts in relation to context and suggests diversifying the locations of arts education to include places like performing arts centers and studios. Morrison, Burton, and O'Toole directly address drama education as a school subject with school-specific kinds of aims (i.e., discipline). Bresler (2002) has also pointed out contradictions embodied in school art; for example, "Arts defy a-priori, rigid criteria; yet schools feel obliged to create accurate a-priori evaluation mechanisms" (p. 8). Bresler brought attention to the interplay between the goals of school art and the larger goals of the school, and the authors in this section attend to this with concern for contextual meanings of art and reflection.

Tools of Reflection

The second section, *Tools of Reflection*, addresses the following question: How is reflection practiced in arts, in education, and in arts education? Responses discuss the application of particular tools that facilitated reflection in particular contexts.

From visual arts, Peel describes a "game" that is an artwork, a reflective tool, and research method she used with children in a gallery workshop experience. Peel argues that the game she developed became a tool for nurturing *children*'s reflective practices. Artists and children who participated in the workshop were invited to create memory cards, sequenced into books. Peel created an instillation that invited families to participate by re-arranging the cards or adding new ones. This engaged children and

adults as "co-reflectors" (p. 78). The tool facilitated a reflective relationship between teacher and learner.

Music educators Glover and Hoskyns consider tools that support the process of evaluating projects that employ artists to work with children. They argue that evaluation is a powerful tool for learning and should be integral to project planning. The authors illustrated examples of using talking, writing, gathering evidence, troubleshooting, and using external observers as tactics to support reflection and reevaluation.

Offering a perspective from dance education, Rolfe introduces learner journals as a tool for facilitating reflective processes in teacher education in the arts. Rolfe draws from her experience using journals with trainee dance teachers enrolled in a one-year program. Although the trainees receive support in and feedback on writing processes, Rolfe describes the writing as dialogic reflection as "the ability to engage in discourse with one's self" (p. 106). Designed to foster student teachers' metacognition, learner journals are intended to help pre-service teachers identify areas of strength to build upon, monitor progress over time, set goals for development, and place their experiences within a larger contexts related to theories of teaching and learning. Rolfe found that the trainees more often recorded their developing beliefs than made connections to larger theoretical constructs in the field.

Cheung and Kung focus on using technologies as reflective tools in music education. They illustrate with a project conducted with "fourth year music students" who worked in peer groups to compose music using both digital and acoustic instruments (p. 109). Cheung and Kung outline four reflective uses of technologies they found. First, technologies acted as "facilitators" of reflection, helping students to express and develop their musical ideas. Technologies also acted as "catalysts" of reflection, as students engaged in trial and error processes of reflection and action in the composition process and evaluated peer performances and recommended ways of improvement on the digital discussion board. A third reflective use of technologies was as "enhancers." This refers to the use of digital means of communication to enhance or increase curriculum time. Finally, technologies as "role reverser" facilitated a shift in the learner/teacher roles. The learner/practitioner is responsible for solving problems and becoming active in creating his/her own learning agenda" (p. 119) and the teacher acts as a facilitator. The compositional process the authors describe was inherently reflective. The act of composing required learners to create, revise, develop, and share ideas.

Kerchner's chapter explores ways arts educators can develop reflective thinking/teaching skills. She presents four tools she used with pre-service music teachers: river journeys, metaphor sculpture, portfolio goals, and videotaped reflection. The goal of each tool is

"To nurture dialogue between experienced and novice arts educators in order to initiate positive change in the classroom" (p. 125). River journeys are records of "pivotal moments" in students' music histories (p. 126). Students acknowledge their backgrounds and compare them with others. Metaphor sculptures are created near the end of the student's first field experience. Students use clay to create sculptures that represent themselves. To develop portfolio goals, students are asked to find two "problems" they want to address. In goals essays, students state the goals, describe their reasons for selecting the goals, specify ways they might track progress in meeting the goals, and describe possible "synthesis products" (p. 131). Videotaped teaching reflections involve students in reviewing a videotape of their teaching and writing a two to three page reflection. Kerchner argues that these tools can lead to "questioning, dialogue, and revision in arts educators' classroom actions" (p. 134).

Revisiting the question of the nature of practice—seen as technical rationality or as a kind of artistry— I notice a recurring tension between the individual and social nature of the tools for reflection authors describe in this section. The technical view of practice presents the self as an individual cognizing agent who can pose and solve practical problems using *episteme*, or universal, propositional knowledge. An alternative view sees the self as a self-interpreting being situated in moral space and embodied in social space. This self is understood dialogically, through ongoing exchanges with others. This reflective self uses *phronesis*, practical wisdom or perceptual knowledge, to understand not only his or her own beliefs (metacognition) but also to understand what it means *to be* a teacher. *Phronesis* is a substantively different stance than one that suggests that reflection is an individual epistemological process. In this view, self-understanding is not the work of an individual. Our self-understanding is embodied and our identity is always defined in terms of some social space (Abby, 2000). The authors in this volume expand talk of "tools of reflection," offering a range from tentative to more voracious expressions of these more dialogic understandings.

Case Studies: Reflections in and on Action

The final section, *Case Studies: Reflections in and on Action*, presents case studies that document reflective practices in arts and learning in a variety of settings. This section addresses the over-arching question: What do reflective practices in arts teaching and learning look like?

Offering lenses from theatre research and drama education, Morrison, Burton, and O'Toole begin with an exploration of drama as a school subject, considering "The use of drama and peer teaching as a combination of discipline and pedagogy which empowers students to be reflective practitioners" (p. 139). The first case focuses on two girls who

seemed disengaged with school. Their drama teacher asked the year nine girls to teach acting skills to a group of year six pupils. Although both were known for "bad behavior," they showed a clear and strong sense of responsibility in the project. The peer teaching gave the girls the opportunity to see the classroom from the perspective of teachers. Similarly, the aim of the action research describe in the second case has been to use drama and peer teaching to help young people understand the nature of conflict and bullying. Year eleven students explore conflict theory and management in their drama class, then teaches the concepts to year eight or nine students. Again, two girls' stories are told. The authors found that both girls transferred what they learned by participating in the study to coping with conflict situation in their lives. "The evidence from the two projects suggests that peer-teaching and reflection can have a positive impact on academic motivation and personal development" (p. 147).

Joseph's chapter focuses on a five-week unit on primary arts education taken by Australian generalist teachers. For her, a fundamental aim became restructuring the course to include non-western music. She focused on introducing students to African music methods. Joseph sees reflective practitioners as agents of change, and sees part of her teaching responsibility to be the preparation of students for "active participation and adaptability. . . in a world where knowledge in globally linked" and teachers teach in multicultural settings (p. 150). Joseph found that introducing a new musical genre "motivated students to learn not only about the music, but also the wider cultures of which it is a part" (p. 152). She suggests that understanding music can aid in understanding cultures and that making connections to the "other" helps us recognize ourselves more fully.

Younker's chapter examines critical reflection in a fifth grade composition class. She spent three years in teacher Laura's music classroom. Younker found critical reflection in Laura's interaction with her students. Laura asked questions to guide students' thinking about what they had created and encouraged them to think like composers by offering "reasoned judgments for choices made" (p. 163). Laura created an "extended community," comprised of herself, the researcher, and an invited graduate composer, for giving students continuous feedback.

Ledgard explores the work of the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT), considering the roles of teachers and professional artists in participatory arts activities with schools and communities. This report focuses on three research programs that experimented with the organization of systematic reflection over time: The LIFT Teacher Forum, a part-time professional development program, *Animarts Action Research*, an investigation into the skills and insights required of artists to work effectively in schools, and the Teacher Artist Partnership initiative (TAP). Ledgard finds that the Teacher

Forum resulted in "enhanced teacher understanding" of relationships with artists, increased willingness on the part of teachers to experiment with new approaches, increased confidence to share learning with other teachers within schools, and evolved perceptions of the role of artists and the potential of the arts in curriculum (p. 175). Participating in the Animarts research "engaged teachers and artists in reflection about how the practice of the artist can enrich the classroom and how in turn the classroom can enrich the practice of the artist" (p. 178). The TAP addressed the need for a model that could "demonstrate the effectiveness of jointly training artists and teachers" (p. 180).

Hennessy brings the volume to a close with a chapter that draws together some of the key issues and themes throughout the book. Shared ideas about reflection include the understanding that reflection is a catalyst for change in values and attitudes that can lead to more effective practice. Also, there is a shared sense that the purpose of reflection is not to solve problems or "capture the ingredients of success to that they can be reapplied" (p. 184). Instead, problems are seen as assets; art making and reflective practice involve risk taking, questioning, and challenging the status quo. Art making itself is a reflective process. Hennessy argues that reflective practices support endeavors to confront problems that arise when centralized control of education "becomes an unbearable strait jacket" (p. 191).

Another recurrent theme in this volume is sensitivity to reflection as something best understood in relation to particular contexts (e.g., art forms, locality, scope), purposes (e.g., to transform one's own teaching, to evaluate practitioners' work, to make sense of learning in and through the arts), catalysts of reflection (e.g., critical events, tools for reflection), and consequences of reflection (e.g., to recognize meaningful learning, develop professional confidence and autonomy). The authors point out the situated nature of knowledge, again building upon Schon's (1983) movement away from a rational dualism in which knowing is separate from doing, "practice" a way of handling knowledge. Eisner (2002) also pointed out that a consequence of viewing theory as knowledge discovered at the university and applied in schools was a sense that once the laws of teaching and learning were discovered, "best practice" would follow. Reform, then, was something that came from the outside; the notion that teachers had insider knowledge of value was a marginal consideration.

In contrast, the authors in this volume explore reflective practice as a kind of artistry and practical knowledge as personal and contextual: "One approaches an understanding of the universal in light of the particular, not the other way around." (Gallagher, 1992, p. 153). The authors suggest a more ontological understanding of teaching, discussing professional agency, arguing that curriculum development and research is the domain of the teacher, and suggesting that teachers have theories and generate knowledge.

Understood in this way, reflective practice is not something that can be pre-determined, essentialized, or instrumentalized.

Conclusion

Reflective Practices in Arts Education lives up to its promise to explore reflective practice and to consider what it means for teaching, learning, and research in the arts. The book meets its aim to inspire personal reflection and collegial dialogue by extending the larger conversation about reflective practices in education. Its scrutiny of conceptualizations of reflective practice and illustrations of reflection in context illuminate issues that need addressing in order to deepen understanding: movement away from understanding reflection through a lens of technical rationality; movement away from understanding reflection as an individual cognitive process that can be instrumentalized, and movement away from understanding theory as something applied to practice. The new direction the authors take readers is one toward greater understanding of the relationship between arts, learning, and context, and toward greater understanding of school art as a genre. Together, chapters in this volume suggest that reflection is a sensible point of intersection between art and schooling, a body of processes that takes into account multiple forms and contexts and intertwines both cognitive and affective development. By positioning reflective practices at an intersection between arts and schooling, this volume presents lucrative possibilities for reframing enduring questions about the role of arts in schooling.

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