N/either Here n/or There: Culture, Location, Positionality, and Art Education

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Source: *Visual Arts Research*, Vol. 42, No. 2, Looking Back, Looking Forward (Winter 2016), pp. 105-111

Published by: University of Illinois Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/visuartsrese.42.2.0105

N/either Here n/or There: Culture, Location, Positionality, and Art Education

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Looking back, Eurocentric and male-dominated paradigms have pervaded research/er and curricular perspectives and profoundly influenced the study and practice of art education in the United States. Arguably, Eurocentric and patriarchal paradigms continue to dominate in contemporary times. In what follows, we focus on pluralistic notions and considerations for research and curriculum development that revolve around positionality and cultural locations—with an eye toward research and curriculum development in art education that recognizes and reflects the experiences and perspectives of those marginalized and rendered invisible (being n/either here n/or there) from the standpoint of the epistemically privileged. In order to be consistent with the subject of this article, it is important that we articulate our own cultural locations and positionalities as authors. Delineating our positionalities supports the notion that our positions may influence curriculum and research, such as what we incorporate into our lessons or what types of information we gather in our research, and how we interpret it.

The 1965 Seminar in Art Education for Research and Curriculum Development was the product and thinking of selected higher education elites. The Seminar Planning Committee[1] invited 38 nationally recognized scholars/authors/educators, perceived to have authority in their respective fields, to address certain foundational areas of art education: art aesthetics, art criticism and history, psychological and social foundations of education, curriculum development, and research methodology (McFee, 1984). Those invited to attend the seminar were mainly White men, a few women, and a negligible number of people of color—both inside and outside the field of art education.[2] Marché (2002) described the participants as being a group of university-based/top-down art educators, considered to be specialists, mainly from

Ohio State and Penn State Universities, who worked to create and promote a new approach to art education.[3]

The 10-day seminar focused on five main areas of concern: (a) the philosophical or the "why" area, (b) the sociological "to whom" area, (c) the content "what" area, (d) the educational-psychological "teaching-learning" area, and (e) the program/curriculum area (Mattil, 1966). Seminar participants who were outside the field of art education addressed issues within their respective fields. Their presentations were followed by responses from art educators. For example, Francis Villemain (philosopher) was paired with David Ecker (art educator) as both focused on philosophic inquiry in art education. Likewise, Melvin Tumin (sociologist) and June King McFee (art educator) were paired with each other as both focused on social change and relationships in society, art, and education (Mattil, 1966).

Following presentations and responses, time was set aside for small group discussion—followed by individual summary statements published in what is now being referred to as "The Red Book" (Zahner, 1997). It is from this context that we position ourselves as authors of this critical essay on culture, location, positionality, and art education. As individuals, we make assumptions based on our positionality. Therefore, it is important to reflect on positionality in reading the 1965 seminar presentations in relation to how people are positioned in society in past and present times and places.

Positionality implies concurrently a process, a condition, a location, and a discourse: the incessant processes and means by which positionality is in/formed, undone, and reformed; the varying conditions in which we live and express ourselves; the location and spaces where it is shaped and envisioned; and the controversial manner in which it is examined and deliberated. Simply put, positionality is a state of being and a process of becoming, a journey of negotiations between social identities and shifting spaces of here and there.

Positionality is based on situating, locating, and positioning the self. Our position is a political point of departure. It is not fixed, but relational, "a constant moving context that constitutes our reality (Geiger, 1990, p. 171). How does who we are and where we are positioned (e.g., as dominant/subordinate, marginal/center, empowered/powerless) in relation to a dominant culture impact our work as art educators? "Positionality is thus determined by where one stands in relation to 'the other'" (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 411).

Positionality—Cultural Outsiders Within

We are a collaborative team of two individuals. One author (Wanda Knight) is a professor in the art education program at The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, and the other author (Yang Deng) is a doctoral student in art

education in the same location within the same program. The way in which we list ourselves as authors is not hierarchical, but instead reflects a spirit of collaboration—with the understanding that knowledge is co-created and socially constructed.

Mutually, we are outsiders. One (Yang Deng) is a cultural outsider, beyond the borders of her home country, while the other (Wanda Knight) is a cultural outsider, within the bounds of her own country. We both negotiate complex personal and collective histories. Equally, we have a strong interest in social justice and multicultural education in research and curriculum development. Our varied positionalities influence our worldviews.

Yang Deng is an Asian woman in her thirties who grew up in Southern China and moved to the United States in 2010 for higher education. She considers herself to be a person betwixt or "between" two cultures due to a sense of not belonging fully in the U.S. or in the Chinese culture.

Wanda B. Knight is in her late fifties and of African descent. She grew up in the southern region of the United States during racially segregated times in the late 1950s and 1960s. She moved to the North in pursuit of higher education. She has crossed borders of race, class, and gender in the United States, and has not yet felt a sense of belonging within the context of the academy.

Citing Patricia Hill Collins's concept of "outsider within" (1986), we both have an epistemic privilege while functioning within the academy as credentialed insiders. Even so, as women of color, we are outsiders within an academic context controlled by insider groups. As outsiders within academe, we are faced with Eurocentric and patriarchal epistemological constraints, and we are not afforded full rights and privileges in hierarchical and cultural structures controlled by insiders (Brown, 2012).

Before we discuss our perspectives on the seminar, we examine arguments on the subject of positionality by several research scholars. Linda Alcoff (1988) defines positionality as the "knower's specific position within any given context, a position always defined by gender, race, class, and other socially significant dimensions" (p. 433). However, Salzman (2002) criticizes positionality as using general social characteristics such as the aforementioned outlined by Alcoff, characteristics that may not reveal much about the real viewpoints of the individual. On the other hand, Robertson (2002) supports the notion of positionality, but not as generic fixed categories or "ready-to-wear" products of identity politics (p. 788).

Similarly, race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion, among other differences, can be valuable in positioning self, "but only if they are not left self-evident as essentialized qualities that are magically synonymous with self-consciousness, or, for that matter, with intellectual engagement and theoretical rigor" (Robertson, 2002, p. 790). This means that positionality is beneficial if

we participate in scholarly discourse and critically reflect upon our position in regard to its impact on research/er and curricular perspectives.

Research/er Perspective

Researchers make assumptions based on their positionality. Some assumptions about research in general include:

1. The White middle-class "American" is the standard by which others should be measured.
2. The instruments used for assessing differences are universally applicable across groups, with perhaps minimal adjustments for culturally diverse populations.
3. Sources of potential variance, such as social class, gender, race/ethnicity, and proficiency in English, are nuances that can later be discarded.

We cannot escape the influence of our positionality. Given this reality, conventional research methods, typically, are not effective for conducting research with different racial/cultural groups because the researcher—marked by gender, race/ethnicity, sexual identity, social class, and other identity markers—influences his or her research. Further, being born and reared in a particular culture can result in patterns of thought that one's culture is the norm. Therefore, it may be difficult to look at the behaviors of individuals from a different culture based on the viewpoints of that culture. Within the context of this article, we define culture as the rarely questioned system of beliefs, values, and practices that forms one's life.

Research in art education can use the cultural standpoints of both the researcher and the researched as a framework for theoretical research design, methods of data collection, and methods of interpretation. This means that the research focus, paradigms, and the methodologies ought to be considered from a positionality perspective rather than from a Eurocentric, pseudo-neutral, universalistic perspective or notion of research. A positionality perspective privileges the cultural standpoints of persons who experience the social, political, educational, and economic consequences of unequal power relations over the assumed knowledge of those who are positioned outside of these experiences.

When we critically reflect upon how we know what we know, we recognize that we are simultaneously empowered and disempowered as experts in our fields of endeavor. As art educators, we are empowered because we recognize that we have unique claims to knowledge that others do not. But, by the same token, we are disempowered as experts because others, too, can lay claims to knowledge that we do not have. This leads us to "question the 'correctness' of our own position, as we come to learn that our views may be constrained by the limitations of our own

experiences" (Takacs, 2003, p. 29). When conducting research, rather than the researcher positioning himself or herself as an expert and sole holder of knowledge to make meaning, the researcher might start from the position of the researched.

Reflexive praxes using concepts regarding positionality allow us to interrogate how our biases and cultural assumptions affect what we see, hear, know, and document as researchers. Through recognition and analysis of the cultures in which we are positioned, "we come to know the world more fully by knowing how we know the world" (Takacs, 2003, p. 29).

Curricular Perspective

The 1965 seminar generated the idea of multidisciplinary studies and contributed to curriculum development and theories in art education. For instance, in 1984, the journal *Studies in Art Education* identified the 1965 Penn State Seminar as the major antecedent to Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE). During Fall 2015, three decades afterward, a colloquium course at Penn State critically reflected upon the seminar, and the following year, in Spring 2016, Penn State hosted a 3-day conference at Penn State to commemorate the 1965 landmark seminar.

Throughout 1965 and during the years preceding the 1965 seminar, there was much civil unrest in the United States, including Civil Rights protests. Despite the aforementioned gains, curriculum in art education has not evolved in profound ways since the 1965 seminar—especially in response to the new and changing demographics in schools and classrooms in the United States. In our failure to adequately prepare future art teachers to provide instruction that is appropriate, inclusive, and responsive to their diverse students' needs, we perpetuate White, Eurocentric values and norms that underserve learners from different linguistic, racial/ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (Knight, 2015). Curriculum reform through student-centered pedagogy within art education is still as relevant and urgent today as it was in 1965.

One of the challenges art educators, like others, appear to confront when developing curriculum is how best to articulate their own positionalities concerning the various ways philosophies of teaching and learning inform curricular design and development. According to Hall (1990), "there's no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself somewhere in order to say anything at all" (p. 18). In shifting to a culturally pluralistic educational paradigm, how can the general art education curriculum be transformed beyond special diversity-related courses grafted onto standard curriculum?

As one might recognize, curriculum means different things to different art educators. To some, curriculum denotes a single course, while, to others, curriculum might concern multiple courses or the entire educational program. Even

though perceptions of the term may differ, curriculum is the lifeblood of an art education program, and has direct implications for teaching and learning.

In general, we believe that an effective curriculum is both a window and a mirror. All learners need to see themselves reflected in the curricular mirror, but while viewing global societies through their curricular window.

Looking forward, researchers and curriculum developers need to respect the unique life experiences that each person brings. By asserting that the broadest possible set of experiences is crucial to helping each of us understand the topic at hand as completely as possible, we empower all as knowledge makers. We allow each person to assert individualized knowledge that contributes to a collective understanding. Rather than *tolerating* difference, we move to *respect* difference, as difference helps us understand our own social locations and positionalities in reference to others within and outside of art education.

Notes

1. The seminar planning committee members were all White men: Manuel Barkan, Kenneth R. Beittel, David W. Ecker, Elliot W. Eisner, Jerome J. Hausman, and Edward L. Mattil.
2. Seminar participants appeared to be only White or Black and male and female. Asian, Indian, Latino/a, and Native American peoples, among others, were not invited.
3. In "The Red Book," titled *A Seminar in Art Education for Research and Curriculum Development* (Mattil, 1966), there are images of 38 participants and 20 observers. Six are women (five White participants and one Black observer, Mary E. Godfrey). One woman, June King McFee, was invited to present during the seminar. In total, there were 58 seminar participants, six of whom were women (including one Black woman) and three of whom were Black (including one woman and two men).

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