University Art Curriculums and the Discipline-Based Art Education Movement in the United States

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Although art has been a part of the curriculum at most universities for over thirty-five years, it is still not part of the mainstream of the university education in the United States. Artists often find themselves isolated from their colleagues in other departments and divided among themselves. Within art departments, curricular isolation is common, and minimum interaction occurs among the various studios and art history, art education, and art theory/criticism. The curriculum focuses primarily on traditional studio disciplines such as painting, sculpture, printmaking, ceramics, metalsmithing, and the new communication support areas. Art history and art theory/criticism are seen (at least, by studio faculty) as support areas. Art education exists in an ambiguous middle ground. Any curricular integration or continuity involving these various aspects of the visual arts is usually coincidental or a by-product of shared concerns between two/three areas of art department faculty members.

The art curriculum has not been perceived as being as comprehensive as those for mathematics or the sciences in the universities. Most of the university art departments have paid too little attention to integration and sequencing of content in the curriculum. Recently, however, there has been the concerted effort to develop comprehensive curriculum for the public schools and universities in the United States which has come to be called Discipline-Based Art Education(DBAE). The single, overriding characteristic of DBAE is that its momentum runs contrary to the dominant direction of most American university art departments. Consequently, because artists and teachers are trained in university art departments, significant changes in higher education are necessary if DBAE is to be successful.
Early Years of Modern Art Education

During the thirty-five years following the early 1950s, art education was guided by three dominant influences (a) the writings of Viktor Lowenfeld; (b) the art and theories of the Abstract Expressionism; and (c) the changing social climate within the dominant culture.

The Influence of Viktor Lowenfeld. Viktor Lowenfeld was one of the most important early art educators of the modern era in the United States. In 1947, he wrote his extremely influential book, *Creative and Mental Growth*.¹ The book was destined to influence a generation of people who flocked to the universities after the war and during the 1950s. Lowenfeld died in 1960, but his influence on the art education community has continued through today.

In *Creative and Mental Growth*, Lowenfeld criticized the education that required students only to memorize isolated bits of information. He called for education that encouraged students “to question, seek answers, to find form and order, to rethink and restructure and to find new relationships.”² He proposed that these activities, which he deemed necessary for creative and mental growth, were at the very core of art education, and he outlined the program by which they could be developed. He encouraged the student-centered learning process that developed from the internal needs of the student rather than from imposed external adult criteria. The development of enthusiasm for art education, especially in the public schools in the decades following World War II was largely the result of Lowenfeld’s ideas.

The Influence of the Abstract Expressionists. While Lowenfeld’s theories were establishing the toehold in the art education world, the Abstract Expressionists held sway in the New York art world. The image of Jackson Pollock swirling automobile lacquer onto his canvas in a gestural frenzy formed the romantic concept of the self-absorbed, intense artist of that era. The Abstract Expressionists are greatly influenced by affective theories of expressionists, especially those who emphasized drawing on the creative Jungian reservoir within oneself and mining that reservoir in search of both personal and

² Ibid., p. 3.