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**Reading Review: Engaging Post-Modern and Critical Theory**

**Summary of Main Ideas**

The most important ideas conveyed by the assigned readings/visuals related to Critical Theory and Post-Modernism. Briefly, according to Critical Theory, learning needs to be within a social context rather than a simple individual-learner process (Avci, Stribling, Leonard, & Ty, 2008). According to the tenets of Post-Modern Theory (Avci, et al), there should far less focus on a correct (i.e. best practices) way for art education delivery (Carpenter & Tavin, 2010, p. 343), as well as more focus on acceptance and cultivation of differences and diversity, the freedom to explore, increasing self-awareness through the unfettered allowance of that exploration. We are to cultivate this in ways that heighten a student’s connection between self and the rest of the world.

The authors of our readings seem to incorporate at least some of both Critical Theory and Postmodernism in their lines of thinking. Olivia Gude (2009) suggests that our main goal as art educators should be to instill in students the self-awareness that leads to the realization of their own power to affect the world. This ultimately leads to students becoming productive participants in a democratic society. It ties in with Doug Blandy’s (2011) participatory culture and sustainability of that culture, stressing the importance of the perpetuating the performance of democracy. Blandy asserts that this is supported in the freedom of contribution inherent to participatory culture, which ultimately “leads to social connection” (Blandy, p. 7). Patricia Stuhr (2003) laments the fact that art education severely limits social and cultural content, wanting educators to stretch themselves beyond the comfortable to embrace the ideas similar to those of both Gude and Blandy. She also asserts that we must begin with ourselves, calling “for a practical and theoretical retooling on my part; more outreach, discussion, and creative activity instead of advice and critique” (Stuhr, p. 313).

All of the authors’ aims for contemporary education seem to contain the same threads of the importance of both social context and the democratic process of learning in education to prepare students for life beyond the classroom.

**Terms/Key Concepts**

For Olivia Gude (2009) “self-aware” and “democratic” ( p. 1) are key terms of her call for art educators to use strategies that cultivate personal meaning that can be shared safely, through free, interactive expression, in a democratic society. Such education can ultimately produce an “engaged citizen”(Gude, p. 5) “by drawing on, rearranging, reformulating, remaking existing shared socially constructed meanings” (p. 2) in the art classroom.

Blandy (2011) introduces the key concepts of “sustainability, participatory culture, and the performance of democracy” ( p. 243) which really boils down to social contribution and connection in society that perpetuates the sustainability of that very society. In addition, he addresses the technical side of art learning. In this global age of information sharing, now the primary resource for learning is becoming community. From urban culture to worldwide, through countless venues of communication, people are learning.

Patricia Stuhr (2003) wants art educators to transform, or “retool” practice and theory. Reconceptualization (Carpenter & Tavin, 2010) goes along with this idea, and is a term that could possibly be applied to the aims of all of the authors we read. We don’t just need to add to our pedagogical bag of tricks. We need to rethink, even do away with, our old, unsuccessful concepts (Robinson, 2010) and see through new eyes what our world is now about.

**Critical Response/Application/Personal Reflection**

Each of the authors we read/viewed presented valid, valuable ideas for the practice of art education in this day and age. As with most differing theories of educational approach, we need not strictly adhere to one idea or the other, throwing one concept out in favor of another. We can use what we find to work best for a given scenario, reflect upon it, tweak it, add to it, and be willing to discard it. As the world changes, so must the approach of the teachers and the learners change. The learners may need to teach more. The teachers may need to become better learners. All educators would do well to pay attention to how this world is evolving, and those of who remember the good old days too fondly might want to take a brand new look at a brand new world. Art Educators who have historically considered themselves experts are put in the position of learner once more; bringing educators back to what thrilled us about art in the first place

I would like to teach a lesson about Santa Claus. In a nutshell, the students are challenged, in small groups, to visually and orally present who Santa Claus is according to various world-wide cultures. The differing folklore, names, costumes, and traditions of each of the cultures might be real eye-openers for the students, helping them to step beyond preconceived notions and step into another’s world. One of the challenges in keeping this lesson in line with the precepts of our readings is the visual component of the lesson. While researching each country/culture, the students will see visuals on it, and be tempted to recreate that picture. Also, while in groups, the students may disagree on what visuals to create. I hope to stress more about verbal description leading to a visual product that a researches picture leading to a visual product. I have even considered having the groups do the research and present to the class orally, and have the individual listeners draw their interpretation of one culture’s of Santa Claus based completely on the oral (and written, for the visual learners!) presentation. I hope to try this someday, but I believe I will have to work out the bugs through “drawing on, rearranging, reformulating, remaking existing shared socially constructed meanings” (Gude, 2009, p. 2) along with the rest of the class!

**References**

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