

# Human Praxis: A New Basic Assumption for Art Educators of the Future

Geoffrey S. Hodder  
university of victoria

This paper presents a prophetic look at art education. Based on an analysis by Lanier, which describes five characteristic roles, a further analysis is made of underlying assumptions and common factors of each role. Responding to Lanier's call for the re-emergence of an old-fashioned hero to lead a new crusade, such a hero is identified as Paulo Freire. Freire's pedagogy, used to develop critical consciousness among oppressed, illiterate peasants in Brazil, is based on "human praxis" (i.e., man's reflection and action upon his world as a means of becoming more human) and is applied specifically to art education. The purpose is to change the existing "oppressive" art education system to one that is more libertarian. Finally, Lanier's five roles are reduced to one resembling the Freirean model, with the prediction that art teachers will cease to be "oppressors" and join with students as "liberators" in the process of becoming more human.

Cet article présente une vision prophétique de l'enseignement des arts. Nous sommes partis d'une analyse de Lanier qui décrit cinq rôles-types et nous avons poussé l'analyse des présupposés de chaque rôle et des facteurs qu'ils ont en commun. Répondant à l'appel de Lanier qui désirait voir réapparaître un héros de vieilles traditions pour diriger une nouvelle croisade, nous proposons Paulo Freire. La pédagogie de Freire dont l'objectif est de développer un esprit critique chez les paysans opprimés et analphabètes du Brésil, prend appui sur une "praxis de l'homme" (c'est-à-dire la réflexion et l'action de l'homme sur son milieu comme moyen de s'humaniser) et est appliquée tout particulièrement à l'enseignement des arts. Le but de Freire est de transformer l'enseignement "opprimant" qui se donne actuellement dans le domaine des arts en un enseignement "libérateur." Nous terminons en ramenant les cinq rôles de Lanier à un seul qui ressemble au modèle de Freire, et nous prédisons que les professeurs d'art cesseront d'être des "opresseurs" et deviendront avec leurs étudiants des "libérateurs" dans le processus d'humanisation.

In assuming the role of art education prophet, it is also necessary to assume that the future has meaning for man and that he is not afraid to overcome the present to achieve improved ways of living in the future. Before attempting to peer into the future, however, some understanding of the past is essential for the purpose of establishing a departure point. A clear interpretation of the past requires the establishment of a specific point of view from which one can contemplate man and his world, the context in which art education exists. This poses two alternatives. The first is to establish one's own stance, a desirable but time-consuming task. The second option is to assume the stance taken by some other prophet for the express purpose of standing on his shoulders (rather than his toes) to achieve a related but extended view. The prophecy that follows is based

on the second option, specifically on an understanding of Vincent Lanier's (1977) perception of art education and art educators.

Lanier chooses a novel way of characterizing art education and art educators in which he constructs "a cast of characters who move across the stage of art education, illustrating a spectrum of postures" (1977, p. 7). Although the characters are not all to be found constantly in one posture, Lanier is successful in placing each one in a recognizable role. He describes five characteristic roles: Magicians, Mechanics, Merchants, Muckrakers, and Mosaicists. These are the five faces of art education.

As we are concerned here with what the future holds for art education, the brief look at the past that follows will not identify Lanier's characters by name. Only the nature of their roles will be described. (Perhaps the reader may wish to complete the names as an analytic exercise.)

The Magicians (1977, p. 8) of art education are easily identified by the presence of the word "magic" in their writings. The essence of art education is seen as the act of creation, an act of magic that cannot be and should not be investigated. The teacher-artist is the ideal. Man is seen as occupying one of two positions in the world: the first includes the artist, who creates the magic of art, together with those who are devoted to the act of magic and its product. The second consists of the "others," who are non-participants and who are, consequently, cheated of the ultimate experience of life.

One becomes a Magician by being an artist or by contributing the act of adoration, either verbally or financially. The appeal of this posture is its "delightful mindlessness" (1977, p. 9). If art is a matter of magic and mystery, there is no point in trying to understand it.

Within Magicianism, Lanier identifies two sub-groups: the Mystics, who regard any ordering with suspicion and depend solely on each individual's unique, private (and unexplainable) experience and the Manipulators, who believe that the most effective motivation for art activity is to be found in the processes and material of art (1977, pp. 10-11).

The Mechanics' trademark is a statement supported by a reference to an empirical study. They worship scientific methodology, thus objectifying their view of man and his world, which is seen as an orderly construct of quantifiable elements. University doctoral programs have provided a haven from the everyday problems of life for which there is no testing. The computer print-out holds the same meaning for the Mechanic as the ritual of the creative act holds for the Magician. Mechanics may be readily identified amidst numerical tables and figures, in research journals, and at conference research seminars (1977, p. 11).

The Merchants are to be found in the business and political world of art education where they equate art with objects such as "underarm deodorants, presidents and compact cars" (1977, p. 13) to be sold to the public. Exaggeration is a tactic of Merchantism as a part of the "hard sell" technique. Their overstatement of the importance of art in the

development of human potential verges on the absurd and, consequently, probably convinces no one outside of art education. Although most of their activities have little direct effect on the art teacher's task in the classroom, Merchants justify their existence on the basis of the resulting public relations.

One finds the Muckrakers compulsively overturning stones to expose messes of maggots as they seek to question the beliefs to which we all adhere (1977, p. 15). Their attacks on art education vary from the gentle to the vitriolic and Lanier readily admits to his own contributions as a persistent Muckraker. (Lanier's paper summarized here is a classic example of the Muckraker's art.) The negativism that is generated by constant questioning and doubt carries with it the challenge to the Muckraker to produce positive alternatives. Only the thickest-skinned can survive the role of Muckraker, whose habit of persistent enquiry can render his own ideals suspect.

Finally, the Mosaicist attempts to weave all of the other postures together into massive textbooks that contain every conceivable viewpoint in art education. The diverse nature of the various art philosophies are contradictory and incompatible and it is unlikely that the Mosaicists' efforts will remove the confusion, in spite of its many merits. Art cannot be all things to all people and the band-aid therapy of Mosaicism is a doubtful cure for the problems that exist (1977, p. 16).

At this point, it will be valuable to examine the five postures from another viewpoint. Lanier has described the differences, but the question of why the differences exist remains unanswered. In an attempt to answer the question, the underlying assumptions that are consciously or unconsciously accepted by each role will be examined. Because it is acknowledged that basic assumptions may be limitless, only the following will be considered here: basic interests, view of the world, view of knowledge, view of man, and the approaches to learning.

Magicians are interested in maintaining the status quo in a world that is mysterious and unquestionable. They accept the form of (fine arts) knowledge as given and their ideal man is an artist who, as teacher-artist, employs a narrative approach to learning.

Mechanics are basically interested in measuring the status quo in a structured, quantifiable world. They are involved in understanding and explaining the form of (Fine Arts) knowledge. Man is viewed objectively and is as he performs. An evaluative approach to learning is employed.

Uniting the arts and life is a major interest of the Mosaicists, who perceive the world as being diversified but unifiable. Man is a multi-faceted individual with personal and social needs that may be met by involvement with the arts. The concept of integration is used in approaching learning.

The Muckrakers are interested in questioning the status quo of a world that is viewed as being open and questionable. They reflect on and question the form of knowledge in the arts for the purpose of improving the

situation. Man is a potential beneficiary of the Muckraker's investigatory approach to learning.

Finally the Merchants attempt to promote the status quo in a world of art that is seen as given and saleable. Man is considered to be a potential client who is the target of the Merchant's indoctrination approach.

It is immediately apparent that, in each posture, the underlying assumptions related to basic interests, views of the world, of knowledge, and of man and also the approaches to learning are distinctly different. Admittedly, this is a simplified view of the situation, but the implications, to be considered later, are important in looking to the future and foreseeing possible solutions to problems.

Lanier (1977, p. 18), having identified and described the five faces of art education, then proceeds to evaluate his findings for the purpose of identifying the beginnings of a new direction, hopefully free of existing pitfalls.

Common to all five postures is the existence of elitism which recognizes only the fine arts of the gallery and ignores the popular arts of the people. This orthodox approach supports a class-structured social organization.

Next, Lanier points to the inability of art educators to conceive of factors other than art as instruments for human survival. He suggests that if art is dropped from the curriculum it is highly unlikely that human life will come to an abrupt end or that aesthetic experiences will cease. The fact remains that art is a luxury, even if it is a valuable one.

Thirdly, unimaginative thinking in the field has resulted in the lack of any action to deal with the rapid changes that are characteristic of the present times. Once old ideas become shibboleths, they become sacrosanct and unexaminable to the point where critical dialogue is stifled.

Finally, lack of coherence in the concepts represented by the five positions has resulted in a total lack of progress in the midst of much activity. (In another context, Lanier [1963] uses the term *schismogenesis*, which is "the splintering of . . . ideas into diverse directions prior to, and in the process of development of a new synthesis" [p. 10]. If what is happening in art education is in fact schismogenesis, then the lack of coherence may be viewed as normal expectation rather than as a problem.) Lanier concludes that the only hope for the future is for the re-emergence of the old-fashioned hero, white charger and all, to lead a new crusade.

In the light of Lanier's comments, it appears that the discovery of such a hero among art educators is about as likely as the possibility of finding an honest man with the aid of only a lamp. The temptation, even from the vantage point of Lanier's shoulders, is to stop the next white charger that passes by to ask for a free ride. But such an action, apart from being irresponsible, would also result in ignoring what may well be his most valuable contribution. In the summary of the five faces, he employs a number of terms that, when considered collectively, point clearly in a specific direction.

Lanier refers to the elitism that supports a class-structured social organization, the survival of the organism, and the unimaginative thinking in which old ideas become unexaminable and critical dialogue is stifled. It is interesting to note that these key concepts have little, if anything, to do directly with art and what art educators are conscious of doing in the classroom. It seems reasonable, therefore, if the problems of art education reside outside the field, that one should also look outside the field for a possible solution. The key to such an external connection would be the concepts identified in Lanier's summary, all of which seem to focus on some aspect of the social context of education in general. It follows that the leader to be sought should be actively concerned with man, his education, and the social situation in which man lives.

One such educator, with no formal connection in art, is Paulo Freire, a Brazilian professor now living in the United States, whose concerns were for the impoverished, illiterate, oppressed peasants of Brazil. Admittedly political, radical, and revolutionary, his methodology was remarkably successful in reducing illiteracy and raising the critical consciousness of the people.

Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) is based on the dichotomy of education-for-oppression and education-for-liberation. He does not recognize neutral education. Men are, therefore, either the oppressed or the oppressors.

The oppressor employs an educational philosophy and methodology, the banking method (Freire, 1970, p. 57), in which knowledge is possessed by the teacher who views students as objects, empty containers, to be filled with that knowledge. Communication is by means of communicate and there is no dialogue. The teacher chooses the course content and the students adapt to it by recording, memorizing, and repeating. The banking method effectively minimizes the students' creative power, and the more students work at storing the teacher's deposits the less they develop critical consciousness. There are many who use the banking method unknowingly and who do not realize that they are serving only to dehumanize their students. Their view of man is as a spectator in a static, given world.

Freire's (1970) libertarian or problem-posing methodology, on the other hand, is to engage in dialogical relationships with others and with the world. True knowledge can only result from dialogue, the purpose of which is the raising of critical consciousness, or conscientization, for the further purpose of learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against those oppressive elements of reality. Human praxis, the process of reflection and action, is the means by which man can become truly more human.

Praxis is entirely dependent on the existence of true dialogue between equals in the process of learning. It is the continuing dialectical relationship between reflection and action. One cycle of the process may be

described as the becoming aware of the concrete situation in which one lives, understanding how that situation may be changed, and then acting to change the situation.

One might ask, at this point, for further justification of the connection being made between Freire's revolutionary pedagogy of the politically oppressed in Brazil and art education in the public schools of North America. It is admittedly a giant step, but one that can be reasonably made.

Oppression, like any other human condition, may be considered as a matter of degree. On a continuum between the points of freedom and domination, the degree of oppression fluctuates with its proximity to either point. Any loss of freedom results in more domination and, therefore, in more oppression and vice versa. Oppression is dehumanizing.

Evidence of the existence of oppression in the public school system is indicated by such phenomena as the high drop-out rate, the demands for more relevance, and the falling levels of literacy, all of which support the presence of a dehumanizing situation. If a system fails to permit individuals to become more human, it is, by Freire's definition, oppressive.

Freire's basic underlying assumption, in terms of his basic interests, his view of the world, his view of knowledge, his view of man, and his approaches to learning, may be summarized as follows: He is interested in the liberation of man through the process of reflection and action on the status quo of the world, which is viewed as being open and transformable. Knowledge results from dialogue between men who are seen as incompleting beings, capable of recognizing their incompleting and of becoming more fully human. His approach to learning is one of co-operation.

To what degree can art educators be considered oppressors in the public school system? To answer this question, it is necessary to turn once more to Lanier's summary of the five faces and, in particular, to the key concepts that he identifies.

The reference to elitism and the support that it provides for a class-structured society might well have been taken directly from Freire's discourse on oppression. True knowledge cannot develop without dialogue and dialogue is impossible within a class structure. Where elitism exists, communication is by means of communicate in the form of propaganda that will further support the oppressive society. Art education's failure to accept the importance of popular art is an act, knowingly or unknowingly, of oppression. The content of art is decided by the educator, who fills his students with knowledge of the fine arts.

The inability of art educators to accept factors other than art as instruments for human survival also reflects the banking method of education. Such a limited viewpoint indicates a defensive stance that is typical, in education, of the oppressor and which could never result if dialogue existed between students and teachers.

Any situation in which old ideas become unexaminable also reflects an oppressive condition. Man exists in and with his world and becomes more human through the process of praxis — that is, reflection on his problems and action on his world. There can be no praxis if cultural ideas become unexaminable. In those circumstances, the world becomes static and given and man's only remaining course is to adapt to it. By this process he approaches the level of animal existence, a dehumanized existence in which reflex rather than reflection is the basis for action.

If one totally rejects Lanier's analysis and summary of art education, it is possible also to reject the existence of oppression in the public school system. However, if one accepts the analysis, in total or in part, one must also accept the existence of some degree of oppression. Having acknowledged and accepted the latter fact, one must be further prepared for a number of changes in terms of interests, relationships with students, and approaches to learning.

Up to this point, Freire's methodology has been presented in its original context, that of a highly charged, political, revolutionary movement. Such a viewpoint may be acceptable to the more radical art educators but the political nature of his problem-posing methodology is no doubt of less concern to the majority than are the basic components of his literary method. Successful teaching, whenever it may occur and for whatever purpose, warrants recognition and further consideration by educators. Freire's methods in Brazil were so successful among the people and their newly found critical consciousness became such a threat to those in power that the government "invited" him to leave the country. Since that time, Freire has been welcomed wherever the need for the process of humanization is recognized. We appear to be far away from such pedagogical achievements in art education.

What are the basic components of Freire's methodology and how might art education benefit from them?

Freire (1970, p. 11) describes his pedagogy as an effort to liberate men living in a culture of silence, that is a situation in which they are not encouraged to know and respond to the realities of their world, and not as yet another instrument to dominate them. Its originality lies in putting everyday things to uses that have not occurred to others. The basic elements of his methodology are:

1. Participant observation of educators "tuning in" to the vocabular universe of the people.
2. Their arduous search for generative words at two levels: syllabic richness and a high charge of experiential involvement.
3. A first codification of these words into visual images which stimulate people "submerged" in the culture of silence to "emerge" as conscious makers of their own culture.
4. The decodification of the words by a "culture circle" (participants in the learning process) under the self-effacing stimulus of a co-ordinator who

is no "teacher" in the conventional sense, but who has become an educator-educatee in dialogue with educatees-educators. . . .

5. A creative new codification, this one explicitly critical (of their concrete reality) and aimed at action, wherein those who were formerly illiterate now begin to reject their role as mere objects in nature and social history and undertake to become "subjects" of their own destiny. (Freire, 1973, p. viii)

Some of the descriptive vocabulary, for instance, "tuning in," "experiential involvement," "visual images," and "culture circle," should be sufficient to attract the attention of art educators because of the similarity of current word usage in the field. But, beyond that point, a restatement of Freire's basic methodological elements will serve to show the potential contribution to art education:

1. Participant observation of art educators "tuning in" to the actual interests, activities, and vocabulary of the students.

2. Their arduous search for generative ideas at two levels: aesthetic richness and a strong connection with the real-life experiences of students.

3. A first coding of these generative ideas into visual images which stimulate students to realize the potential impact of art on their lives and also to realize that they are capable of becoming makers of their own culture.

4. The decoding of the visual images in a dialogical relationship between the "teacher," who has now become teacher-student, and the "students" who have now become students-teachers, for the purpose of learning together and teaching each other. The decoding process involves the discussion of, and reflection on, the aesthetic content of the visual image as it relates specifically to their own interests in life.

5. The culmination is the development of some aesthetic action that results in a change in the real world. The resulting change is subjected to further reflection and further action which becomes a continuous process of humanization.

This methodology, applied to art education, deals specifically with Lanier's criticisms. Elitism cannot exist in the presence of true dialogue between teacher-student and students-teachers, and without elitism the class structure is removed.

Dialogue will reveal that art is only one instrument in the process of humanization and that aesthetic experiences are derived from many sources.

Through the process of human praxis, reflection, and action on the world, old ideas will cease to be shibboleths and will be open to examination by everyone, and critical dialogue will no longer be stifled.

The lack of progress in the midst of much activity will be dealt with in the process of conscientization. The development of critical consciousness depends on human praxis which depends in turn on reflection and action

in a continuous, related process of humanization. Progress, the result of continuous related actions, is assured.

The implications of the proposed methodology for Lanier's five faces of art education are clear. The Magicians will disappear in a puff of their own blue smoke under the criticism of human praxis. The Mechanics, as they watch their "objects" becoming "subjects," will report their most significant finding that there really is nothing to measure, after all. The Merchants will simply go out of business as people become more aware of the importance of aesthetic and other experiences in the process of becoming human. The Muckrakers will come into their own, because everyone will become a Muckraker, posing problems, reflecting on them, and taking action to bring about changes in the world. Finally, the Mosaicists' bindings will come undone under the critical examination of individuals for whom art cannot be all things.

To understand why Freire's methodology deals so effectively with Lanier's criticisms, it is necessary to consider the underlying assumptions of Freire and of the five postures.

Art educators appear to hold basic assumptions related more to the content of art than to the nature of man's potential. Freire's interest in reflecting and acting on the world in the process of humanization more readily permits emphasis on the ultimate purpose of education, the development of man's potential. The Muckraker comes closest to Freire's interest, but there appears to be only a responsibility to suggest positive alternatives and no commitment to action.

The five faces view knowledge as something that may be accepted, measured, unified, questioned, or promoted. Once again, with the exception of the Muckraker who "questions," these views of knowledge imply that possession of knowledge is possible. For Freire, knowledge results from dialogue between equals. It is not a possession to be bestowed on others.

The art educators' view of the world varies from being mysterious and unquestionable to being structured and quantifiable, with the Merchants on hand to sell whatever exists. While the Mosaicists recognize diversification in the world, they also strive for integration. Only the Muckraker questions the world in a similar manner to Freire, but the difference between them is that while the Muckraker questions alone, Freire does so through dialogue with others.

Freire sees man as becoming rather than being; man is in a constant process of humanization. For art educators, man *is* already what he does, the way he performs, a multifaceted individual, a beneficiary, or a client. Freire's view seems to open more possibilities for human development than do the more confined views of the art educators.

All of the five faces approach learning with what appears to be a uni-directional bias, in which the teacher is the subject and the student is the object of learning. Narration, evaluation, interpretation, investigation, and indoctrination are all subject-object approaches and they differ from

that of Freire, which is one of co-operation, in which all the participants are the subjects and the world is the object of learning.

Some of the differences in basic assumptions described here are more obvious than others. Individually, they may appear to have little potential for influencing outcomes, but collectively they provide a valuable basis for a new focus for art education in the future.

There is undoubtedly a need for us to be concerned about the future of art education, but the argument here is that those concerns should be directed not toward art content but toward a methodology that will generate new knowledge potentially important in the process of humanization. There is something quite pretentious in assuming that we possess today a clear enough understanding of the needs of the people in the future to arrive at a prescriptive statement about art content. To attempt to impose our beliefs on an unknown, future educational system without any understanding of the needs of the people is as clear-cut an act of Freirean oppression as can be imagined. The greatest contribution that we can hope to make is to endeavor to formulate ways and means that will demonstrate to educational participants of the future the potential importance of art in the process of humanization.

Having discarded four of the five faces of art education, i.e., the Magician, the Mechanic, the Merchant, and the Mosaicist, there remains but one body with one face, that of the Muckraker. Clearly, we are left with something that is already becoming more human. The day is not far off when art educators will step out of the role of *Mancipator*, the oppressor, and join with the students to become *Manumitter*, the liberator.

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Geoffrey S. Hodder is an Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Music Education at the University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia v8s 2y2.