Human Praxis for Art Educators: A Response to Lon Dubinsky

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Dubinsky's "straw-man" criticism of my paper makes a response to him quite difficult. Having stated that the article is based on "a general misreading (misunderstanding?) of Freire," he proceeds to develop his criticism in such a way that I wonder whether he is at all concerned with changes in art education or only with preserving the intellectual integrity of Freire. His own comments clearly indicate a lack of understanding (misreading?) of "Human Praxis" (1980), so much so that I doubt that we will reach any level of mutual understanding through this exchange.

MAIN POINTS

The main points of his criticism or, as I see them, his straw-men will be examined here in terms of form and content.

Straw-man #1. The term "Muckraker" appears to cause Dubinsky some puzzlement. The term is, of course, Lanier's and the form and function of the Muckraker are clearly defined by him. Any confusion caused by this designation is the result of Dubinsky's introduction of his own definition taken out of context. Lanier's Muckraker is not related to "political scandal" or "hard-hitting journalism." My own use of the term, as acknowledged, reflects Lanier's definition.

Straw-man #2. In criticizing my application of Freire's philosophy to art education, Dubinsky employs a variation of Halpin's (1966, pp. 276-277) "clichés as a form of resistance." By simply labelling aspects of the paper as clichés, he apparently feels relieved of the responsibility of showing that such clichés are not appropriate for the particular situation. Halpin concludes: "this trick of rendering an idea impotent by indicating it as a cliché . . . appeals especially to those who pride themselves on being 'intellectual' or 'educated'."

Straw-man #3. My views concerning art education may well be different from those of the establishment — if Dubinsky's purpose is to point this out then I accept it as a compliment not as a criticism. The current art education world of mimeographed outlines and paint-by-numbers can hardly be described as libertarian education under any circumstances. His reasoning, however, leads me to comment further. His statement that my view of the field is "unrealistic" implies that the view

with which he is familiar is "realistic." Elsewhere, he expands on his view with reference to art being "a specialized and established domain," and art education "being a Platonic field which deals with artistic productivity, aesthetic feeling and judgment" and "a constituent and conventional field." These statements together suggest that Dubinsky is not aware of what "is" in art education, only of what he believes it ought to be. I believe that the use of such terminology in describing a "realistic" viewpoint of art education would be clearly labelled elitist and "oppressive" by Freire. It is absurd to view reality as being static. As Freire notes throughout his work, the transformation of concrete reality is an integral part of human praxis.

Straw-man #4. I am puzzled by the apparent confusion caused by the designation Messiah. Having admitted that the designation is his, not mine, Dubinsky states elsewhere that I "extend" Freire as a Messiah (when in fact he does!) and concludes by saying that "such anointment is ultimately counter productive." My designation of Freire the hero is based on the fact that heroes usually emerge as the result of a given, isolated act and that rarely, if ever, is the entire life and philosophy of such a hero subjected to minute scrutiny. I do not care to comment on what constitutes a Messiah. I leave that to those in need of intellectual salvation.

Straw-man #5. Dubinsky makes an important issue of sexist inferences in my paper and clearly states that there are no sexist inferences in Freire's work. I have no quarrel with him regarding his concerns about sexist inferences, particularly when the use is intentional. I am as concerned about equality as he appears to be. I am, however, more concerned that his better understanding of Freire is apparently based on reading that fails to observe that Freire (1973) makes reference to "man," "men," "himself," and "his" to qualify persons more times in the first chapter alone than are worth counting. This use is also, hopefully, not of the intentional variety.

Still keeping in mind the dangers inherent in such expressions, Dubinsky's solution of the use of "s/he" is perhaps not as free of such dangers as he believes. The sequence of "she" and "he" must also be questioned. "A realization of the roles and power relationships historically ascribed to women and men" surely points to the need for a new qualification — lest, at some future time, it be charged that Freire and others have placed women in a position of dominance rather than equality. The dangers of employing the convenience of configuration must not pass unnoticed into common usage.

Straw-man #6. My use of the term "methodology" causes Dubinsky considerable distress, and yet on close examination it is simply a matter of the term used and not the method or approach developed that causes the distress. The approach is clearly Freirean and not scientific. The use of the term "methodology" is justified in the Freirean sense. The language

of art educators includes the term and is widely accepted in the field as being synonymous with method, process, approach, etc. Too often the vocabulary of the intellectual, in the struggle to be precise and accurate, succeeds in bypassing the very people with whom the intellectual ought to communicate — the practitioners. Rightly or wrongly, the word "methodology" is a part of art educators' vocabulary, and as noted in the paper "the process involves participant observation of educators 'tuning-in' to the vocabular universe of the people . . . " (Freire, 1973, p. viii).

As further justification of the use of the term, I refer Dubinsky to Freire, who indicates that "to know the peasants' manner of seeing the world . . . implies a search. This in turn requires a methodology which should be, in my opinion, dialogical, problem-posing and conscientizing" (Freire, 1973, p. 159).

Straw-man #7. The importance of "visual images" is raised as an example of considering the "forms of knowledge and actual content assigned to the field." My reference is questioned and Dubinsky implies that I have not clearly defined the term. Earlier, he notes that I parallel Freire's approach with a process adapted to art education but fails to notice that my use of the term "visual image" also carefully parallels Freire's use of the same term. It was not intended to introduce the term for the purpose of intellectual discussion in the classroom concerning its definition. It was used simply as a part of the description of the process of teaching/learning that occurs. My use of the term is no more complex than that of Freire.

CONCLUSION

Dubinsky appears to miss the whole point of the application of Freire's methods to art education.

It is my intention to provide not several "basic assumptions," but only one, that of *human praxis*, the process of reflection and action.

He raises the question of the forms of knowledge and the actual content assigned to the field and deals with it as if knowledge and content can be dealt with identically in every field. In art education, as Eisner (1978, p. 4) notes, there exists an essential difference. Judgments in other fields, such as arithmetic and spelling, are made using the external criterion of the model answer. The student can add, subtract, or spell correctly or not and the work can be evaluated readily by comparison. In art, no such criterion or model answer exists externally. All judgments are made internally. It is thus not possible to define the form of knowledge and the content of art education without predetermining the production. To do what Dubinsky suggests would reduce art to a form of academic study in which predetermined knowledge is made available to students through the teacher. Dubinsky is at odds with Freire, for such education is oppressive. Such education is what Freire describes as the

"banking system" — the process of depositing knowledge within the empty containers of students.

It may not be enough, as he suggests, to change the pedagogical process, but it is, I suggest, a valuable beginning, particularly when one views the mimeographed outlines and paint-by-numbers images of Dubinsky's "specialized and established domain" of art education. A change of viewpoint can help bring about a change in attitude. My purpose throughout has clearly been that of adapting the Freirean methodology to art education, not of adopting it in its purest form.

Dubinsky's purpose, apparently, is to preserve the words and deeds of his Messiah (not mine), and in doing so his response seems to be more by reflex than reflection.

As noted at the beginning of this response, there is little likelihood of our reaching any kind of mutual understanding in this matter. Perhaps we can agree, however, as we pass each other by, that our differences are not so surprising after all. As Freire (1973) states:

> For as the people emerge into a state of awareness, they discover that the elite regard them with contempt; in reaction, they tend whenever possible to respond aggressively. The elite, in turn, frightened at the threat to the legitimacy of their power, attempt by force or paternalism to silence and domesticate the masses; they try to impede the process of popular emergence. These circumstances exacerbate the prevailing irrational climate, stimulating sectarian positions of various casts. And in a large part the people, emerging but disorganized, illiterate and semi-literate, naive and unprepared, become pawns of that irrationality. The middle class, fearing proletarization and always seeking privileges and upward mobility, view this popular emergence as, at the very least, a threat to their own peace and react with predictable mistrust. (pp. 32-33)

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