EDITORIAL

This issue, guest-edited by past editor Flávia Bastos and distinguished art educator Enid Zimmerman, continues the exploration of creativity begun in the March 2010 issue of Art Education.

Surprise Me!

Flávia and Enid: The National Art Education Convention in Seattle in March 2011 has as its theme Creativity, Innovation, and Imagination in Art Education. These are cited on the NAEA website as 21st-century skills that all students need to be successful, not only those who will work as artists, but also those who will work in all sectors—from scientists to computer program designers to consumers. In a recent NAEA publication, Learning in a Visual Age: The Critical Importance of Visual Arts Education, teaching students to use processes that lead to creative outcomes is highlighted as a major component of high quality instruction in the visual arts. In this report, expert art teachers are recognized as those who, through introducing creative process in the visual arts, enable their students "to identify a problem, gather relevant information, try out solutions, and validate those that are effective." These same skills are described as needed in learning environments in school subjects such as history, science, and mathematics.

Enid: This is the second of two issues of Art Education that focuses on creativity. Concerns about creativity and reconsidering its place in art education were evident in the over 45 articles that were submitted in response to our call for papers for an issue of Art Education devoted to creativity, for which I was guest editor. Flávia Bastos, immediate past editor of Art Education, and I edited this issue about creativity and art education. We are also co-editing a book on this same topic and received 90 abstracts in response to our call for submissions. Obviously, there is an overwhelming interest in this topic and its applicability to the field of visual art education. Current research about creativity indicates scores in creativity measures were rising in the US until 1990 and since then the trajectory has been downward, especially for K-6 students where the decline is most obvious (Kim, cited in Bronson & Merryman, 2010). Recent inquiry demonstrates that around the world other countries are making creativity a national pedagogical priority, while standardized curriculum, rote memorization, and national testing (Plucker, cited in Bronson & Merryman) have predicated against developing creativity, innovation, and imagination as being in the vanguard of our country's educational agenda. Ironically, the arts often are touted as a prominent place where creativity takes place in our nation's schools.

In art education research, when current boundaries of our discipline are being reconfigured, what currently is emphasized are themes such as visual culture, arts-based research, community-based pedagogy, environmental and eco-based pedagogy, and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. These paradigm shifts are highlighted toward a "profoundly critical, historical, political, and self-reflective understanding of visual culture and social responsibility" (Carpenter & Tavin, 2010, p. 329). Although these might be considered paradigms in flux, a walk down the corridors of most elementary schools, and in many cases secondary schools, demonstrates there is a BIG gap between what is espoused in much of current art education research literature and what is actually practiced in art classrooms. Mind that gap, otherwise what is important for quality art education may fall between what is status quo and what is being suggested as expanded boundaries for the field.

I recently was at a state art education organization meeting and found my place at a luncheon table at which each setting was a placemat constructed from a 10" x 12" piece of laminated white watercolor paper on which were colorful designs of plants. I looked over at my neighbors' place settings and thought at first we all had photocopies of the same design. On closer inspection, I noted that different first-grade students in the same art class made all the placemat paintings (right).

On the backside of the paintings was information that explained that all standard procedures were spelled out in detail to assure that there was no deviation from what the teacher expected from the lesson. The title related to a particular garden in the county, state and local standards were listed, and the objective was for students to understand the art element—line. Students were to learn about a variety of lines, follow directed teacher instructions, discuss line in artworks, read about line in art textbooks, and show their knowledge about line by creating a painting using a variety of lines. Students were assessed...
with a rubric that included elements and principles of art, craftsmanship, and originality and creativity (the last two items were not mentioned anywhere else).

Although the students appeared to be expected to follow the teacher as their compositions progressed, it is hopeful to note that all was not lost in terms of creativity, innovation, and imagination in the young students’ reactions to this lesson. Hidden in the replications are small reminders of the inherent creativity that could have been harnessed for more individually inspired paintings by the art teacher, such as the cleverly incorporated caterpillar and snail, heart flower and spider web, and an angelic face of a sun (below). Most of the art teachers at my table responded positively to what one defined as “the children’s adorable artwork.” What can art teachers and art educators do to address the gap between theory and practice and how can this treacherous space be made a place of true creative endeavor so that when students mature they are supported in generating bodies of work that demonstrate creativity, innovation, and imagination?

Flávia: Many art teachers tend to favor bona fide practices and teaching strategies. Many novice and experienced art educators often believe in using methodologies that include discrete and sequential steps that deliver standard instruction, incorporate simple assessment measures, and assure a well-managed classroom. Creativity and its range of manifestations, from pedestrian everyday solutions to extraordinary accomplishments, should be an essential dimension of both art and education. Tharp (2003) proposed that “creativity is a habit” (p. 7) and the best creative work is the result of good work habits. Therefore, it is critical that we engage in discussion of how to infuse classrooms with a more legitimate pedagogy that nurtures and promotes core dimensions of the arts, such as creativity, innovation, and imagination.

As a Brazilian, born and educated until the completion of my undergraduate degree in my home country, I am still mystified by the technical bias of North American education. Perhaps, at the core of a developing country experience, with its drastic disparities and pivotal problems, is a need to keep creativity and imagination alive to cope with, transcend, and transform the conditions of the everyday. Therefore, my own background provides a foundation for some of my views regarding art education and creativity in particular. During my years in school, the curriculum was regulated by general guidelines, leaving opportunities for teachers to design lessons that often made connections to local culture and current events. I attended urban public schools and my teachers took advantage of what was available around us. In art, we had lessons about key concepts—perspective, the human figure, Cubism, hand-built ceramics, Brazilian art—but our artwork was always a personal response to the information received, and often connected to a body of inquiry each student developed through his or her own research and self-expression. I have never seen a demonstration in an art class. We experimented with materials, searched in books or in our school’s library; our work was individual and did not resemble our classmates’ endeavors. Only in the 1990s when I arrived in the United States to attend graduate school, did I witness for the first time an art teacher showing her class a ‘sample’ of the work she expected her students to produce and then walk them through a step-by-step process that set out how to do it. It all felt foreign to me.

As we confuse higher standards with greater regimentation, we compromise the very essence of our discipline. Art is integral to daily life, and as such it is shifting, multidimensional, and not easily contained. Accordingly, our teaching with and about art must reflect the openness and dynamism of the everyday. One of my most passionate and talented students, Pamela Palmerini, is a high school teacher who routinely asks her students to “surprise her” with their work (see Aaron Ector’s work, p. 7). In her syllabus, she invites them to “embrace the unknown,” experimenting beyond conventional boundaries. In doing so, she teaches students simultaneously about the impossibility and undesirability of closed-ended outcomes in art. She encourages them to use what they know and what is being learned in personal ways as she creates a stimulating learning environment where teacher and students learn from one another. She facilitates engagement with issues, problems, and subjectivities and nurtures the practice of creativity, not as an add-on to her program, but as integral to art and the lives of her students.

Enid and Flávia: In this issue of Art Education, all authors in one way or another ask art teachers to be surprised by their students’ creative processes and products as they engage them in art activities in a variety of settings. Seeking to clarify meanings associated with the broad term creativity, Melody Milbrandt and Lanny Milbrandt identify observable processes that have connection to teaching and learning that focus on creativity. Diane Jaquith discusses why intrinsic motivation should be at the forefront of any discussion about creativity and art education as learners engage in artmaking through self-directed learning to find and solve problems of their own choosing. Emma Perkins and Mary Carter use “the wild things” metaphor to describe an instructional model. Choice, Voice, and Challenge (CVC), to promote creativity, and its possible applications. In the Instructional Resource section, Kim Barker explores the work of Oliver Herring, a whimsical artist who explores the world in fanciful and imaginative ways, using technology applications to introduce students to stop-motion video. Through use of Creativity Toolboxes by teachers, groups of learners, and individual students, Michael Hanson and Rebecca Shulman Herz demonstrate how art units and lessons can be thoughtfully structured to foster creativity. Michelle Tillander offers suggestions for art teachers about how to build a creative synthesis among technology tools, teaching strategies, and content that results in
new approaches for engaging art learning that have surprising results. Nicole Gnezda proposes that it is helpful to understand complex neurological and emotional operations that are active during creative processes and how these operations can help art teachers more fully understand what happens inside their students as they engage in processes to create art products.

As a practice, creativity emerges at the very unstable edge between routine and innovation. We need to mind the gap. This requires a destabilizing force of an issue or an idea that generates a response that is uniquely appropriate for that situation. As educators, we often grow accustomed to systematizing what we do. The two issues of Art Education that focus on creativity and the upcoming 2010 NAEA Convention invite us to expand our focus and develop our educational practices so that we expect to be surprised by each student’s innovation, imagination, and creativity.

Flávia Bastos
Enid Zimmerman

Flávia Bastos is Associate Professor of Art Education and Director of Graduate Studies, College of Design, Art, Architecture and Planning, University of Cincinnati. E-mail: flavia.bastos@uc.edu

Enid Zimmerman is Emerita Professor of Art Education and currently Coordinator of Gifted and Talented Programs in the School of Education at Indiana University. E-mail: zimmerm@indiana.edu

REFERENCES


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ENDNOTES
1 The first was Art Education, 63(2), March 2010.
2 Carpenter and Tavin note there are two movements that influenced art education in the last century: creative self-expression and discipline-based art education. They focus their attention on the latter noting that the former has also been a major influence on the field. In this article, the authors have creatively pushed the boundaries of research reporting by presenting their findings in a graphic novel format.