

IMAGES of INFLUENCES

Carmen L. Armstrong
June King McFee Award
Acceptance Speech
1996

The Women's Caucus has been a part of my NAEA art education experience since it was first organized and for all of my years in higher education. Originally, McFee award nominations were made at the annual business meeting for the following year's award. When I was designated as the person to notify the awardee and introduce her at the awards ceremony, I was privileged to introduce Laura Chapman and Eugenia Oole. As with the other awardees, their achievements were impressive. Later, I was nominated two different times by two different persons, and was not the selected awardee. The third time someone nominated me and I didn't receive the award, I was tempted to feel like "always the bridesmaid, but never the bride"; but it was an honor to be suggested and very worthy individuals received the award. The point is that there are many high achieving women. From submission of paintings to shows and blind reviews of journal articles, I became able to grow from success and from rejection. One is not productive to win recognition, but is so out of sincere commitment and professional concern. That makes such recognition as the McFee award surprising and appreciated.

In anticipating some acceptance words, an initial image summarized much of my thoughts. I visualized a solid vertical board fence whose cracks permitted a ray of light to fall on a seed ready to grow. The light is critical, but the seed must seek the light with persistence. In addition, a seed must be nourished by fertile ground. I have many images of personal and professional influences which provided fertile ground to nourish my development as an art educator. The influences, now recalled as fleeting images, provided motivation and models as much as instructions.

Images from family life

Personal notes at a time like this are not only a humble recognition of those close to me, but notes that may suggest the little things that each of us can do for others, that may have unpredictable, but

meaningful consequences for family, students, or friends.

I'll never forget my father playfully playing the violin, or carrying an extended arm full of dishes off the supper table with a jovial show-off grin. I'll never forget his supportive words "Do whatever you want to do, but do what you want to do." He modeled such venturesomeness as he fearlessly originated a dealer-owned wholesale hardware business in the 1940's that now can be recognized from coast to coast by the Do It Center signs at independent hardware and lumber stores. As an eleven year old, I helped organize pages in the first Hardware Wholesalers, Inc. (HWI) catalog. In a turn-around, years later, Dad reviewed my prototype model for the Planning Art Curriculum (PAC) resource (1979) with insightful suggestions for how teachers could more easily access specific information. His suggestion was something between the concepts of key sorting, barcodes, and hypercard ...in the early 1970's!

Thinking was valued in our family life. Evening dinners were lively discussions or verbal sparring...at least between the three oldest of the five children. In balance of this intellectual competitiveness, the drama and playfulness of music surrounded our family life. I listened to opera on the wind-up Victrola, and sang classic chorales with the church school children's choir. Milton Cross' Metropolitan opera presentations were a regular Saturday event as I did my dusting chores. Dad's sense of rhythm in dancing and Mother's ability to follow his whimsical inventions of steps delighted me. Gatherings around the piano with my older brother at the keyboard, Dad innovatively playing the violin, and Mother's melodious singing, inspired the rest of us to join in enthusiastically.

Mother was a quietly strong woman. She carried the major responsibility for raising the children during the years that Dad was traveling to start HWI. At home she was the capable manager...firm, but fair and trusting. She was a definite influence on my interest in art. In the 1920's she handpainted a complete set of china in a tasteful Art Deco-type pattern that I treasure. I was aware at an early age that it had value and had won awards. Mother was also a member of the Women's Club Art group,

and occasionally tried to sketch a face or a tree.

Retained images of incidents, ordinary as they might be at the time, somehow created a climate of acceptance of art as a career. I can remember having no reservations for taking liberties with coloring book pictures where I extended the lines to the edge of the page in order to color more. But probably the most vivid memory is the moment in our kitchen when I casually said that, as runner up, I was awarded the Saturday School Junior High school scholarship to the Ft. Wayne Art Institute from our school because a classmate who won didn't want the scholarship. I was surprised and appreciative of Mother's warm approval of the award (which was based on charcoal drawings copied from our drawing book...art instruction in a parochial school in 1945-1947).

Dad's organization of nuts and bolts and the HWI catalog, reinforced by my mother's organization in the kitchen—her personal collection of kitchen tools, the budget, and weekly tasks—set the stage for efficiency in activities as diverse as organizing my painting palette and intellectual tasks such as teaching, researching, or developing resources to aid teaching and curriculum planning in art.

With that background, I met Nolan, my husband of over forty years! He was one of eight sons. There were no sisters on whom to place expectations for doing dishes and cleaning house. The Navy supported that self-sufficiency. Nolan never questioned my interest in art, nor objected as we visited five art museums on our honeymoon! He has consistently been supportive and our basic values soon led him out of marketing and into economic education, sociology, and psychology of learning. His intellectual capacity and memory continue to impress me and I've often referred to him as my walking encyclopedia...which really spoils me...but it's so convenient! Nolan is my first editor and critic, someone who gives unconditional encouragement, and is totally unselfish.

The compatibility of Nolan and myself extended to raising our two daughters, Becky and Karen, and from a very biased point of view, they turned out great! But since my intent is on how they helped my achievement, let me focus only on a few

images. Our daughters were my guinea pigs in many respects. They were preschoolers when I first went back to graduate school. I tested ideas out at home first: like having an art closet so they could get art materials at will for self-directed activities (McFee, 1961) with a Saturday Children's Art School in the basement of our home in Crawfordsville, Indiana, with looking walks to see the colors of stars, and as my experiential base (along with my past public and private teaching) for testing out all the theory and research I was encountering in graduate school. Karen still remembers walking the path to the garden plot for Indiana University graduate student families, but the image that was influential on me was the time she dove for a curled up leaf along the side of the path exclaiming "Look, Mommy, space!" Space was a concept that had been developed in the related arts class at the lab school. To me it said that transfer can occur because the research showed how difficult it was to demonstrate what we always assumed.

Some influences were negative. I had to tell a kindergarten teacher that my girls used art materials in expressive ways at home and not in order to stay within the lines of tiny workbook images. Her reply was that they needed to do that in first grade. In first grade the teacher argued that someday they would be need to be neat as secretaries. Another image that shaped my resolve to attempt to change the world of art education! came from an art teacher the girls had. On a visit to school, I saw the showcase full of fifth grade crayon drawings of trees covered with multi-colored pastel blossoms. The trees were almost identical. Karen brought her tree home later and asked, "Do you suppose that I got one star instead of two because I put the doll in the crook of the tree?"

Images from professional life

Professional images that created lasting influence were of two kinds: a) shaping and mentoring as a graduate student, and b) reinforcement and support as a professional art educator.

Graduate student images

Mary Rouse and Guy Hubbard were new faculty members at Indiana University when I returned in 1963 to finish my master's. They must receive this award with me. Mary's prompting in critical reviews of research and Guy's chiding me about my problem with words, shaped my direction and exposed

me to research and ideas that broadened the horizons of art education, setting the stage for my future.

Art teachers that achieve must have an undaunting spirits. In 1964, Mary Rouse undertook a 17-hour drive from Bloomington, Indiana to Minneapolis, Minnesota to see that she and three graduate students attended the Western Regional Art Education Association conference. We arrived at 7am only to find our department chair, among the hotel lobby crowd, all in their night clothes. A fire had routed them from their sleep. We graduate students slept on cots in a conference room that reeked of smoke for the duration of the conference; but there I became aware of an encouraging balance in art educators. The highly esteemed professors seriously interacted in sessions with their peers but also relaxed as they partied. I have, from some conference, a memorable image of how serious discussions overlap with the relaxation from seeing Mary Rouse and Elliot Eisner sitting on a bench outside a party room, nose to nose intensely, but respectfully, defending differing positions on some issue. I thought "Yes! This is an exciting atmosphere in which art education can thrive!"

Sometimes, one's negative reaction to comments can influence a decision. When I asked one art educator if he was going to put his recommendation into action, he replied that he was an idea person...that someone else could try to make it work. As a recent art teacher in the public schools, I was slightly angered and, as a result, challenged to assist busy art teachers in putting theory into practice. I felt that too much of a gap existed between general admonitions and recommendations in texts and the daily business of teaching art.

A painting instructor at IU also popped a bubble for me when he insisted that nothing was creative. He meant that if we traced our influences, what we did was merely to synthesize bits already explored by others...a sobering thought for a new, inspired art teacher about to embark on a mission to contribute to a new art education! The major contributions that I have made to art education are just that...syntheses of many ideas from others, yet new in form and intended to be more directly applicable.

I was fortunate to be a grad assistant to many leaders in art education as I worked on my doctorate, including June King McFee, Harlan Hoffa, Charles

Dorn, Fred Mills, and Mary Rouse. Brought up under the influence of Lowenfeld, I had found McFee's 1961 explanation of child art in the Perception-Delineation theory, logical and comprehensive. As her graduate assistant during an intercession at IU, she created an image of the art educator as an approachable human with a warm, but task-oriented and systematic approach to teaching. McFee emphasized the role of perception in conceptualization (1961). I saw her enable student success in solving visual art problems by their involvement with concept-building activities. I mimicked this teaching approach that contributed, along with Woodruff's (1967) task analysis and concept formation model, to description of my own model of an art teacher questioning strategy based on behaviors that characterize the art production process (1986). Later (1993), I tested the effectiveness of that model by coding teacher questions and student responses influenced by Flanders' (1960) interaction analysis, Parson's (1968) structure for analysis of inquiry-facilitating teacher questions, and Jere Brophy's (1976) criterion-referenced observational measurement in the classroom.

Mentors Guy Hubbard and Mary Rouse expected their students to make contributions at NAEA. In addition, they introduced me to two groups, the then invitational, Seminar for Research in Art Education and the MaFia (translated as students and grand students of McFee). These associations were stimulating. I was exposed to the cutting edge of so many important ideas and efforts to improve art education! I felt duty bound and eager to also contribute in some way.

Post-graduate images

The influences of graduate school experiences were lasting and were reinforced by many. After Mary Rouse's untimely death, Guy Hubbard continued to be supportive. He understood my attempts to help put theory into practice. He recommended putting my Planning Art Curriculum (PAC) resource on Hypercard, but by then I was on the way to another "mission"...facilitating students' inductive reasoning in forming concepts needed in their art production as part of work on the stages of inquiry in art production. I had gone to an NAEA session on questioning by Karen Hamblen. Impressed, I stayed to make a comment to her.

Images ...Continued on pg 8

She turned, read my name tag, and exclaimed "Oh! You are Armstrong and Armstrong. I referenced you." I really didn't know if anyone read the article that my husband and I wrote in 1977, but finding that recognition did great things for me. I have a clear image of that first and subsequent meetings with Karen.

As Dean of the Visual and Performing Arts college at NIU, Stanley Madeja was instrumental in my exposure to what became a series of influential experiences with the Getty Center for Education in the Arts. Out of a conference for university personnel came a grant to NIU for the Improvement of Pre-Service Discipline-Based Art Education, a follow-up grant to publish a book describing the development of *An Aesthetics Resource* (1990), further training as an IVAE consultant, and most of all, motivation to modify my own teaching. The change was something I'd groped for based on research, theory, my public school teaching, and a deep-seated feeling that students should know why their involvement in art was important. I gave up some favorite time-consuming projects and deliberately substituted exciting art criticism experiences, aesthetics dialogues, and art historical inquiry activities related to the art production experiences. These changes revealed how I had been short-changing the thinking capacities of my students previously.

About the same time, I was teaching a graduate course in Evaluation in Art Education that leaned heavily on research methodology and my experience in coding live classroom verbal interaction. I had also used Mary Rouse's *Descriptive Scale for Art Products* (1968) which formalized the sorting of art work by criteria that I had done in grading K-6 art. The Getty Center training clarified an expanded content to teach and assess that brought all this experience into focus. A grant from Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to a Naperville, Illinois school district to develop non-traditional instruments in the arts led to a recommendation from a former student in the evaluation class for my involvement. That led to another Illinois Art Education/ISBE project, and I knew that I had better begin to write up some of the work I was developing. Tom Hatfield and the NAEA Board gave me the opportunity and now *Designing Assessment in Art* (1994) is available.

But another kind of influence came out of the Getty experience. I have an image embedded forever of a group of nine art educators, all women, who came to California to be trained as IVAE consultants. The evening of our arrival, we got acquainted over a glass of wine. This small group represented lives that varied so much from each other and from mine! I had just begun my term as president of the Women's Caucus, but had never personally felt the difficulties of which I heard which aroused my focused concern in behalf of women. Our group jelled so well that Harry Broudy named us the "naughty nine" for asking so many probing questions. I thank all of the naughty nine, and the Women's Caucus members I have had the good fortune of meeting, for broadening my view of art education and those who are responsible for it.

One of the naughty nine, Connie Newton, deserves special thanks for supporting my nomination for the McFee award. I appreciate others already mentioned who wrote such complimentary remarks—Tom Hatfield and Guy Hubbard. Debbie Smith-Shank, my friend and colleague at NIU initiated my nomination and former graduate students, Pat Herrman, Sally Hazelton, Kathy Hillyer, Robin Russell, and Marilyn Schnake who wrote or spoke to support my nomination. These former graduate students represent many others whom I must thank for their grit in accepting the challenge to test out theory with their real live students. It takes understanding, courage and dedication for an experienced teacher to leave his/her comfort zone of successful teaching to try something new.

The field of art education needs leadership in the political arena; it needs the researchers and theory builders. Having a positive image of what in the wholesale hardware business is called the "middleman", I chose to not only try to conduct research and build pragmatic theory, but to be that middle person, translating research and theory into forms that are a step closer to the classroom for art teachers. In the end, however, art teachers in the field are the ones that can make art education come to life.

They are the ones who can effect change. May their images, and those who help create them, lead us on to the best world of art education possible!

Thank you.



REFERENCES

- Armstrong, C. (1994). *Designing Assessment in Art*. Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.
- Armstrong, C. (1990). *Description of the Development of an Aesthetics Resource*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University, School of Art
- Armstrong, C. (1986). "Stages of inquiry in producing art: Model, rationale and application to a teacher questioning strategy." *Studies in Art Education*, 28(1), 37-48.
- Armstrong, C. (1979). *Planning Art Curriculum (PAC) Guidelines and levels K to 8*. DeKalb, IL: ABAFA Systems.
- Armstrong, C. & Armstrong, N. (1977). "Art teacher questioning strategy." *Studies in Art Education* 18(3), 53-64.
- Brophy, J.; Evertson, C.; Anderson, L.; Baum, H.; & Crawford, J. (1976). *Criterion-Referenced Observational Measurement in the Classroom*. (Report No. 76-S). Austin, TX: University of Texas at Austin, Research and Development Center for Teacher Education.
- Flanders, N. (1960). *Teacher Influence Pupil Attitudes and Achievement*. U.S. Department HEWDE, Cooperative Research Project #397. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.
- Parsons, T. & Smith, C. (1968). *Guided Self-Analysis System for Professional Development Program III: Teaching for Inquiry*. Berkeley, CA: Professional Development Systems.
- McFee, J. (1961). *Preparation for Art*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.
- Rouse, M. (January, 1968). *The development of a descriptive scale for art products*. *Bulletin of the School of Education*, Indiana University, 44(1).