

Mary J. Rouse Award Acceptance Address

March 21, 1997

By Doug Blandy

I am honored to receive this award from the Women's Caucus. I am grateful to Paul Bolin, Georgia Collins, Rogena Degge, Laurie Hicks, and Liz Hoffman for writing letters in support of my nomination. I am particularly grateful to Kristin Congdon for initiating my nomination for this award. The fact that I can share this evening with my friend and colleague Rogena, winner of the June King McFee award, makes this event that much more memorable for me. I am also mindful of those other distinguished art educators who have received this award. I am privileged to be among them.

The purpose of my remarks this evening will be to share with you the values that I hold to be important and some of the ways that these values affect my research and teaching. Particular attention will be given to some of those people and events that have mentored me along the way.

Preparing these remarks was an interesting exercise in examining my own intellectual life. Novelist and essayist Wallace Stegner (1996) believes that life is best examined by looking at the shadows we cast on others. However, I believe that it is more important to acknowledge the significance of the shadows that are cast on me. Tonight I will give particular attention to describing the influence of the Women's Caucus, and some of its members, on the work that I do.

I.

I teach and do research in the Arts and Administration Program at the University of Oregon. This is a University of which I am very proud to be associated. Those of you who have studied at the University of Oregon, or who have visited its campus, know that it is physically held together with chewing gum and bailing wire. However, despite its funding problems, it is home to one of the most politically progres-

sive student bodies and faculty in the country. *Mother Jones Magazine* routinely lists the University of Oregon as one of the most politically activist campuses in the United States.

I am also privileged to be associated with a program that is distinguished by having had on its faculty Maude Kerns, June King McFee, and Vincent Lanier. My current colleagues are, in many ways, like family to my partner Linda and our children Brendan and Lydia. Over the years each has had a profound influence on my thinking. Linda Ettinger, the Program Head, rarely complains about my head strong nature and has been generous in her advice as she and I respond to the problems associated with having aging parents. Beverly Jones refused to accept my reservations about computer technology and convinced me of the importance of the World Wide Web as a source of community. Jane Maitland-Gholson taught me that it is possible to think non-linearly. Rogena Degge and I share many political points of view, enjoy talking about politics, and share a love of roses. I initially met Rogena while she was at The Ohio State University and because of her encouragement entered doctoral school there. Liz Hoffman is patient with my impatience and continually reminds me of the importance of moderation in all things. My pal Paul Bolin, now at Penn State, offered me friendship the moment I arrived in Eugene as he simultaneously taught me the value of a historical perspective. Loo-Ann Grove is our office coordinator. As a long time Eugene resident she has informed me about the history of the area, regional politics, and what local associations are able to accomplish.

Academic programs are, of course, more than their faculty. Over the ten years that I have been at the University of Oregon, I have been privileged to work with many remarkable undergraduate and graduate colleagues who have allowed me to accompany them on wild and woolly research explorations. From them I have learned about such areas of

study as the history of volunteerism in America, cultural policy in China, the aesthetics of wall art, the relationship of profit to nonprofit endeavors, tattooing and body piercing, and the material culture and music associated with Rockabilly.

Together we form a research and learning community that has allowed me to thrive despite upheavals associated with funding crises - one of which resulted in the closure of the Department of Art Education and the opening of the Program in Arts and Administration. I coordinate the community arts area of concentration within this program of 35 graduate students and 25 community arts undergraduate minors. All of us continue to be committed to the multicultural and public interest orientation that made the Department of Art Education at the University of Oregon unique.

II.

Working in segregated institutions for people with mental retardation in the 1970's convinced me of the importance of promoting non-segregated inclusive educational environments. My studies in Art Education at Ohio University with Bob Borchard and Cliff McCarthy and the The Ohio State University with Ken Marantz, Bob Tauber, Nancy MacGregor, and Barbara Boyer; my teaching in schools, community arts centers, and universities; and my research over the past twenty years has all been attentive to providing art educational experiences in schools and other community-based settings that meet the needs of all students. Research and teaching has also concentrated on the relationships between art, education, gender, community, and place.

My current research continues earlier efforts to define, describe, critique, and analyze the implementation of community arts programs that are participatory, community focused, community based, socially ecological, and culturally democratic. I am examining multiple cases in which community arts organi-

zations are contributing significantly to environmental, social, cultural, and economic well-being. I am particularly interested in cases where indigenous solutions, rather than externally prescribed solutions, to community problems are implemented. I am also attending to definitions of community that consider the intersection of art with computers and telecommunications networks. The development and maintenance of arts oriented interactive web sites that are collaborative, consensual, accommodating, and congruent with other characteristics associated with feminist perspectives are a specific focus.

My research and teaching is political and public interest oriented. I am a strong proponent of the idea that academics can be activists through their research and teaching agenda. I will always be grateful to Ken Marantz for supporting me in this belief. Methods derived from critical theory and cultural studies also support my point of view. The public interest orientation of my research and teaching is directly attributable into my upbringing as well as the international and domestic events that shaped my young adulthood.

My parents, Henry and Lu Blandy, always kept me informed of their opinions regarding local, state, national, and international politics. Early memories include sitting with them and watching gavel to gavel coverage of the Democratic and Republican conventions. Dinner conversation was lively and contentious. Not always good for digestion, but good for my mind. My other was also active in civic associations that addressed child welfare. In high school, I edited and underground newspaper that attempted to bring the Viet Nam war, the student movements on campuses, and the civil rights movement to middle school and high school students living in my very homogenous white middle class bedroom community in central Ohio. This activity was punctuated by riots on the Ohio State University campus and the killings on the Kent State University campus in the spring of 1970. One of my most vivid memories from this time was seeing the Ohio State University ringed by Ohio National Guard tanks and installations.

In undergraduate school, I was active in anti-war activities and embraced a pacifist orientation to conflict that I

hold to this day. It was also while an undergraduate that I became involved with disability rights. I met my life partner Linda Beal while continuing to do this work after graduation. Linda is a social worker and psychotherapist. She is the person who introduced me to the work of Paulo Freire and his pedagogy of the oppressed; a major influence on my approach to community and education. Linda and I have been together twenty-three years.

My involvement in anti-war activities and the disability rights movement convinces me that the pursuit of a democratic state is a project that requires lifelong struggle and is not necessarily tied to political or economic institutions like federal/state/local government, the military, universities, public schools, and the like.

Where I often see the struggle for a democratic society working best are in those diverse informal and formal enclaves in which people are working and acting together for a variety of political, cultural, economic, and educational purposes. In most cases, these enclaves are not established or directly controlled by the state. I learned to appreciate the importance of "civil society" in providing forums for debating the public good. My personal experience of these spaces was validated in my formal education process by reading and investigating research from education and the human services that seemed to confirm that communities with a civically lively and engaged constituency are more likely to successfully identify and solve problems of mutual concern (Putman, 1997). Personal experience and formal research also introduced me to the important role that the arts or community arts organizations can have in fostering civil society. The Row House Project, YaYa, the Green Quilt Project, and the Names Project are examples in this regards.

The United States has been unique in the numbers and health of its civic associations. However, we are now living in a time when civic engagement is on the wane. National elections are characterized by voter apathy. Studies are showing that the numbers of American attending public meetings has dropped by one-third (Putnam, 1995). As the United States approaches the millennium "more American than ever before are in social circumstances that foster

associational involvement (higher education, middle age, and so on), but nevertheless aggregate associational membership appears to be stagnant or declining." (Putnam, 1995)

Despite these disturbing national statistics, those of us who are members of the National Art Education Association are blessed with the strength, compassion, perseverance, dedication, rambunctiousness, and tenacity of the Women's Caucus and its membership. As a civic association the Caucus models reciprocity and civic engagement. Every year it fosters the coordination and communication of discussions associated with important social issues. It allows those of us who are its members to collectively act on matters of mutual concern. It embodies past successes at collaboration that serve as a template for future collaboration by its members. It has supported me in advocating for collaborative endeavors within a system that tends to value the scholar who works alone.

Within the National Art Education Association, the Women's Caucus, through its sponsored conference presentations and programs, provides a "free space" in which people learn to articulate what they believe in, appreciate the power of collective action, and find support for their struggle to make social change. For this reason, democratic action is dependent upon spaces like the Women's Caucus.

It is not insignificant that my first contact with the National Art Education Association was in Columbus, Ohio in 1980. Nancy MacGregor recruited me to take notes during a part of the Caucus' meeting in Columbus to protest the Convention being held in Georgia - a non-ERA state. I consider my participation in that important event to be among the most significant collective political actions of which I have been a part.

Three of my most important, lasting, and dear friendships are with Laurie Hicks, Liz Hoffman, and Kristin Congdon - all Caucus members. I take friendship very seriously and agree with those who know that friendship is as nourishing as food. These are people with whom I have squabbled, laughed, worried, celebrated, and who are mutually respectful of our sometime lunacy. These are also people who believe strongly in activism and with whom at

one time or another I have stood along side of in support of an issue of mutual concern. With each I have collaborated on projects that I believe advances the field's understanding of the importance of an activist research agenda.

Laurie Hicks in one of the most tenacious and irreverent people I know. She is also one of the most caring. In her writing and teaching, she fully articulates for me the importance of teaching students the skills associated with reconstructing their society. She is an inspiration for all of us who are engaged in activist research and teaching. Laurie has also listened intently to me when I have talked about Linda and my concerns about raising a son and daughter in a sexist society. Laurie's insights in this regard have been invaluable to us.

Liz Hoffman is passionate about Oregon's landscape and quality of life. She has worked diligently to communicate to me the experience of this place from a native Oregonian perspective. In doing this she has impressed upon me those cultural, spiritual, political, economic, and physical characteristics associated with "place." One result of our friendship is the 1993 article "Towards and Art Education of Place." Liz is also the first reader of my papers. She once tried to teach me how to knit and we have had several conversations about the quality of stitches sewn by men.

Kristin and I became friends during her first year of teaching at Bowling Green State University. Her writings on folk groups and folk speech have forever changed my thinking. Although we both maintain independent research agendas, we have also been able to collaborate on two anthologies and at least eight book chapters or articles. Writing with Kristin is one of the great pleasures of my life. I am a person who has difficulty with limits. Kristin is unlimited in her thinking. No idea is too absurd, off-beat, unpopular, obscure, or challenging for consideration. This has resulted in articles that I am very proud to be associated with and several road trips to some rather surreal locations. Kristin has also been a great support to my family. When my infant daughter Jessamyn died she was the first of my Bowling Green State University colleagues to call and offer assistance.

My son, Brendan was invited to her class while Linda gave birth to Lydia. Kristin has also helped my family understand and appreciate my obsession with collecting the wierd and the cheap.

III.

I have no doubt that my membership in the Women's Caucus has broadened my sense of self as a life partner, father, friend, activist, art educator and man. Our civic association has made gender visible within the field of art education and the educational venues in which we work. It has helped all of us who are men and members of the National Art Education Association to make our gender visible to us. My participation in Caucus activities encourages me to see gender in a historical context and as a conception constructed as a result of our relationships with ourselves and each other. The Caucus has encouraged me to believe that any discussion of democracy and civic association must consider gender politics. As a profeminist man, the Caucus has given me the strength and a platform from which to stand against inequity and for social justice. The writing and projects of Georgia Collins and Renee Sandell have been particularly important to me in this regard. The Caucus and its members have given me the freedom to confront notions of manhood that stress hierarchy, competition, and domination in favor of a manhood that is cooperative, collaborative, accountable, and responsible.

I am immensely proud to be a member of this Caucus, have great respect and affection for its membership, and am honored to be receiving this award.

Thank you.

References

Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling along: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1), 65-78.

Stegner, W. (1996). *Spectator bird*. New York, NY: Penguin.



CALL FOR SYLLABI

Women, Art and Education Courses



Renee Sandell is soliciting your course syllabi for Women, Art and Education courses, as well as any effective feminist teaching strategies, for all educational levels, along with lists of instructional materials and references. Renee will compile these materials for use by interested Caucus members.

Send two copies of these materials to:

Dr. Renee Sandell

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