

In conclusion, we enthusiastically applaud Dr. Karen Hamblen as recipient of the June King McFee Award. She has laid the groundwork for younger scholars interested in investigating the interrelationships between social/critical consciousness, art and education. She has been uniquely instrumental in opening important opportunities for research and dialogue concerning issues of culture, gender and social responsibility.



Karen Hamblen and Heather Anderson

JUNE KING MCFEE AWARD ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Karen Hamblen

First of all, I wish to thank Dr. Heather Anderson for nominating me for this award and for those who wrote letters of support—Dr. Kris Congdon, Dr. Laurie Hicks, and Harriet Walker. They all have my appreciation. And, again, a special thanks to Heather. Heather has always been supportive and just plainly nice to me and that has meant a great deal. She represents a constancy in caring, civility, professional integrity, and scholarship—characteristics that, as I will suggest, deserve recognition and support in our field.

I've titled my acceptance talk "Eleven-Year-Olds and Lost Voices." I know that the voices part may be a bit trite, but I think it helps describe what happens to the careers of many females—and males—in our profession.

I am very honored to receive this award and have a great deal of respect for all that it represents. Dr. June McFee deals with concerns that need to be addressed within the field of art education on an ongoing basis. Dr. McFee was instrumental in focusing attention on the role of culture and gender in artistic expression and response, and current developments in multiculturalism, ecological aesthetics, feminist studies in art education, etc., owe much to her work. This award also takes on special significance in that I was a student at the University of Oregon when June King McFee was there. I think that she retired two years after I received my doctoral degree. I liked June McFee as a person and always admired

one's interests and actions were validated. She offered a view of art education that had a sense of integrity and purpose. This was my experience as a doctoral student. It is that doctoral student and later a higher educational person and the differences between the two that I want to discuss.

When I learned that I had received this award and would be asked to give a brief response, I thought back to my graduate study days at the University of Oregon—and that is where the eleven-year-old part of my title originates. Carol Gilligan (1992; Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990) has written about preadolescent girls and their rather special characteristics. They are sort of asocial, apolitical, and asexual (a bit) at that age — and, of course, the eleven-year-old as a metaphor of prepolitical action applies to males as well, although my perspective on this is female. Eleven-year-olds tend to act on the basis of their own sense of being rather than stepping back and calculating and manipulating situations. They can be quite ingenuous and sometimes impolite, but they are not knowingly mean; they are generally indifferent rather than manipulative in actions towards others.

In looking back at my graduate studies at the University of Oregon, I realize now that I was very characteristically eleven years old. I went to classes, I enjoyed my studies, I learned a great deal—and I went home. That was it. I really did not talk much with other students, and I was close to totally unaware of what group was in, who knew whom (in the Biblical sense and otherwise), likes and dislikes among people, and so on. I didn't really think about dealing with others in the Department in the sense of figuring out where power and influence resided. And, I didn't care—that is why I classify myself as

eleven years old back then. To give you some sense of how out of the loop I was: Several years after graduation I was asked by someone—and I thought it was a bit of a goofy question—whether I had been a “June Baby.” My response was that, “No, I wasn't born in June.” The whole meaning of “June Baby” had to be explained to me. (June Baby referred to those people who were considered to be June McFee's special students.) I had little idea that there were different power relationships going on—and, to repeat, I wouldn't have much cared at that time or, more correctly, would not have cared to put my efforts into doing so. This, I think, is what eleven-year-olds can offer the field—a sense of possibility, actions that are not always looking for the advantage. I was trying to explain “eleven-year-olds” to someone, and I used the example of the young girl in “Member of the Wedding” by Carson McCullers. Also, Anne Frank's optimistic vision was a bit eleven-year-oldish, and the androgynous Peter Pan is the perennial pre-adult. (Postscript: After my presenting this speech, Dr. Charles Weider suggested that the young girl in the film “River Rat” serves as another example. The list could go on, it seems.)

But, of course, eleven-year-olds do grow up—they learn that not everyone can be trusted, that one is (if female) probably not very good in math, and that politics play as big a role as ability. At one point, I was told by a faculty member never to discuss my work with June McFee because, according to this faculty member (not, I'm sure, according to June herself), June thought that I was making fun of her work. This was goofy, and I knew it, and it served to marginalize me from power in the Department, but it didn't really matter to me. I went on my own way, which I intended upon doing anyway. Although I was certainly influ-

enced by June McFee's ideas, my contact with her was minimal.

So, as you can see, there is a bit of irony involved in my receiving this award. I must admit that I wasn't completely naive in my eleven-year-old days. I never told anyone that I found the graduate program to be a great deal of work but also relatively easy; I never told anyone that I thoroughly enjoyed writing my dissertation and found my doctoral research a sort of intellectual game that intrigued me and was a bit of a hoot. I knew of sexist behaviors and, I suppose, favoritism, but I was relatively impervious to much of it. The first inkling I had that I was not always "within bounds" occurred when I did not attend a potluck reception held at a faculty member's home. When I said to another student that I wasn't really interested in Departmental social events, I was told (prophetically) that this was "not wise."

Eleven-year-olds grow up—or they are forced to do so. The year after I received my doctoral degree, I was hired as a visiting assistant professor for one year. At this point I entered the professional world of higher education. At that time, I learned that I really had not been as invisible and as apolitical as I thought. I learned that I was completely hated by a fair number of people that I had not really paid much attention to as an eleven-year-old. They had undoubtedly always disliked me, but I had not had to notice before. There were alliances, groups—in and out—and so on. I learned that I had a backside and that my actions were not my own but rather were interpreted as appropriate or not appropriate by others. As an eleven-year-old, I was only responsible to myself; now my actions were validated or invalidated, condoned or not condoned, by others. I never really figured out what

was-what, but I could no longer afford to be impervious. I learned that those wonderful naive eleven-year-old actions were completely out of tune—and I remember feeling my mind retreat to the back of my head and hoped that I might be safe back there. This is the type of thing those eleven-year-old girls do when they learn not to talk up in class, to curtail their "creative" impulses, and to essentially "dumb down." I could tell that I had little political etiquette knowledge or skills, and the safest recourse was to venture out intellectually as little as possible. I left the University of Oregon with a folder full of papers that I had written (at least five of them) that I did not submit for publication until later, because I knew better. I knew that if anyone learned that I had a fair number of papers accepted for publication I would really get it in the neck. So, in some sort of distorted way, I did figure out some aspects of the political terrain and what would get me into trouble.

At my subsequent employment in higher education the operative word for women who did almost anything was pushy—again, no eleven-year-olds allowed. I have always wondered what they would have done with someone who really was pushy—big-time. If this little scenario of political awakening only applied to me, the response might be that, "Karen, you just need to get a grip and wake up and smell the political coffee. This is the way any professional work is." But, I don't think that I'm alone in not always being able to navigate dangerous political terrain at university levels or the only one who is appalled by how politicized the field of art education is—or the only one who thinks that our profession loses a great deal when eleven-year-olds have to accept less than their capabilities might allow.

We will probably always have a few eleven-year-olds who enter higher education and who, to some extent, survive or who slip through the system's scrutiny. I see them now and then—but they are not always distinct; they appear and often disappear. Some people in the field retain the enthusiasm and sense of purpose of eleven-year-olds. But all too often they are quickly socialized to play the political games. Several months ago I was asked to provide some committee nominations, and I found that all of the “eleven-year-olds” I suggested had already been deemed to have committed political etiquette faux pas. Maybe none of them cared—and, if so, I hope they can keep that attitude—but I suspect that it will not be their abilities that shape their careers.

I think that we lose some very bright and capable people. Voices get lost, and we (the collective we) socialize and punish. I once wrote an article on political networking in art education and described it as a major shaper of the ideas of the field (Hamblen, 1986). I have personally benefited from political decisions, and I have been damaged by them. I have played a few political games, and I've been kicked about in political games. Political decisions, political ties, and political maneuvering are an art education reality—and, I would add, it is where the nastiness and meanness resides and where distortions occur. Although we deal with wonderful art and fantastic artistic thought and behaviors, this is can be a treacherous field. My recent experience as Editor of Studies in Art Education would suggest this is a Machiavellian world that might be beyond redemption. My attempts to depoliticize just a few aspects of Studies' bylaws and procedures were an absolute waste of time, and it is back to business as usual. I do not even bother nominating

people for any of the editorial and reviewer positions anymore. (Postscript: The recent invited editorial [Arnold, 1995] in Studies constitutes essentially an unpaid-for-advertisement [although paid for by our NAEA membership dues] and is one of the more overt examples of political lagniappe that I've seen in art education. Most political maneuverings occur within a climate of enough shame so that they occur behind the scenes.)

Sometimes the political nature of our field makes me angry, sometimes it is scary, it often disgusts me, and it can be down right creepy. Then again, it seems just plainly farcical and comical in the larger scheme of things. The problem is that it can destroy. Dr. Nancy Johnson often said that she did not have a clue as to the political nature of the field when she entered it. One time she came back from talking with an administrator at LSU, and she was quite shaken. She said that she had probably ruined her chances in that she had just started talking about all her ideas. She was usually very careful not to say anything that was intellectually intimidating. Nancy was so incredibly bright, but much of her voice was lost in her attempt to quell political repercussions and criticisms. Our field does not always treat the eleven-year-old's propensities very kindly.

I've tried to figure out where my prior political indifference and later blunderings originated. I grew up in a setting where an often-stated homily was: “There are so many nice people in the world that you don't have to deal with those that aren't.” This could have been embroidered on a wall sampler. By nice it was meant that most people are kind and considerate and trustworthy, and together all these nice people make for an interesting and relatively safe world. I remember

all these nice people make for an interesting and relatively safe world. I remember talking about this at dinner one time with Nancy Smith—Paul Bolin and Heather Anderson were there, too. Nancy said that this was the most naive thing she had ever heard and that it was impossible to avoid the nasties. I would agree with her and add that this homily was a dysfunctional bit of advice for academic survival. But, I also think that it is the converse of this homily that we should consider really strange: that we cannot trust people, that we have to worry that others are manipulating us, that political clout rules, and that other people are always looking for advantages to put us at a disadvantage. This is what we should find strange and unacceptable.

Eleven-year-olds give us a glimpse of a reality, perhaps naive and ingenuous that, nonetheless, is a time and a place where meanness is not calculated and other people are not manipulated for professional opportunity. And, there are moments when this is reality. June King McFee provided an environment for graduate students that allowed them, if they wished, to be politically naive—and to intellectually fly. For this, I am indebted to her. I hope that all of us would support and be able at times to experience the eleven-year-old's world of possibilities and apolitical voices.

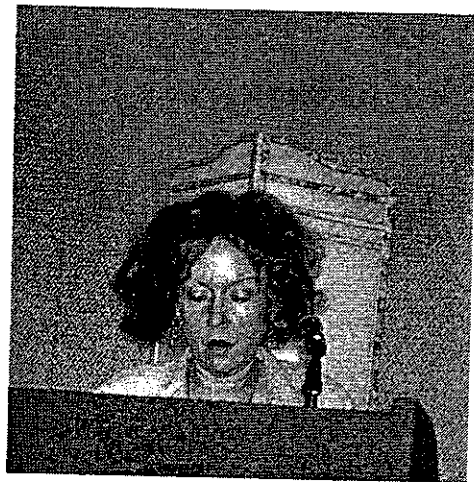
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