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Marilyn Zurmuehlen Working Papers in Art Education
ISSN: 2326-7070 (Print)
ISSN: 2326-7062 (Online)

Volume 2 | Issue 1 (1983) pps. 75-75

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Recommended Citation
Feinstein, Hermine. "Mentor's Introduction." *Marilyn Zurmuehlin Working Papers in Art Education* 2 (1983): 75-75.

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Mentor's Introduction

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This proposed study, in its pilot form, grew out of Ms. Stockslager's interest in metaphor and her participation as a judge in one of my recent studies, "The metaphoric interpretation of paintings: Effects of the clustering strategy and relaxed attention exercises" (Studies in Art Education, in review).

The two studies are similar in two major respects. The theoretical framework is drawn from art, philosophy, and social psychology. Certain components of my study will be used and re-tested, e.g., the effects of the clustering strategy and the reliability of the literal-metaphoric assessment scale. There will be a number of dissimilarities. Although I tested the variable, relaxed attention exercises, it will not be tested in the proposed study. Rather, Ms. Stockslager will design and test a new instrument which will assess the referential adequacy of metaphoric interpretations. Whereas the population in my study was college students who were taught to metaphorically interpret realistic, abstract, and non-objective paintings, the population in her study will be adolescent students who will be taught to metaphorically interpret realistic paintings.

Why adolescents? Why realistic paintings? Typically, the stage of adolescence is marked by the abandonment of metaphoric thought in favor of literal thought. Options for a full range of thinking are curtailed. Realistic paintings usually elicit literal interpretations. The use of realistic paintings as stimuli for metaphoric interpretations may serve to expand the range of thinking in youngsters.

Expanding the range of thinking to include its metaphoric component is a substantive and timely concern. We are now in the midst of a metaphor resurrection. In the past four years there has been a plethora of journal articles and books published on the subject. This interest, I would argue, will not be just a passing fad. Metaphor was once considered by many to be at best an ornamental linguistic device, at worst a deviant of grammer and semantics. Now, philosophers, linguists, psychologists, and those working in the neurosciences are realizing that our conceptual system--the way we think--is fundamentally metaphoric in nature, and that the metaphoric products of that thinking contain truth-bearing content. These ideas were advanced by Susanne Langer and, of course, by others before her. In the 1950's she argued that metaphor is both process and product of thought and that art, as developed product of thought, is metaphor. If we accept these propositions, then we, as art educators, are charged with teaching students how to decipher art metaphorically. This proposed study will attempt to do just that with an adolescent population, using the clustering strategy, and realistic paintings.

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