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

Volume 4 | Issue 1 (1985)

pps. 39-40
DOI: 10.17077/2326-7070.1107

Mentor's Introduction

Judith S. Koroscik

Mentor's Introduction

JUDITH S. KOROSCIK
Ohio State University

Karen Kakas began her doctoral studies by asking several fundamental questions about the processes of teaching and learning in art. She was curious about the nature of learning that results from studio art experiences and the role teachers play in that learning. Moreover, she was interested in the effect students have on each other. She questioned whether peer interaction promotes or inhibits learning, whether it supports or overrides teacher influences. She wanted to know how different teaching methods affect art learning and whether varied forms of teacher intervention are more or less effective given the demands of particular studio activities. Most art educators are aware that drawing from observation imposes far different demands than the production of drawings culled from the imagination. Yet an extensive review of the literature yields little evidence to suggest whether teaching methods effective in fostering learning in one studio activity may be equally effective in promoting success in another.

These are important research problems in the field of art education because they address the complexity of actual art learning situations. Unfortunately, student-teacher interactions are not readily observed nor is the quality of students' drawings easily measured. Karen puzzled over these limitations and combed the literature for reliable methods to borrow from related investigations. She found numerous studies that examined the characteristics of children's drawings from a developmental perspective. Much to her surprise, this body of work failed to offer suitable means for approaching the questions she had formulated. This was puzzling because the merits of developmental research on children's drawings are evident. Why then was such research of little value in outlining methods she might also employ? Afterall, her study was designed to assess art learning through the measurement of children's progress in drawing.

Lee J. Cronbach gave a presidential address to the American Psychological Association in 1957 on a subject related to this very problem. In his talk, Cronbach identified two contrasting streams of inquiry that have evolved within psychological research throughout the last century. One stream employs experimental methods; the other stream is devoted to the use of correlational methods of the kind chiefly used in developmental research. Cronbach calls our attention to the fact that these two disciplines of scientific psychology not only employ different methods, they also ask distinctive questions of nature. Shulman (1981) aptly explains those differences in a more recent look at disciplined inquiry in education.

> Those researchers who are deemed correlationists are interested in studying nature as it is, in studying the natural correlations occuring in nature. They are committed to understanding the functional relationships between variations in one set of events or characteristics and variations in another. . . . They see nature presenting itself for inspection and the role of the scientist that of identifying which of the variations that nature presents are

http://ir.uiowa.edu/mzwp/vol4/iss1/15
DOI: 10.17077/2326-7070.1107

associated with other processes or outcomes.

> In contrast, experimentalists are interested, as Cronbach observes, only in the variation they themselves create. The experimental method is one where scientists change conditions in order to observe the consequences of those changes. They are interested in understanding how nature is put together, not through inspecting nature as it is, but through introducing modifications or changes in nature in order to better understand the consequences of those changes for subsequent states. They argue that only through the systematic study of planned modifications can we distinguish casual relationships from mere chance co-occurences. (pp. 9-10)

Art educators who are unaware of these underlying differences in psychological inquiry will have difficulty comprehending the research literature even when it relates to the subject of their own investigations. As Karen Kakas discovered in her early attempts to integrate developmental research findings into an experimental research scheme, all psychological studies of children's drawings are not the same. How and why they differ is not always readily apparent. Thus, I recommend all doctoral students who seek to be informed readers of the art education literature devote a few hours studying the points Cronbach (1957) and Shulman (1981) raise about the different approaches taken in psychological and other disciplined inquiries. The time spent will no doubt be useful in distinguishing apples from oranges in research findings that might otherwise be directly compared. It might also stimulate thoughts about what art education researchers must consider while piecing together evidence to formulate adequate theories of teaching and learning in art.

REFERENCES

Conbach, L. J. (1957) The two disciplines of scientific psychology. **American Psychologist, 12,** 671-684.

Shulman, L. S. (1981). Disciplines of inquiry in education: An overview. **Educational Researcher, 10** (6), 5-12; 23.

http://ir.uiowa.edu/mzwp/vol4/iss1/15
DOI: 10.17077/2326-7070.1107