

# Toward a Theory of Supervisory Practice for Discipline-Based Art Education

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**TOWARD A THEORY OF SUPERVISORY PRACTICE  
FOR DISCIPLINE-BASED ART EDUCATION**

*Katherine Schwartz*

The purpose of this study is to develop a supervision system that represents the theoretical foundations of discipline-based art education as stated by Greer (1984) and conforms to the guidelines for developing a theory of supervisory practice as stated by Sergiovanni (1984). Discipline-based art education (DBAE) is defined as a theoretical approach to teaching art that is systematic and sequential. It leads to an adult understanding and appreciation of art based on the skills and concepts derived from aesthetics, art criticism, art history, and art production. The supervision of DBAE is consistent with the supervision of other academic subjects.

A theory of supervisory practice is designed to improve instruction and the quality of classroom life through the integration of scientific, artistic, and clinical supervision methods. Scientific methods are used to identify facts and descriptions of instruction by focusing on the observed behaviors of teachers and students.

Artistic methods are used to gain a broader view of instruction by focusing on the expressive character of what teachers and students are doing in the educational setting. Clinical supervision provides structure for interpreting the data derived from scientific and artistic methods.

The case for integrating scientific and artistic methods rests on the notion that through interpretation of facts, meanings are derived and analyzed. Sergiovanni states, "Theories of practice are ultimately concerned with action taken to improve a present situation and in our case the beneficiaries would be teachers and students" (p. 78). Action taken to improve the quality of art instruction is the

ultimate concern of the supervision of discipline-based art education.

The supervisor's role in initiating, implementing, and maintaining DBAE programs in schools is significant. While it is recommended that the role of art specialists be expanded in school districts that adopt DBAE, in many schools supervision for the purpose of improving or managing accountable instruction is the responsibility of principals and classroom teachers. In most cases, the principals and teachers have had little or no formal training in art or art education.

To meet the demands for accountability it is clear that the conceptual base for the supervision of DBAE instruction be directly related to DBAE's theoretical foundations. As noted by Broudy (1972), the demands for accountability are valid only when there is an agreement of a "common body of knowledge and skills to study and teach" (p. 123). The knowledge base derived from the theoretical foundations directs the development of a supervision system to gain a comprehensive view of DBAE art programs.

A supervision system that is based on theoretical foundations and conforms to the guidelines for developing a theory of practice contributes to the implementation of DBAE in four ways:

1. The standards for quality instruction in art are identified for classroom teachers and for principals who are non-art specialists.
2. Specific teaching behaviors that correspond to the theoretical dimensions are identified to insure that the results of the art instruction are well within the control of classroom teachers and are consistent with the theory of DBAE.
3. The observation and analysis of instruction are based on a common body of art knowledge and necessary skills to study and teach art.
4. Based on the information gathered from the observations

and analysis of instruction, concrete and cumulative DBAE training for teachers is generated.

A theoretically based supervision system for DBAE contributes to the maintenance of art programs after they have been implemented by identifying areas of concern for staff development. The system insures that DBAE is guided by theory rather than a specific teaching method; it allows for considerable autonomy in professional teaching styles.

The DBAE Supervision System is derived from an integration of applied research techniques, designed to affect the practice of teaching art in elementary schools. The research design includes three sequential stages: identifying the theoretical dimensions of DBAE, designing the supervision system, and validating the supervision system.

### **Identifying the Theoretical Dimensions**

The purpose of the first stage is to identify the knowledge base for the DBAE Supervision System through a reflective analysis of DBAE's seven distinguishing features as stated by Greer. The knowledge base is presented as a list of theoretical dimensions to guide educational practice.

The dimensions are validated and refined by a review process that includes both an item by item analysis and interviews with a select group of art education scholars. The dimensions are coded to correspond with the distinguishing features of DBAE to provide a comprehensive knowledge base for the supervision system.

### **Designing the Supervision System**

The purpose of the second stage is to combine the knowledge base with the guidelines for developing a theory of practice to form the DBAE Supervision System. Rush (1986) has labeled categories to illustrate the distinctive characteristics of DBAE: content,

curriculum, and context. These categories provide a structure for the DBAE Supervision System.

The system calls for observing the content of instruction, the structure and sequence of the curriculum, and the context for art instruction as a basic subject in general education. To inform and guide the practice of DBAE, the supervision system includes a manual for coding teacher performance and appropriate definitions.

### **Validating the Supervision System**

The purpose of the third stage of the research design is to validate and refine the supervision system. The success of the DBAE Supervision System as a guide to implement and maintain DBAE in schools is dependent upon whether teachers, principals, and supervisors who are in a position to use the system perceive its components to be clear and useful.

The participants at the 1985 Getty Summer Institute for Educators on the Visual Arts were selected for this study because they represent school districts that have chosen to adopt the DBAE approach to teaching art. Normative-survey research methods consisting of questionnaires, checklists, and interviews, were used in gathering data. The responses of five groups of educators were compared: returning principals, classroom teachers, art educators, new principals, and art supervisors. Participants were asked to evaluate and suggest refinements in the instruments used in this study by completing the following sequence of activities:

1. Attend a research orientation session.
2. Review all DBAE Research Study Program materials with the researcher.
3. Complete Part II of a Data Collection Form while observing a video tape of a discipline-based art lesson.
4. Complete a survey by rating each of the behaviors

on the observation form and responding with written comments.

5. Return all handouts and the Data Collection Form to the researcher.

The research sessions were scheduled for one hour on three separate days. The first session was designated for principals who had attended a previous Getty Institute. The remaining participants attended either of the other two sessions.

Each session consisted of three parts. First, during a 15 minute orientation session, the researcher reviewed the DBAE Research Materials with the participants. The materials include an instruction guide and a data collection form for observing DBAE teaching behaviors. The guide includes the purpose and description of the study, guidelines for coding DBAE teaching behaviors, and a participant's survey. The data collection form includes a section to use during a pre-observation session with teachers, and a section for recording content behaviors during a DBAE lesson.

The intent of the second part of the research session was to extend the participant's understanding of the supervision system. While viewing a 20 minute discipline-based art lesson video tape, the participants recorded teaching behaviors as they occurred. The tape, provided by the Getty Institute, was shown in each of the three sessions.

There were several advantages to this simulation experience:

1. Each participant was exposed to the same DBAE model lesson.
2. Research sessions were scheduled to be compatible with the Getty Institute schedule.
3. The simulation provided the researcher with control over the variables and environment to the extent that experiences were reproducible.

After completing the simulation experience the participants were asked

to evaluate the supervision system by responding to a two part survey. Part One of the survey identifies years of experience in teaching, education administration, and art education. It also identifies which participants have training in instructional supervision, have received art degrees, or have art teaching certificates.

Part Two of the survey asks participants to rate 25 DBAE teaching behaviors listed on the observation form in two separate categories: supervision and art content. Participants are also asked to write brief reactions to the supervision system as a tool for collecting and recoding data of discipline-based art education.

The means, standard deviations, and correlational data on the responses of the educator groups will be computed. The written comments will be compiled, coded for identification, and qualitative comparisons will be made between and within groups.

A factor analysis will be completed to determine if the individual teaching behaviors form clusters that represent the three categories: content, curriculum and context. The main purpose of the analysis is to validate the structure of the supervision system.

A supervision system that is based on the theoretical dimensions of DBAE is essential for the successful initiation, implementation, and maintenance of art programs that are discipline-based. The system serves to improve art instruction by establishing an integrative relationship between education theory and education practice.

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