

Mentor's Introduction

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mentor's introduction

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The last quarter of the 20th century has been a period in which new conceptions of knowledge have emerged. During the 1930s and 40s the dominant view of knowledge was defined by a narrow conception of science; to truly know was to have a scientific basis for making testable claims about reality. Perception was believed to provide the stuff that served as the subject matter of claims, but it was the claims, not the subject matter, that really mattered. Perception of the so-called "furniture of the world" could lead to misleading beliefs. It required a scientific method to secure propositions that one could trust.

Richard Siegesmund's work participates in the newer conceptions that have become so attractive to scholars in the past quarter-century. The concept of reasoned perception would, I think, be regarded as an oxymoron 50 years ago. After all, reason was one thing, perception another. And the idea that perception itself could be reasoned was probably more than most philosophers and theoreticians could bear.

Yet today, the idea has very attractive features. As perception becomes increasingly appreciated as a process that is active rather than static, engaged rather than complacent, subtle rather than coarse, mindful rather than mindless, the idea of perception being a process through which reason itself is exercised is no longer strange. Siegesmund regards the practice of art education as concerned, in the main, with advancing the quality of reasoning that goes on in perception.

But Siegesmund's interests do not terminate with an exegesis of the relationship of reason to perception, he is concerned with the ways in which the process can be enhanced. Put more simply, he is interested in the quality of teaching. Ultimately, educational goals, whether in art education or, say, in the field of mathematics education, have no chance of realization outside of the conditions that are provided in classrooms from which students can learn. Teaching is among the most important of these conditions -- though far from the only one. Classroom norms, the substance of the curriculum, the procedures used to evaluate what students have learned also matter. The examination and improvement of classroom conditions, including teaching, is a subject that must receive attention if the aims advanced by art educators such as Richard Siegesmund are to be realized. His agenda seems to me to be not only theoretically important, but practically useful. The marriage between conception and actualization needs critical examination. Richard Siegesmund is pursuing the study of that marriage. Lets all hope that in the end, the marriage is a happy one.