EDITORIAL

Legacies and Lineages

Doug Blandy

Senior Editor

Two events this past spring directed my attention toward lineages and legacies within Art Education. First were the sessions at the Spring 2008 National Art Education Association (NAEA) Convention memorializing June King McFee. In remembering McFee, several generations of former students and colleagues repeatedly expressed the importance of her work and personality to their teaching and scholarly endeavors. The second event was Celebrating Pluralism, a May 30th symposium at The University of British Columbia honoring the career and scholarship of Graeme Chalmers. At least three generations of art educators were represented at the symposium, with earlier generations referenced in some of the papers and informal remarks. All of us who participated in the symposium spoke about how Chalmers and his scholarship informed our own research and in some cases how Chalmers’ legacy has, and is, being transmitted to students both at, and beyond, his home institution. For example, in a conversation I had with Chalmers and Rogena Degge, I discovered that the Art and Society course that I teach at the University of Oregon was first taught by McFee, next by Chalmers who had been her student, followed by Degge, a student in Chalmers’ Art and Society class, followed by me, a student of Degge’s while she and I were both at The Ohio State University.

Lineage projects, formalizing the professional relationships like those that emerged in remembering McFee and at Celebrating Pluralism, have been initiated within some academic disciplines. Consider, for example, the Mathematics Genealogy Project (North Dakota State University Department of Mathematics / American Mathematical Society, 2008). The goal of this web-based project is to document all those who have received an advanced degree in mathematics and the history of advisor / advisee relationships. Mathematicians with a PhD are asked to contribute their name, university in which the degree was earned, title of dissertation, and the name of their advisor to an online database. The American Physical Society (APS) initiated a similar project (Lesieutre, 2008). Members are asked to identify their thesis advisor’s thesis advisor’s as far back as possible. Biologists Bennett and Lowe (2005) depicted the academic genealogy of George A. Bartholomew, an organismal scientist, to his PhD students in the form of a tree containing primary, secondary, tertiary, and quaternary branches.

Klapisch-Zuber (cited in Strocchia, 2001) demonstrated the use of tree forms to illustrate genealogies in ancient Rome and in Europe during the medieval period and Renaissance as a means for depicting the relationship between time and people. Weigel (2008) links such trees with knowledge by tracing genealogical trees to the Biblical story of the “Fall of Man” with the Tree of Knowledge that figures in the story as the first genealogical tree. Her analysis proceeds to

Editor’s Note

Thank you to Elizabeth Hoffman for her comments on an earlier version of this editorial.
describe how this tree has morphed over time as a way to picture both familial and intellectual / philosophical relationships. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) recognize [that] the cultural values implied in the tree form the basis for an “arboreal model” for organizing knowledge in a hierarchical way.

George Lesieutre (2008), a participant in the APS initiative suggests what the value of academic genealogies to fields of study. Lesieutre, a professor of aerospace engineering at The Pennsylvania State University, posts his academic heritage online in the belief that an academic lineage represents the passing down of theoretical interests, methodological training, personal traits, and other features that shape a researcher” (p. 1).

Lesieutre’s (2008) orientation to academic genealogies is not about pedigree and hierarchy. It is more about exposing the social, cultural, and political contexts that shape scholars and scholarship. Such exposition allows for a critique and analysis of what is exposed. In this way scholars, and the fields of study they are associated with, can undertake a rigorous self-examination of what has shaped and is shaping them as well as what is, and is not, recognized as knowledge. Patterns of inclusion and exclusion can be noted. Conscious decisions promoting change in the future can be considered and applied.

Lesieutre’s orientation resonates with me in that it encourages an approach broader than the arboreal. The wisdom of Lesieutre’s approach was reinforced when I contacted Ken Marantz, my PhD advisor at The Ohio State University, to get a sense of my own academic heritage. While Marantz did reply with the name of a former sculpture professor, he placed a greater emphasis on the writings of Ernst Gombrich, Arnold Hauser, John Dewey, John Berger, Manuel Barkan, and Ron McGregor. Marantz also mentioned fields of study such as English, Philosophy, Economics, Sociology, and Anthropology (personal communication, June 23-24, 2008).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) assist in thinking about how to visualize an orientation that accentuates the multiple sources that shape scholars and scholarship. The rhizome consisting of subterranean networks of roots and shoots is what they posit. Duncum (2001) used Deleuze and Guattari’s reference to the rhizome, with reference also to Wilson (2000), in considering a definition of visual culture. Duncum’s counsel to “look for something that is useful rather than something that is neat” (p. 104) has relevance to constructing academic genealogies as well. A rhizomatic model permits scholars to experience their fields from a contextual point of view. In this view our academic genealogies would be fluid, cyclical, permeable, transformative, unpredictable, and anti-authoritarian.

Based upon the few historically oriented manuscripts that I receive as editor of Studies in Art Education, I could assume that art educators’ predilection is to focus on the problems and challenges of today without fully considering their antecedents or the larger history of the field. As a field, we have yet to produce a body of work that adequately explores, documents, or critiques our genealogy from the perspective of either the arboreal or rhizomatic. However, my experience during the memorials for McFee and at Celebrating Pluralism lead me to believe that while the field of Art Education has not yet conceptualized and implemented formal genealogical projects, members of the field do have an enduring appreciation, affection, and critical orientation to the myriad and
complex networks of relationships that define who we are as individuals and as a collective. Our task is now to act on this as basis for deepening our historical knowledge toward more fully understanding the genesis and evolution of the field and the scholars who have shaped and are shaping it.

References


