

# THE CHALKBOARD

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## SPECIAL ISSUE ON ART AND TEACHING: FACULTY MEMBERS SHARE THEIR PERSPECTIVES ON AESTHETIC EDUCATION

### Feature Articles Contributed By:

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### *Greetings from the Dean*

**Deborah Shanley,  
Dean, School of Education**

**B**rooklyn College's School of Education is proud of its partnerships with local school districts and our city's cultural institutions that strive to build a continuum of quality arts programs. This edition of The Chalkboard will introduce you to a range of best practices in fine arts, visual and performing arts in teacher education.. Through shared dialogues and rich partnership efforts, we hope to ensure that every student experiences the power and beauty of the arts along with the joy, creativity, and intellectual stimulation that standards-based arts education programs can provide.

**A**s educators we need to develop additional ways to tap the tremendous potential for creativity that exists in students. The School of Education has been working over the past seven years to integrate art education into all phases of the curriculum, forming collaborative alliances with arts organizations to bring curriculum content and performance into the process of teacher preparation. Through these collaborations we have come to realize the profound importance of art in the lives of students and teachers.

**I**n this issue, faculty share some of their insights and experiences in esthetic education. In many cases, it is the students who provide artistic surprises as they give palpable form their experience. With the tools acquired in their preparatory years here, we are confident that they will blossom into caring and challenging teachers who will bring out the best in their students.

## ***Scenes from an Early Childhood Classroom: Research in Literacy and the Arts in Early Education***

Carol Korn, associate professor of education;  
Faculty director, Carleton Washburne Early Childhood Center

**A**t the Early Childhood Center, the lab school of the School of Education at Brooklyn College, the arts form a core component of the curriculum. The three- and four-year-old children enrolled at the center enjoy ready access to paints, crayons, markers, pencils, clay, and assorted collage materials. The enthusiasm with which they spontaneously give creative expression to the contents of their minds through art, play, movement and language is remarkable. We thought about how we might connect their early experiences in, and affinity for, the arts to the idea of the arts as human activity--an experiential world shared by adults and children, rather than a world inhabited solely by children. How could we strengthen the connections between the arts and early childhood curricula, especially in the area of literacy, to create a powerful arena for both personal expression and for learning about and being connected to diverse human enterprises and experiences?

**O**ut of these questions arose Language, Literacy, and the Arts in Early Education, an action research project currently in its third year at the Early Childhood Center. This research project, which is partially funded by the City University of New York's Faculty Research Award Program as well as by joint funding by the Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education, explores how engagement with the arts can facilitate the development of young children's communicative and expressive abilities. We invited the Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education to join us in investigating how young children create art and respond to works of art, how the arts can be connected to their daily lives in school, and how early childhood programs may successfully develop collaborative relationships with local cultural and arts institutions.

**E**arly Childhood Center teachers work with Lincoln Center Institute teaching artists in the visual arts, music, dance, and theater to identify works of art representative of diverse cultural backgrounds that will provide a jumping-off point for children's expressiveness and for learning across a variety of cognitive domains. The project also explores the process of developing a collaborative relationship between an early childhood center and a cultural and arts institution, two organizations with differing viewpoints, frames of reference, and often, ways of working.

We invite interested faculty to join us in working on and extending the center's research agenda. For more information, visit our web site: <http://depthome.brooklyn.cuny.edu/schooled/ecc/ecc-index>

## ***Reflections on the Arts in an Interdisciplinary Context***

**Phyllis Gold Gluck**  
**Professor of education**

**A**dvocates for multidisciplinary and integrated studies believe that students do not see contexts and connections among the disciplines or in their own lives; that subjects are isolated and significant knowledge often falls between the spaces of traditional disciplines. As our students understand how learning is interrelated, they grow both personally and professionally bringing new sensibilities, critical skills and teaching strategies into their classrooms.

It is through the arts that the heritage of a people is transmitted. When examining how levels of structure, form and meaning interact as well as the embedded signs, symbols and metaphors, the diversity and commonalities of cultures is illuminated. Through the languages of art, meanings are transformed, retained and shared. Experiences in and with the arts enable us to create, perform, interpret and improvise, and we can see, hear, move and feel with greater sensitivity and purpose.



Authentic themes that disclose fundamental patterns and valid correlations are essential for linking the humanities, the social sciences, mathematics, the sciences, technology and the media. Our secondary students collaborate in multidisciplinary teams, they examine their own disciplines through the lenses of other subjects, and they create projects choosing the art forms and materials that best express their own ideas and feelings. Themes explored in class include:

#### The Idea of the Modern:

The movements and "-isms" that challenged expectations, extended the frontiers of the arts, changed our world and also shaped education.

#### The Search for Utopia:

Imagining the ideal and the unimaginable unleashed; including manifestoes, pageants, rallies, anthems, revolutionary posters and films, urban planning, communes and depictions of paradise.

#### Sacred Precincts:

We shape our places and they in turn shape us. All cultures build both dwelling spaces and ceremonial spaces, from the open to the closed, from the communal and public to the familial and the private. We examine special precincts dedicated to memory, commemoration, celebration, sanctuary, worship and leisure.

Ironically, while the arts are treated marginally in our schools, those regimes that control, censor and destroy works of art fully recognize the power of the arts.

## **Aesthetic Education and Teacher Education**

**Karel Rose**  
**Professor of education**

When prospective teachers dance their names, sing scat, discover Mondrian in their own line drawings, change Orpheus into guitar playing hippie, or convert an eggplant into a vase, they are doing transformative work. Teaching is complex because, among other demands, it requires these improvisations and translations from one realm of knowledge into the space and time constraints of a classroom.

The collaboration with the Lincoln Center Institute has both dignified and facilitated this work and highlighted the aesthetic dimension of teaching. For too long, art encounters have been locked into the false dichotomy of either art for its own sake or art as a means to an end. The work of Elliot Eisner and Harry Broudy along with my own teaching experiences have convinced me that it is not an either/or situation. We can enjoy art purely for itself but we can also view it as a rigorous opportunity for reflection and intellectual growth. A painting, a symphony, a poem, or a ballet may be the pathway for thinking about social issues, cultural differences, personal concerns, artistic forms or the creative process itself. In my classes, aesthetic experiences have served a curriculum

agenda that has literacy as its centerpiece. As students reconstruct meanings, develop thinking in different symbol systems, activate prior knowledge, and organize experiences as narrative, they are shaping their language understandings. Thoughtful engagements with the arts can overcome the damaging notion that arts education is frivolous and simply an add-on to the “real” curriculum.

**R**esponding to student interest, I established a Guild for Aesthetic Education to provide a forum for students interested in a deeper exploration of the role of the arts in education. At Guild meetings, students meet with faculty from the School of Education, liberal arts departments, and teaching artists from the Lincoln Center Institute to reflect on ways in which the arts may be translated into school settings. Exercises, discussions and hands-on activities are designed to develop aesthetic sensitivity and critical thinking abilities. Guild members are kept informed of art happenings throughout the metropolitan area. In the past, only students from second-level courses and higher were invited to participate. However, this semester all Education students were invited to attend.

**G**uild students have participated as interns at Lincoln Center Institute and attended special events that are not always available to all students. In March, two students from the guild attended an arts advocacy conference in Washington, D. C. which was financed by Dean Shanley and the Office of the Dean for Student life through a Barnes & Noble grant. They then shared their findings at a guild meeting and with education classes. Students have also made presentations at meetings of the Center for Educational Change.

**S**tudents have expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to engage with faculty and teaching artists in this informal setting. Deep relationships have developed and faculty have served as mentors and friends. Students have pursued honors projects in the arts and many have received recommendations when applying for positions in schools where the arts are a priority. Brooklyn College, located in a cultural and artistic capital of the world and buttressed by an education faculty committed to aesthetic knowing, is in a unique position to influence the direction of teacher education at this critical time.

## **The Day of the Poet**

**Jennifer McCormick**  
**Assistant professor of education**

**T**he annual Day of the Poet brings public, private, and parochial high-school students together to participate in a series of readings by professional poets and to engage in intensive poetry-writing workshops led by poets and teachers. This year 140 students from nearly thirty schools throughout Brooklyn gathered at Brooklyn College to hear Sapphire, author of *Push*; Dennis Nurkse, poet laureate of Brooklyn; and Robert Hershon, author of *The German Lunatic*.

**T**he event was conceived by Professor Peter Taubman of the School of Education and has been supported by the school in conjunction with the Ethyl R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities. In addition, the Wolfe Institute and the Brooklyn Borough President's Office have funded the annual publication of poetry journals containing the work of participating students and teachers.

**D**ay of the Poet is a highly anticipated event for Brooklyn teens. One student from Erasmus High School participated in last year's event and pleaded with his teacher until he was allowed to return this year. "I worked for this," he said, "I deserve to be here."

**T**he New York Times, The Daily News and National Public Radio have covered Day of the Poet over the past two years. For some schools, this has meant that students received positive attention from the press for the first time.

The following schools have participated in Day of the Poet since its inception in 1996: Bishop Ford High School, Abraham Lincoln High School, Bishop Loughlin High School, Brooklyn College Academy, Brooklyn International High School, Brooklyn Studio School, Brooklyn Technology Business and Technology, Erasmus Hall, Bushwick High School, Bushwick Outreach Center, Canarsie High School, Clara Barton High School, Cobble Hill High School, EBC-Bushwick, EBC-East New York, El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, Fontbonne Hall Academy, Fort Hamilton High School, George Westinghouse High School, Grady High School, High School for Redirection, Lafayette High School, Midwood High School, Nazareth High School, New Utrecht High School, Pacific High School, Packer Collegiate Institute, Paul Robeson High School, Poly Prep, St Edmund Prep, South Shore High School, Teen Aid, Thomas Jefferson High School, Van Arsdale High School, W. H. Maxwell Vocational High School, Yeshivah of Flatbush

### ***Preparing Teachers for Learning In and Through the Arts***

**Linda Louis, assistant professor of education**

Education students are entering the teaching profession at a time when the arts are being strengthened in New York City public schools. Brooklyn College is preparing them well with courses like EDUC 43, Teaching the Creative Arts, which introduces students to the unique features of artistic learning and helps them become more confident and skilled at planning arts activities that support and challenge children. In this course the visual arts, music, dance, and drama are studied from two perspectives. First, students focus on learning in the arts. Class discussions, readings, and guided studio experiences, help students reflect on how the arts function within the culture and their own lives. Later, in their field placements, they concentrate on learning through the arts as they design meaningful integrated arts activities that enable children to demonstrate the growing complexity of their ideas and feelings across the curriculum.

A number of students have become so excited about artistic ways of knowing and learning that they have extended their field experiences beyond the course. Some students teach art classes in the after-school program of the Early Childhood Center, serving as peer mentors to other students enrolled in EDUC 43. Others assist with clay classes for high school sophomores as part of our collaboration with the Boston College Academy. Former students are teaching after-school interdisciplinary arts classes in local Brooklyn schools and are assisting in the professional development workshops we offer to the faculty and community administrators.

This clay figure is a good example of how learning in the arts prepares students for learning through the arts. As Jean Valery, a student in EDUC 43, was exploring the properties of clay, a shape reminded him of how his body moves while practicing tai chi. This association between the clay's flexibility and palpability and features of his experience, such as a leg suspended in mid-air, provided him with the means to capture the movement authentically.



Like most students, Valery expected that EDUC 43 would teach him how to use materials to make things. Instead, he learned that sometimes the material itself informs the idea. He also expected that art projects would make learning in other subjects more fun for children. He discovered that the reason the visual arts are particularly suited to interdisciplinary work with children is that they involve the creation of personal meaning. Subject area content becomes more relevant, memorable, and meaningful to children when it is connected to their real-life experience. These two discoveries about artistic thinking will ultimately help Valery-and other EDUC 43 students-- to create

an arts-rich classroom in which children can be active constructors of their own knowledge.

## Brooklyn College Theater and Education Initiative

**Donna Linderman, assistant professor of education and theater**

The Brooklyn College Theater and Education Initiative (BCTEI), is a project of the Department of Theater's M.F.A. program in Dramaturgy developed from a collaboration between the Department of Theater and the School of Education. It is committed to the expansion of theater in classroom settings, training teaching artists and classroom teachers, and providing access to quality theater events for New York City high school students and their teachers. The initiative provides an opportunity to deepen dialogue between BCTEI and partnership schools through practical theater work and to discuss ways to integrate theater into the classroom with a focus on the new New York State learning standards.

BCTEI has established partnerships with eight area high schools, including a group of College Now high schools. Together they stage performances and provide support materials to eighteen public and private schools, serving more than two thousand students and their teachers.

The Department of Theater offers schooltime matinees of its mainstage productions at Brooklyn College's Gershwin Theater. The spring 2001 program includes Neil Simon's Brighton Beach Memoirs and the M.F.A. Thesis production of James Engelhardt's Slave Trade. Graduate students from Brooklyn College's theater program serve as BCTEI teaching artists, -conducting pre- and post-show workshops at partnership schools. They work closely with classroom teachers to structure theater activities that will expand students' understanding of matinee productions. Every effort is made during these sessions to connect workshop activities to classroom curriculum

Students also have the chance to meet Brooklyn College actors, directors, and designers in a post-show discussion series, "Talkback," which provides a forum for questions and comments about the production they have just seen. To encourage student audiences to share the theater experience with their families, BCTEI provides discounted vouchers valid for the 2000-01 season.

BCTEI has been actively supporting student productions from participating schools. In February a group of Bushwick High School College Now students performed their contemporary, bilingual adaptation of Romeo and Juliet--R'omeo and Giulietta to an audience of Brooklyn College students, Department of Theater and School of Education faculty, and guests from the CUNY Office of Academic Advisement and the New York City Board of Education Chancellor's office.

Upcoming BCTEI activities include two on-campus Saturday theater workshops led by Brooklyn College faculty and production artists for students and their classroom teachers: "Making It Look Good," introduces the production design process, and "Making It Real," which focuses on how to approach text as an actor. Workshops will culminate in visits to technical rehearsals and matinees at the college.

### *The Chalkboard*

A newsletter of the School of Education

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