

National Art Education Association

Styles of Historical Investigation

Author(s): Mary Erickson

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Winter, 1985), pp. 121-124

Published by: [National Art Education Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1320568>

Accessed: 15/06/2012 01:19

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



National Art Education Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Studies in Art Education*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Styles of Historical Investigation

Mary Erickson

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

This paper is an analysis of historical inquiry. Four styles of historical investigation are identified: realistic, formal, expressive, and pragmatic. Each style is considered for the philosophical assumptions of the historian, the methods employed, criteria for judgment, and examples of the style in the literature of art education. Some conclusions are reached regarding contributions that history can make to the field of art education.

For years I have enjoyed history for its own sake, occasionally attempting a scholarly research project and always fascinated by how historians have accounted for our past. For me an historian might be an art historian writing about her findings, an antique dealer waxing eloquent about changing dinnerware styles, my colleagues explaining our present situation at Kutztown University as the inevitable consequence of President de Francesco's reign, or a student explaining to his out-of-touch professor the significance of Peter Townshend's work in modern rock music. Somewhere in all these examples is a bit of history that I enjoy contemplating for the sake of the contemplation. My appreciation of history is aesthetic, and so is my approach to the present task.

I shall attempt to shed some light on the relationship between philosophy of history and method of history by looking at four styles of history: realistic, formal, expressive, and pragmatic. For each style I shall consider the philosophical position of the historian, the methods employed, criteria for judgment, and examples of the style in the literature of art education.

Realistic History

The realistic historian believes that history exists outside the historian's attempt to reconstruct it. Ranke said it was this way in the latter part of the 18th century:

To history has been assigned the office of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of the future ages. To such high offices this work does not aspire; it wants only to show what actually happened (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*). (Ranke, 1972, p. 57)

There are philosophers of history, among

Mary Erickson is Professor of Art Education.

An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the National Art Education Association, Detroit, March 1983.

them E. H. Carr, who hold that history only exists because historians make it known to us and that it is absurd and illogical to believe that historical events exist on their own. A realistic historian would reply with Tuchman: "I . . . declare myself a firm believer in the 'preposterous fallacy' of historical facts existing independently of the historian" (1982, p. 23).

It is the realistic historian's concern for doing justice to what actually happened that dominates his or her investigation. Let me quote Tuchman once more: "If the historian will submit himself *to* his material instead of trying to impose himself *on* his material, then the material will ultimately speak to him and supply the answers" (1982, p. 23).

How does a realistic historian operate? Not by predetermined methods but by those means that suggest themselves as facts are uncovered, much as the police detective of fictional fame moves from clue to clue, each new discovery suggesting new questions for which methods of further investigation are chosen. A realistic historian must have an arsenal of qualities and skills to call upon as the investigation moves ahead. Not the least of these skills Collingwood (1956) labelled *historical imagination*, that is, the ability to put oneself into the situation of a person in the past in order to rethink that person's thoughts. To do so one must be able to empathize and one must be immersed in details of that earlier time. The realistic historian perceives circumstances of the past, for the most part, as particular events, unique, unlike any other. Perhaps this is what Tuchman prized as she wrote: "Nothing can compare with the fascination of examining material in the very paper and ink of original issue" (1982, p. 19).

Realistic history like any other history must be factually accurate. It must faithfully recreate the past as it actually was. In 1846

Michelet (1972) wrote that the aim of history was resurrection. Realistic history, like realistic painting, can be judged on the basis of how well it brings its subject to life.

Two remarkably different realistic historical articles appear in the November, 1982, issue of *Art Education*. Saunders (1982) seems motivated to correct inaccurate notions about the teachings of Lowenfeld. He wants to "dispel further misinterpretations" (p. 28). His concern for doing justice to the past, as it was, is evident as he writes that a current belief about Lowenfeld's pronouncements "was the farthest thing from what Lowenfeld meant" (p. 28). Saunders proceeds to restate Lowenfeld's beliefs, supporting them with detailed instances of Lowenfeld's words and actions in particular situations. Saunders's "resurrection" of Lowenfeld is so complete that he moves back and forth between present tense and past tense through much of the article. For example, Saunders writes "always Lowenfeld has the child . . ." (p. 30) and "the Lowenfeld motivation usually begins . . ." (p. 31).

On quite another track Smith (1982), too, wants to set the record straight on Lowenfeld. Smith is concerned that we may not comprehend accurately Lowenfeld's influence unless we understand how his words were delivered and received within the context of his Germanic speech patterns. Smith supports his conclusions with detailed analyses of Lowenfeld's sentence structure and of contemporary accounts of the impact of the words. Through careful attention to detail Smith, like Saunders, brings to life Lowenfeld's pronouncements, albeit suggesting a very different conclusion.

Formal History

Formal historians are concerned with the order and structure that they can create out of the events of the past. Formal historians hold that historical phenomena can be explained in just the way science explains events, that is, by reference to appropriate laws or generalizations. Teggart (1962) proposed that history is not a distinct discipline at all but simply a branch of science that he would term the science of social change. For scientific historians the difference between a scientist's prediction and an historian's explanation is only the time of occurrence of the event in question. In order to see past events in relation to laws the formal historian must perceive them in their uniformity and regularity rather

than in their particularity. Similarities for the most part rather than differences among events are noted.

Formal historians must view long-term changes or the "*longue durée*", as the French historian Braudel (1980, p. 31) puts it, in order to see the overall structure of history. Another French historian writes:

A fact is no longer an event selected because it marks a high spot in a history whose meaning is predetermined, but a phenomenon chosen and sometimes constructed by reason of the recurrence which makes it comparable with others in terms of some unit of time. (Furet, 1972, p. 49)

The computer has been a great boon to the formalist historian enabling orderly analysis of a host of event units and time units. Areas of data heretofore untapped by historians are being considered by the quantification methods of the formal historian. Events, which if studied independently are too insignificant to warrant attention, can become significant when categorized with other similar events within a statistical analysis. Definition of categories is a major task of the formal historian. Formal histories must meet social science standards in their validity, generalizability, power of prediction, and replicability.

White's (1977) study entitled "An Historical Review of Doctoral Program Growth and Dissertation Research in Art Education, 1893-1974" structures past doctoral study by translating many individual events into quantifiable units that can be analyzed chronologically and demographically. He is confident enough in the structure he has developed to predict growth trends in doctoral studies in the future. Peregallo's (1978) study of art course offerings from 1915-1975 likewise concludes with predictions of growth in various areas of course offerings in college art departments.

Michael's (1977) study of leadership roles of women in art education exemplifies the definition task of the formal historian. In order to organize hundreds of bits of information about women in art education, Michael identifies standardized categories of leadership. A Natalie Cole, a June King McFee, or a Laura Chapman is shown to be a leader, not as indicated by her unique contribution, but rather as she increases the tally of women in defined leadership categories: for example, chairpersons or heads of college or university art education programs, or presidents of state art education associations.

Expressive History

The expressive historian is concerned with making an individual statement about the past. For the expressive historian there are many different accurate histories about the same past. The famous American historian Turner wrote:

Objective history applies to the events themselves; subjective history is man's conception of these events. "The whole mode and manner of looking at things alters with every age," but this does not mean that the real events of a given age change; it means that our comprehension of these facts change.

History, both objective and subjective, is ever *becoming*, never completed. (1972, p. 200)

Acknowledging a significant role for subjectivity in historical investigation distinguishes expressive histories from other types. Expressive history according to the 19th century historian Macauley should be judged on much the same grounds as art. "No picture, then, and no history, can present us with the whole truth; but those are the best pictures and the best histories which exhibit such parts of the truth as most nearly produce the effect of the whole" (Macauley, 1972, p. 76).

Madenfort (1982) provides us with an example of expressive history of art education in "Lowenfeld, Myself and the Tragic Dream," for which Madenfort is both witness and historian. Madenfort clearly has a statement to make about Lowenfeld's impact on art education, namely that Lowenfeld came close to addressing the important issue of the liberation of our spontaneous expression of individuality; but because he confused individuality with ego he "only perpetuated the lie" (p. 24). To support this contention Madenfort recounts in subjective detail his experience of Lowenfeld's teaching, creating a picture of the effect of Lowenfeld on his students.

Pragmatic History

The pragmatic historian is concerned with issues and problems of the present. Aron put it this way:

History is the handmaiden of life as long as it provides examples, judges the past and puts the present in its proper place in the historical process. History is a dialogue between the past and present in which the present takes and keeps the initiative. (1959, p. 156)

Thus the issues chosen for investigation by

the pragmatic historian are those that are relevant to present-day problems. The pragmatic historian's work is judged by its utility in illuminating present issues. Pragmatic histories often conclude with prescriptions for solving present problems.

Efland explicitly declares his pragmatic intentions in "Art Education During the Great Depression" (1983). "As current economic woes beset us in the eighties, the story of how our professional forbears coped with the exigencies of their day might yield an important lesson or two from which we can learn for the present" (p. 39).

Youngblood (1982) in "Lowenfeld's Unremitting Legacy" begins by identifying a present problem, looks at the influence of Lowenfeld for perspective on the problem, and concludes with specific recommendations aimed at correcting the situation. Stankiewicz (1982) in a recent issue of *Studies* explicitly sets out to provide perspective on present attitudes towards women and art by examining the roots of those attitudes in the 19th century. Alexander (1981), concerned with present neglect of gifted and talented art education, traces educational thought in this area from 1924 to 1972 and concludes with a plea for art educators to turn their efforts in the direction of curriculum development for the gifted.

Conclusions

Styles of historical investigation like styles in art are not usually exclusive. Historians can be found whose work evidences quantities of more than one of the four styles that I have described. Only a narrow-minded critic would suggest that a single style of art is better than all others or that one set of criteria can be used to judge every work of art. A similar conclusion can be drawn regarding styles in history. A formal trend analysis ought not be judged for its power to enliven the past. An expressive history ought not to be judged on its generalizability.

Historians and readers of history are not outside their study, but rather are themselves part of the history that interests them. Historians of art education are active in the continuing development of the field. Each approaches art education from a different perspective and with varying goals for its future. There is no agreement among historians about the basic nature of historical inquiry. Some call history an art; others, a science.

Identifying the value of history is rather like arguing for the significance of art. Both offer perspective, sometimes a glimpse of detail, sometimes an orderly view of wholeness. Neither is unanimous in its goals; both are measures of a society. In histories of art education, as in the art world, we should not expect or seek unanimity, but rather should prize the insight that diversity can bring.

References

- Alexander R. (1981). An historical perspective on the gifted and talented in art. *Studies in Art Education*, 22 (2), 38-48.
- Aron, R. (1959). Relativism in history. In H. Meyerhoff (Ed.), *The philosophy of history in our time* (pp. 153-161). Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Braudel, F. (1980). *On history* (S. Matthews, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Collingwood, R. (1956). *The idea of history*. London: Oxford University. (Original work published 1946)
- Efland, A. (1983). Art education during the great depression. *Art Education*, 36 (6), 38-42.
- Furet, F. (1972). Quantitative history. In F. Gilbert & G. Graubard (Eds.), *Historical studies today* (pp. 45-61). New York: W. W. Norton.
- Macauley, T. (1972). History. In F. Stern (Ed.), *The varieties of history* (pp. 71-89). New York: World. (Original work published 1880)
- Madenfort, D. (1982). Lowenfeld, myself and the tragic dream. *Art Education*, 35 (6), 22-24.
- Michael, J. (1977). Women/men in leadership roles in art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 18 (2), 7-20.
- Michelet, J. (1972). From the introduction: *The people*. In F. Stern (Ed.) *The varieties of history* (pp. 108-119). New York: World. (Original work published 1846)
- Peregallo, A. (1978). Trend analysis of selected art course offerings at institutions granting art education degrees. *Studies in Art Education*, 20 (1), 64-72.
- Ranke, L. (1972). Preface: *Histories of romance and Germanic peoples*. In F. Stern (Ed.), *The varieties of history* (pp. 54-62). New York: World. (Original work published 1885)
- Saunders, R. (1982). The Lowenfeld motivation. *Art Education*, 35 (6), 28-31.
- Smith, P. J. (1982). Lowenfeld in Germanic perspective. *Art Education*, 35 (6), 25-27.
- Stankiewicz, M. A. (1982). The creative sister: An historical look at women, the arts and higher education. *Studies in Art Education*, 24 (1), 48-56.
- Teggart, F. (1962). *Theory and processes of history*. Berkeley: University of California. (Original works [*The processes of history*, *Theory of history*] published 1919, 1925)
- Tuchman, B. (1982). *Practicing history*. New York: Ballantine.
- Turner, F. J. (1972). The significance of history. In F. Stern (Ed.), *The varieties of history*. New York: World. (Original work published 1938)
- White, D. (1977). An historical review of doctoral program growth and dissertation research in art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 19 (1), 6-20.
- Youngblood, M. S. (1982). Lowenfeld's unremitting legacy. *Art Education*, 35 (6), 32-36.