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MEDIA REVIEW

Revitalizing History: Recognizing the Struggles, Lives, and Achievements of African American and Women Art Educators

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Bolin, P. E., & Kantawala, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Revitalizing History: Recognizing the Struggles, Lives, and Achievements of African American and Women Art Educators*. Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press. 208 pp. ISBN: 978-1-62273-107-7.

In *Revitalizing History: Recognizing the Struggles, Lives, and Achievements of African American and Women Art Educators* (2017), art educators finally find a contemporary text that illuminates the lives of African Americans and women hidden from view and so often missing from books in art education. As a professor teaching the history and philosophy of art education for more than a decade, I have often wondered about the limited texts and resources art educators use to teach the history of our field. I have struggled every semester to introduce students to those whose lives and works have been underrepresented in our main texts. Arthur Efland's *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts* (1990) has been the standard. Its survey of movements in art education presents the historical contributions of a predominantly White Male Europe, citing the influences of German and English philosophies on educational institutions that in turn have shaped

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the art curriculum and pedagogy in the United States. Those of us who are conscientious about including multiple narratives in our representations of art education histories have long known what it feels like to seek out “herstories” that can encourage our female students. We also have attempted to find narratives told from a non-White perspective that speak to all students, instead of serving up the standard dominant culture White Euro-American Male metanarrative handed down year after year. Mary Ann Stankiewicz wrote *Roots of Art Education Practice* (2001), an important text that provided us with a counternarrative to the Efland canon by including multiply cultured and gendered histories. Stankiewicz (2001) interwove important life stories and historical contributions of women and people of color throughout her text. However, even today, in 2017, Ami Kantawala observed, “Despite many publications on the history of art education, the lives and contributions of many female art educators—and particularly the complex interrelationships of their stories with social, cultural, artistic, and educational contexts—have often been overlooked or hidden” (Kantawala, 2017, p. 143).

Historical Texts in Art Education

One series, *Women Art Educators* (1982, 1985), the first two issues edited by Enid Zimmerman and Mary Ann Stankiewicz, addressed the contributions of several women for the first time. Later, Kristin Congdon and Enid Zimmerman (1993) co-edited a volume on stories of female artists and art educators that was focused on the lives of women artists, teachers, and scholars; and their book

contextualized accounts of sexism, multiculturalism, and feminism. The Canadian Society for Education through Art also presented a volume edited by Elizabeth Sacca and Enid Zimmerman (1998), which included antiracist and political themes related to social change. The last volume in the series, published in 2003, edited by Kit Grauer, Rita Irwin, and Enid Zimmerman (Grauer, Irwin, & Zimmerman, 2003), focused on teaching in situated contexts, mentoring, and intercultural women’s concerns. Additionally, the Penn State Seminars of 1985, 1989, and 1995 presented stories of a few women art educators’ contributions to the field. Two decades have since passed, and for those educators teaching in today’s contemporary context, perhaps the most useful text is still *Remembering Others: Making the Invisible Histories of Art Education Visible* (Bolin, Blandy, & Congdon, 2000), which focuses on narrative case studies of many people, not just women, who generally have not been recognized in art education history. As a teacher of the histories of art education, I have sought a way to establish the stories of Native American, female, African American, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and allies (LGBTQIA), Latinx, Asian, and people who have been “othered.” In this search, I have had to select individual contemporary readings, post 2000, to help my students understand how all lives count and that they are equally relevant to and for art education.

The Importance of Revitalizing History

In *Revitalizing History: Recognizing the Struggles, Lives, and Achievements of African American and Women Art Educators* (2017), the personal and storied accounts of African American and women’s life histories are foregrounded; students can therefore identify, identify with, and respect these art educators. With this focus on African American and women art educators, *Revitalizing History* is a selected representation of papers presented at the “Brushes with History” conference at Teachers College, Columbia University, in November 2015. In their introduction, “A Past

Forward,” the editors, Paul E. Bolin and Ami Kantawala, historians in art education, note that although historical inquiry forms the foundation for much research in art education, there remain many undocumented moments and overlooked or hidden individuals. Therefore, instead, Bolin and Kantawala present historians who boldly challenge ideas in need of exploration and critique. In their introduction, the editors clarified that questioning a dominant culture status quo enables readers to approach history from vitally diverse perspectives: “Our hope is... to strengthen and encourage more interest in histories of art education, but also more sophisticated and innovative approaches to historical research in this field” (p. 12).

The text assembles the work of scholars from across the United States to elicit multi-leveled conversations reaching beyond what is provided in general art education textbooks. As Stankiewicz noted in the “Foreword,” situated contexts enable us to revitalize histories as we look for “examples of informal art education beyond the walls of art museums, in community art centers and communities created by marginalized artists” (p. 9). In addition to individual histories, Stankiewicz also noted that by analyzing institutions, the book reflects a sophisticated approach to historical inquiry that takes into account complex social interactions.

Carefully edited by Bolin and Kantawala, the text is comprised of 11 chapters, the majority ranging between 12 and 18 pages. The brief histories come alive as every author’s criticality and passion about their subjects emerge. *Revitalizing History* is especially exciting because of each author’s unique singular focus on both African American and women art educators.¹ Perhaps as the result of Bolin and Kantawala’s tutelage as professors, conference planners, and editors, many of the authors are emerging historians who challenge, question, and represent untold histories in a new light. Stankiewicz notes in her foreword that, as conference planners, Bolin and Kantawala hoped the presenters

would identify gaps in written histories of art education while engendering a focus on the importance of historical research that questions such gaps. In the editors’ choice of the 11 historical accounts in this important volume, the same concerns emerge. Bolin (2017) believes historians must ask pertinent questions instead of accepting assertions that claim truth. These 11 essays ask just such questions and challenge status quo historical interpretations.

In the first essay, Heidi C. Powell, a descendant of the Lenni Lenape peoples² examined how we might better reflect local memory in art education history by noticing that what we (re)collect shapes how we see the world, a view of history that acknowledges our relative subjectivity and its influences on the stories we tell. In the second chapter, Christina Hanawalt and Sue Uhlig analyzed the life and work of an early 20th-century art educator, Mabel Spofford, who both created and collected material artifacts that became a vibrant pedagogical force for the authors’ examination of new relational possibilities of archival research. In the next chapter, Christina Bain explored the life of art educator Nancy Renfro, a teaching artist of puppetry and performance, and interwove her own life as a historian, sharing the subject’s lived experiences in the places both had lived.

In the first three chapters, history is perceived as a temporal tapestry of vivid connections experienced through visual and material culture and the idiosyncrasies of place. History is presented as dynamic, not static or distant. In chapter four, Elise Chevalier examined art educator Dorothy Dunn, the non-Indigenous founder of the Santa Fe Indian School (1932-1937). Chevalier concluded that Dunn contradicted her progressive ideals by insisting on the beneficence of the so-called traditional studio program within the dominant U.S. colonial system. In the fifth essay, Mary Hafeli discussed Margaret McAdory Sicheloff’s pioneering work in the testing of aesthetic judgment, which is the first close examination of Sicheloff’s work to date. Hafeli noted the enduring challenges of

quantifying artistic and aesthetic production. In the sixth chapter, Kirstie Parkinson examined the Art History textbook *Art through the Ages* (1926), in which the author and art educator Helen Gardner discussed teaching aesthetics as a universal potential instead of the traditional chronology of noted artistic masters. In chapter seven, Jessica Baker Kee challenged the Eurocentric metanarrative in art education history by examining the Hampton Institute, a teaching institution for Black and Native Americans whose intellectual tradition of Black aesthetic and narrative histories is underrepresented in American art education, except for its presence in most historical accounts of the life and work of Viktor Lowenfeld prior to his going to Penn State. In chapter eight, Debra Hardy examined a vital community organization and African American cultural center, the South Side Community Art Center of Chicago, a Black art institution and the lone survivor of the Works Progress Administration. In chapter nine, Rebecca Dearlove considered the impact of visual culture education on 1960s and 1970s cinema programming at the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Film. She examined *What's Happening?*, an educational film program that programmed 21 films between 1971 and 1974, many of which were made by African Americans who produced films openly addressing social and cultural conditions about their communities. In chapter ten, Allison M. Clark told the story of Anna Curtis Chandler, a storyteller and educator who implemented dramatic pedagogy to create politically charged imaginative productions in art museum contexts in the early 20th century. In the final chapter, Congdon presented the Highwaymen's Story of 26 young African American landscape painters in Jim Crow-era Florida whose work contributed to the ongoing struggle for civil rights and the subversion of unilateral Western aesthetic approaches to valuing art. All 11 chapters use either primary research interviews, excerpts from the subjects' dialogues and writings, colored illustrations, or documentary

photos to successfully chronicle untold missing histories in art education.

What might have improved the discursive qualities of the book would have been the incorporation of the format of the "Brushes with History" conference in which discussants moderated sessions. I would have liked to have read a dialogic discourse in the chapters, perhaps with each chapter as a "call," and at its end, the discussants' interjected questions or ideas as the "response." Such a dialogue would underline the lived notion of history by opening it to contemplation and argument. In their introduction, Bolin and Kantawala allude to *Revitalizing History* as part of a new historical trend, history *from below*, viewing work as both "interpretive and fluid"; hence, a dialogic call-and-response structure might encourage the generation of such "a multitude of valid responses" (p. 23).

Additionally, editors should have included author biographies. In his 2017 *Studies* article, Bolin referred to the importance of the life story of the historian: "Knowing about the life of the historian... provides useful insight into the work they perform, thus helping foster increased understanding of the historian's particular position toward the past and interpretation of it" (p. 90). Although authors' institutions and their status as independent scholars were noted, I found myself searching for even brief life histories, but I found none.

In conclusion, an editor's work is to create a space for presence; to bring new content forward; to shape an original vision; to curate and cull views that align with missing and much-needed perspectives. Palpable in *Revitalizing History* are both editors' love for and commitment to their discipline. Based on a strong sense of responsibility, Bolin and Kantawala demonstrate an ardent desire to revolutionize conceptions of history through a more just expansion of the art education field. By augmenting contemporary views of history through their inclusivity, they radicalize the imposed confines of dominant-culture subject matter. The editors,

as both teachers and scholars, demonstrate the regenerative capacity of examining unexplored, excluded histories. What was hidden was not only brought into view but also centered. At the conclusion of the introduction, the editors hoped the book would invite deeper dialogue and engagement with the often overlooked life stories of African Americans and women within the history of art education. They also hoped the book modeled how historians select intriguing narratives that identify and interpret

written documents, images, and stories to complement and balance the larger history of art education by focusing on more innovative approaches to historical research. The book absolutely fulfills both of these hopes. Once again this semester, I am teaching the History and Philosophy of Art Education, but thankfully, I can include *Revitalizing History: Recognizing the Struggles, Lives, and Achievements of African American and Women Art Educators* among the other texts on my reading list.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ There are 12 chapter authors and two editors involved in this book project. All 12 chapter authors and one book editor are women. Of the 13 women who participated in this publication, two are women of color and one is Native American.
- ² The Lenni Lenape peoples' ancestral land was Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, but due to a government removal, they are now located in Oklahoma and Canada.