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Elliot Eisner Will Stay with Art-Educators Beyond His Lifetime

Elisabete Oliveira
University of Lisbon, Portugal

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I admire Eisner's pioneering insights, theories, practices and books, namely "The Educational Imagination" (1979), "The Art of Educational Evaluation" (1985), "The Arts and the Creation of Mind" (2002) and "Educating Artistic Vision" (1972). Each text, in its own unique way, comprehends curriculum for its productive, critical and cultural dimensions: These dimensions, together with B. Malinovski's "Une Théorie Scientifique de la Culture" (1944), were crucial for my own action-research construct of the three Visual Aesthetic interactions of Dimensions (D) and Functions (F) in Education, as follows: *Material D – Technological F / Social D - Communicative F / Ontological D - Life Organizing F*. Since the peaceful Revolution into Democracy of April 25th 1974 in Portugal, Eisner – as a *referential* (I am not recognizing human *models*) – has helped me in contributing to the improvement of a cultural emphasis in the Portuguese Visual Arts Education Curriculum for all young people (up to the age of 15). Eisner also influenced my action-concept of continuous "self-eco-compatibilization" in Art-Education – interacting with others and the environment emergence.

I met and worked with Elliot Eisner from 1979-1980, during his sabbatical year at the London University Institute of Education, where I was completing my PhD studies. During this time, Eisner's "Educational Expressive Objectives" were being approached in his lectures and worldwide gaining recognition. I also had the privilege of proposing, introducing and assisting

him to Lisbon for the 1980 Ministry of Education – Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Course for Secondary School Teachers and Inspectors. Our friendship grew during INSEA (see Figure 1), and especially in 1988-1997, when I served as an INSEA World Council elected member. During the summer of 1988, while attending the *cultural night* of the 1st INSEA African Congress in Lagos, Nigeria, Marie Françoise Chavanne (INSEA President) and Eisner (INSEA Vice-President, before becoming President) were called to the stage in their stockings. “Tell my wife if I don’t come back”, said Eisner to the audience. Both their heads were marked with the blood of a sacrificed cock and they were declared immortal. This became true for Eisner, at his death, entering a new dimension from which his personal energy, knowledge and works will stay with Art-Educators beyond his lifetime.



Figure 1. Legend: Rotterdam INSEA World Research Conference Participants, 1981: All in the 3rd row (left to right), Phyllis Gluck is 3rd; Elliot Eisner is 6th; Brian Allison is 9th and Elisabete Oliveira is one step in front of him.

Below, I share Eisner’s own written words in a 2009 interview for my book “Visual Aesthetic Education Eco-Needed in Adolescence” (2010), in order to answer the four questions that I had posed: (1) What factors from art, life or others, have contributed relevantly to your becoming the Art Educator as you are? (2) What do you consider as your major contribution to Art Education? (3) What gives you energy to go on in Art Education? (4) What do you suggest to those who are now to go forward in Art Education? In Eisner’s words:

I have tried to respond to your questions, which are quite broad, in a form that is useful to you. (...) You ask what kind of education contributed to the arts educator I have been. I would say that all of my life experiences in one way or another have contributed to the way I think about life, education, and art. The experiences that I have had in my own life have sensitized me to features of the environment, most especially to people, in ways that have provided a basis upon which I develop my own thinking. As you know, I do not make a sharp separation between art education and education in other fields. All fields, in principle, can be treated in an aesthetically sensitive way and I would hope that schools would make it possible for students to enjoy the aesthetic in any subject they work in.

Your second question deals with what I place greatest emphasis on in the context of my work in the field of art education in general. First, I would say that my major focus has been on the conceptual or, even more broadly, theoretical aspects of art education as a field of practice. I have tried in my work to identify features of art education which are distinctive, that is, which are unique or specific to art and education. So I have tried to have it both ways, I have tried to show what is common across the field of art education and across other fields and I have tried, at the same time, to identify what is particular and unique to the field of art education. This kind of a task may make me slightly schizophrenic, but I want to retain both the generality of the field and its contribution to other areas of life and at the same time to recognize what is specifically or uniquely belonging to the field of art education. I would say that my work in my book, "The Enlightened Eye", would be an example of the kind of work that I have the strongest regard for.

Your third question is regarding energy for continuing my work at, let us say, an advanced age. The energy that I have is fed by the joy and pleasure I receive from grappling with ideas that I have been struggling with for a lifetime of scholarly work. Engagement in such work is a deep source of satisfaction and may even do some good! At the root of my work is a form of aesthetic experience that comes with the form of an intellectual type. These rewards have contributed to my continuing motivation to work for which I am most grateful.

Regarding what I would suggest to art educators regarding their work, my recommendation is in some ways very simple. It is, keep your feet rooted firmly on the ground while your head can reach into the heavens. Create an awareness in your own life between what is grounded firmly in the earth and at the same time reaches high above the ground to explore the possibilities that the arts make possible in the

lives of those who engage them and who themselves are engaged in their making.
(Oliveira, 2010, pp 69, 71, 164, 166 & CD - Annex 1.8.14, complete interview).

Eisner's words will surely stay with all of us.

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About the author

Elisabete da Silva Oliveira (Lisbon University-FPCEUL, PhD,2005). Licensed in Painting, she was "Visual Aesthetic Education" (VAE) Teacher, National Curriculum Planner and Adviser in Basic / Secondary School (ages 10-18) in 1965-1985; Teacher Education Teacher for Infant / Primary / Secondary School; and Museums' Lecturer. She followed London University Art / Design Diploma / Master / PhD Courses. From 1985 to her retirement in 2006 she taught Sciences of Education (FPCEUL) and Azores University; and Theatre-Education at the IPL-Theatre and Cinema Higher School. She is a CIEBA-FBAUL researcher and PhD Jury presently. She wrote and edited 5 Books, Book Chapters and 100 Articles; and created Visual Resources/Centers. Her 2010 book "Visual Aesthetic Education Eco-Needed in Adolescence" researches "auto-eco-compatibilization" in a VAE curriculum for all; teachers' formative evaluation criteria; and an "Exploratory" of emerging pioneer School Projects.

She co-founded VAE Associations and was InSEA World Counsellor (1988-1997), making Presentations in Europe/America/Asia/Africa. Her Art work integrates national and international collections.

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