



Dr. Karen Hamblen

Mary Rouse Award Acceptance Address

Karen Hamblen

Dr. Carmen Armstrong introduced Dr. Karen Hamblen, Associate Professor in the School of Art and in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Louisiana State University, as someone demonstrating outstanding performance in teaching, scholarship, and leadership. She spoke of Karen's teaching at conference sessions and her "clarity of explanations, . . . evidence of her preparedness, effective teaching techniques, sensitivity to the discipline of art and professional level presentations." She also mentioned Karen's publication record (35 journal articles between 1982 and 1986 with nine "in press") and of her substance, insight, and positive contributions to our field. The light touch title to a heavy thought article characterizes Karen's writing and presentations." She concluded, "As Mary Rouse's former student, I feel sure that Karen is the kind of professional that Mary would support and strongly encourage."

I wish to thank the NAEA Women's Caucus for this award. More specifically, I wish to thank Carmen Armstrong who nominated me and the people who supported my nomination with their letters. Receiving this award is a vindication of sorts for qualities and achievements that I've strived for in my professional life. They are types of qualities and achievements, however, that do not always receive positive recognition—and often have to be developed in spite of the situation rather than because of it. It is the gradient against which professionalism all-too-often has to work that I'd like to focus on in my acceptance speech.

This award comes to me at a time when I have been examining my own professional potential as well as the professional possibilities in art education in general. As many of you know, I have a range of research interests and instructional focuses. I've worked in the areas of the sociology of art, art museum education, the history and philosophy of art education, and aesthetic theory. I am particularly proud of my work in developing higher order thinking instructional methodologies in relationship to art criticism, and I wish to acknowledge the strong influence Carmen Armstrong's work has had on me in this area.

My work ranges from the theoretical to the very practical. There is a note of defensiveness in that last sentence, however, inasmuch as there seems to be some suspicion, at this time, of research that doesn't promise a quick, practical payoff. That is a problem that art educators will have to deal with if we are not to become a group of technicians implementing programs for the sake of doing and implementing programs devised by a select few. When we are involved in research, in the broadest sense, and when we act as readers and evaluators of research, we can participate in the creation of the field—through our input and informed choices. When the act of conducting research is considered suspect, as I believe it is in some quarters of art education today, we are in trouble.

This takes me to what I'd like to discuss today, namely the life world of the art educator. I'm interested in finding ways for that life world to be enhanced. I'm interested in finding why it comes to be circumscribed, and how, in some instances, that life world becomes terribly distorted and painful. I would like to propose that every art educator should demand that right to rise to his or her level of competence—and beyond. I see so many very talented and capable people in our field who are never given the chance to exercise their potential. And, in fact, at times attempts to exercise that potential are met with disapproval if not outright punishment.

For several years of my postdoctorate career, I consciously left any theoretical, problematic, research perspectives I had at home every time I went to my university employment. This does not mean that I wasn't busy and involved. During those three years I learned new dimensions to the meaning of the words "tired" and "exhausted." Unfortunately, for many art educators at the university level, this grind becomes a way of life. There is little time or energy left to keep up with what

is happening in art education, let alone time to be actively involved and contributing to the research foundations of the field. I survived, and I escaped, and I was able to establish myself solely because I never took one day off for vacation or any other purpose during that entire three years. This was not a matter of self-denial, because I found that I truly enjoy the research aspect. I am fortunate in that active involvement in the field and my research are ways that I feel creatively fulfilled. To me, it has not been an outside threat of publish or perish, but an inside, felt-need to do research so that I do not psychologically perish.

In talking to art educators and others in academe, I find that men have plans to escape to better situations, within or outside academe. One man told me of how he had to spend one year at a nonresearch university, but when he presented a paper at a conference, his brilliance was recognized, and he moved on to a bigger and better university after the year. All I can say is that that must have been some paper he presented or else that was some conference he attended. Escape is usually not that easily accomplished. I have no statistics on this, but I suspect that women stay in such employment situations longer—or they plainly stay. It might be profitable to track new art education graduates, male and female, who show promise and to find the mechanisms by which they exercise professional options or are not able to develop professionally. In my case I had a wonderful negative role model that gave me some incentives—this was a woman who, after twenty years of employment at a university, retired as an assistant professor. The story was that along the way she had offended the powers that be and that she had also picked up a chemical dependency habit.

Several years ago at a conference, I heard a paper read by a woman about to receive her doctorate. I took particular notice of her, as I thought at the time that this was someone who might make a mark on art education. I have, however, seen others like her, who make compromises and disappear. When I saw this woman the next year at a conference, she had gotten a of at a university, but she told me that she did not know how people managed to survive there beyond the day-to-day work load. I had no advice for her other than that escape is possible. I had done it. I've noticed that she has since moved to another university, and I hope that her situation has improved. There is, however, something drastically wrong when professionalism and professional development are not integral to academic employment. Again, I have no statistics on this, but I suspect that this is the norm rather than the exception. We lose some very good people.

Several years ago when Jean Rush (1985) accepted the June King McFee Award, she spoke of the difficulty of women, in particular, maintaining their research interests without departmental support and the tenuous route a woman pursues in trying to balance departmental requirements, national recognition, tenure and promotion review requirements. Publishing research is necessary, but it also leaves one wide open to departmental jealousies. In relation to this, Tom Anderson (1985) has written of how university professors, throughout their educational preparation and subsequent university employment, are reinforced for conforming behaviors and for not questioning or disturbing the status quo.

I am suggesting that the condition of our life worlds is often inextricably tied up with learning passive behaviors, of being rewarded for being less than we are capable of being, and of gradually losing our options to act. In my former university position, I learned quite quickly that I had been hired specifically for qualities of passivity and conformity. When I found the files of others who had applied for my position, I was surprised to find some rather well-known art educators among the applicants. Initially and naively, I thought that I had been chosen over these others because this university had recognized potential in me that was just waiting to blossom. Of course, that wasn't the case at all. I was hired because my potential lay in my ability to be molded like the little Pillsbury dough boy and because I looked adept at "doing windows."

When I applied for and received a faculty development grant my second semester, I was horrified to learn that rather than receiving release time (as stipulated in the grant) my other duties were just made worth less—so it would all add up the same, except now I also had to fulfill the obligations of the grant on top of everything else. Like the rape victim, I blamed myself for the situation, and only much later was able to tell any of my professional colleagues about it. I was mortified that I would be hired by a university and then be treated so badly by it. It was at that point that I realized that my value had to come from myself and the development of my own intellectual capital. I also realized that to maintain my professionalism, to keep up to date, and to contribute to the field were not going to be easy tasks.

We are rewarded for passive behaviors, are often in unsupportive employment situations, and, as I briefly noted earlier, we are also in a field that is suspicious of researchers. This suspicion has also been noted by Erickson (1979) and Foley and Tempelton (1970). Apathy or even antipathy toward research and reinforcement for passive behaviors are intertwined and I believe, have been highly detrimental to individual professional development as well as to the development of the entire field.

One only needs to read some of the job descriptions for entry-level positions open in art education to know that those who take these jobs are going to enter and leave with essentially the same stock of intellectual,

professional capital. This is why some of these positions are euphemistically known as "female gopher jobs." However, it is not just academe out there that imposes this life world on us. We also contribute to our own limitations on potential. It is ironic that in a field in which creativity, open-ended responses, and individual freedoms have been educational goals that theory and research are suspect in some quarters.

Erickson (1979) has discussed how women in art education have not traditionally considered themselves to be educators much less researchers and how this has stunted the professional growth of the field. In much the same vein, Rush (1985) has discussed research as providing a form of "consumer protection" inasmuch as research opens up possibilities for our actions. At this conference, I am participating in a panel discussion in which I am presenting a paper titled "Research for Existential Choice" (Hamblen, 1987). I am suggesting that through an understanding of research options and by developing options through our professional research, we are able to exercise choice and create parts of our own reality—otherwise we are subject to limited options, limited potential, and we are subject to the world as defined by others. I find it an affront to my entire professional training to have art education defined for me. Understanding and conducting research goes well beyond my own personal interests and my enjoyment in research activities. There is a moral dimension to this that impinges on the entire field, as well as the dimension that would improve individual life worlds.

When I have to explain to someone that "yes, art education does have a body of theory and research," I am responding to an inherited attitude toward art education that I don't appreciate. When I hear art educators say that we must act, that we've done enough talking, that we have enough research, and that we have to follow the same piper, I get some inkling of why we often cannot get any respect. Finding my earlier employment to be less than conducive to maintaining professionalism was certainly a shock, but finding attitudes within art education itself antagonistic to behaviors that might give out profession some academic legitimacy has been truly disappointing. At a time when we are seeing all sorts of reports on excellence in education, I suggest that we need to focus on aspects of the university professional's life world that would allow for excellence. The themes of passivity that I've discussed and of having opportunities to exercise professionalism are matters of morality; they are matters of workers' rights and of human rights. A mind is a terrible waste; so also is a professional career.

As a field, art education is very susceptible to educational fads and to ideas that have less than educational merit. If I were to be dictator for a day and wanted a complacent population, I would ask for a population in which the intellectuals had been shipped out or were considered superfluous, or in which only a few were given any credence. I would want a population that was often tired and overworked. I would mandate work environments that gave people little time or energy to reflect and question. I'd physically and psychologically isolate people. I'd limit their professional opportunities, and I'd make sure they were not reinforced for developing new modes of action. This hypothetical population would fear reprisals on both local and national levels. I'd limit their access to information. Rather than awards for professional promise, I would promote those that showed the most sycophantic behaviors and those that most loudly and proudly proclaimed their dislike for anything that smacked of intellectualism. Pragmatism (as defined by me and that select group of intellectuals) would reign supreme. This, of course, is just a hypothetical scenario.

I appreciate this opportunity to discuss aspects of my career with you. But, actually it is not just my career—it is our career, whether or not you have experienced any of these aspects first hand or not. My experiences were far from unique. The Holmes Group Report (*Tomorrow's Teachers*, 1986) discusses the need to upgrade the professional opportunities of elementary and secondary teachers. I would suggest that the professional opportunities of university professors also need to be monitored. If we are going to improve teacher preparation in this country, we need a professoriate that has the time and the ongoing, developing intellectual capital to do so. Otherwise, the changes will be makeshift and will have little staying power.

I would like to propose that some part of NAEA, such as the Women's Caucus, evaluate employment sites as to whether they are conducive to professional development. Through the grape-vine, we learn of problems at some universities, but that does not really change the situation, not does it help the people there. It is nearly impossible to institute changes when one is in a dependency role within a system. Universities, however, are tremendously sensitive to the slightest possibility of adverse national publicity. Art educators should be labelled for what they are—an inappropriate use of personnel and disservice to art education. The AAUP puts universities on the short list for violations; the NAEA could do the same. University employment should not be hazardous to one's professional health.

