



## UNESCO World Conference on Arts Education: A Poetic Review

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### INTRODUCTION

In March of 2006 I was invited to present a paper on my dissertation research at the first world gathering on arts education sponsored by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] in Lisbon, Portugal. The conference was attended by delegates from over 100 nations and was intended to encourage countries that offer little or no arts education to see the value of the arts in schools, and to change their policies and practices.

What follows are my poetic impressions and representations of that experience. Two poems contained in this suite—for *Amanda Lichtenstein* (a mostly-found poem) and for *Eric Booth* (a mostly-found poem)—fall into the long literary tradition of *found poetry*; that is, they are crafted from preexisting source texts, in this case my notes taken as I listened to these two speakers at the UNESCO conference (see also Butler-Kisber, 2002; Prendergast, 2004, 2006; Sullivan, 2000).

### day one — preaching to the converted

*i* lie  
on a warm carpet floor  
inside a huge marble jewel-box theatre  
inside a huger cultural riverside complex  
in Lisbon

(day one)

and i hide  
inside this private box seat  
behind a closed door  
from twenty expert speakers  
(17 men & 3 women)

banging their own drums  
(some soft / some loud)  
about art and education  
in the twenty-first century world

speaking empathy  
    imagination  
    creativity

showing self-centredness  
    power-pointedness  
    political correctness

i am  
    jet-lagged  
    alienated (so few women)  
    & bored

so  
i curl up with my head  
on a jacket-made pillow  
& dream

of a global conference  
on arts education

that  
looks  
    somewhat other than this

that  
lives

somewhere other than here

## to become an artist

you must give  
a part of  
your life

(it is not enough)

to take a course  
spend 5 or even 50  
minutes a day

you must rather  
take apart  
the classroom

dread-embedded in  
the prison discipline  
of school

(it is not enough)

you must create  
a critical pedagogy  
transmitted

& transformed

through the arts

as omnipresent

as necessary

as air

(to do otherwise  
it is not enough)

## day two — hyphens

today i forgo  
listening  
for seeing

go  
to 3 galleries

on my feet  
(& my toes)  
for hours

share these marvel-  
filled yet  
almost-  
empty spaces  
with school-  
children

watch them

meet Rembrandt  
Bosch  
Degas  
Manet

for the 1<sup>st</sup> time

huddle in close-  
quarter groups  
before a master-  
piece (meal  
for the soul)

almost shout  
their answers  
as if  
enthusiasm alone  
might wake

these long-

dead faces  
might enter

these long-

gone land-  
scapes

caught in suspended beauty  
and immortal surprise

taking us some-

where other

somewhere

these children

(& i)

so very need  
to go

## day three — questions

art for art's sake

or

for the sake of others?

advocacy burnout

burns brightly

here

why must we always

fight for

what we do?

inside the curriculum

is safer

(more conservative?)

outside the curriculum  
is braver  
    (tilting at quixotic  
    windmills?)

complacent  
or  
resistant?

on the margins  
or  
at the centre?

art may  
    consume  
    through  
    creation  
        (like fire)

how can  
this truth  
    hard as  
    coal or  
    diamond  
ever be  
taught?

## for Amanda Lichtenstein (a mostly-found poem)<sup>1</sup>

smashed up  
in these moments  
lie poetic under-  
pinnings  
    of our work

umbilical awareness

each  
    bound up  
        in the other

autobiographical revolutions

ultimate gestures  
        of inquiry

resisting the  
corporatization  
        of the mind

i walk  
inside myself  
        to be  
        comforted  
        by art

## day four — closing session

all education  
is an art  
(the art  
    of discovery)

a space  
    for peace  
        joy  
        pleasure

a place  
        for change

for Eric Booth (a mostly-found poem)<sup>2</sup>

art is:

the power  
to transform  
the most  
degrading  
of settings

to say "wow"  
in poignancy  
in bravado

tsunamis of  
wordsthoughtsideas  
wash over

we frail vessels  
engaged in complexity

remember:

tolerate paradox  
experience the body  
embrace chaos

be

the strange attractor  
who cannot measure

a lightening  
of the heart  
or  
a decrease  
in boredom

remember: art is

oxygen

& anti-  
biotic

for education



## Notes

1. Lichtenstein is a teaching artist in Chicago and a published poet. This poem was created from notes taken at her presentation.
2. Booth is an American arts educator and advocate who has worked for the Kennedy and Lincoln Centers, teaches at Juilliard and was founding editor of *Teaching Artist Journal*. This poem is created from notes taken at his closing address.

## References

- Butler-Kisber, L. (2002). Artful portrayals in qualitative inquiry: The road to found poetry and beyond. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, XLVIII(3), 229–239.
- Prendergast, M. (2004). 'Shaped like a question mark': Found poems from Herbert Blau's *The Audience*. *Research in Drama Education*, 9(1), 73–92.
- Prendergast, M. (2006). Found poetry as literature review: Research poems on audience and performance. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 369–388.
- Sullivan, A. (2000). The necessity of art: Three found poems from John Dewey's *Art as experience*. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. 13(3), 325–327.



**Monica Prendergast's** work has been published in a number of education journals (*Youth Theatre Journal*, *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*). Her research poetry has been published in the *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, *Research in Drama Education*, *Language and Literacy* and *Qualitative Inquiry*. Monica's books include *Teaching Spectatorship: Essays and Poems on Audience in Performance* (Cambria Press, 2008) and a coedited collection, *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences* (in press). She is a faculty member in the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences, Division of Creative Arts in Learning, at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.