

Kristin G. Congdon

A short response to Ann Kuo's article must, by definition, focus on only one or two points. While recognizing similarities in art education across time and place, I wish to discuss the diversity and interconnectedness of our field.

Art educators continually comment on teaching too many students in too little time, while having few planning periods to develop new curriculum and engage in professional development. Art teachers repeatedly talk about how devalued and misunderstood their subject is. Kuo seems to feel that one of the reasons for this lowly status is because of our *vague* reason for existing. In other words, we do not appear to have a clearly stated purpose. It is true that few people outside our field understand what it is we do or what it is we want to do. We are often perceived of as those who take the class while the *real* teacher gets a break; those who can "handle" or "reach" difficult students where others have failed; and those who give students something "creative to do" for a class period. In truth, we are all those things, but we aspire (and deserve) to be seen as more than that. But our multiple purposes and goals are not easily stated in a few sound bites. Art is diverse and complex and what we do as art educators is also diverse and complex. Being less vague about it will mean that we need to find a way to categorize all that we do under certain well-stated headings. We need to recognize that art education is about a multiplicity of things, and we need to list those things in ways that we all understand and can easily communicate to others. We should also make sure that this list is based on solid research.

Kuo correctly recognizes that education follows social trends. Our diversity of goals means, among other things, that we can easily link ourselves to other fields of study, often those that answer our most pressing concerns. Kuo writes that Taiwan's focus on economic gains resulted in art being valued less than other disciplines like language, math, science, and technology. But in my hometown of Orlando, art is thriving while developing an economic base is at the forefront of educational planning. A shift from a primarily modernist aesthetic approach, which we have made, to career development, design and technology, and visual literacy is keeping art and art education relevant.

Art education can and should shift with time and place. While many art educators have tried to place clear-cut boundaries around our field, I believe this has been to our detriment. Art teaching should not solely focus on letting "the student experience the universality and uniqueness of human thought and feelings as expressed in art" as Kuo states. When we study art we need to understand it as it relates to small group understandings and experiences as well as more universal expressions. We need to understand art as it uses science and flourishes with technology. We must relate it to historical documentation, ritual, politics, and the many ways in which it defines community. The more we connect art with other subjects as

opposed to fighting with them for time and resources, the better off art teachers, and our students, will be. We have spent decades trying to separate and compete. It is time to recognize art for its diverse, complex, and ever expanding functions. When that happens, it will become clear that art educators need to work in ways that are more integrative, interdisciplinary, and collaborative. Perhaps this might be an answer to the teachers' concerns Kuo has outlined in her questionnaire.