

mentor's introduction

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Three years ago a group at Penn State began to explore the consequences of broadening the content of art education. We were dissatisfied with the narrowness of contemporary curricula that centered on artworks from the realm of the art museum. Turning our attention to other visual phenomena we developed opposing interpretations of Disney animated movies, advertisements, teen magazines, and teenagers' bedrooms while directing our attention toward cultural meaning rather than aesthetic value. We speculated about the consequences for art education if the field were to reject the art historical study of a canon of aesthetic masterpieces. We wondered how art education would change if distinctions among high art, low art, popular art, and mass culture were to disintegrate. We worried about how to manage the content of our field if it were to include a vastly broadened array of visual artifacts accompanied by new pedagogical approaches to inquiry, interpretation, and creation. The emerging discipline of visual culture provided the theoretical core of our investigations.

None of the members of that initial group have carried the ideas as far as Kevin Tavin. His inquiry has led him to explore issues emerging from cultural studies, visual culture, and critical pedagogy, and to investigate the implications that these new disciplines hold for art education curriculum and instruction. It is notable that Mr. Tavin has already transformed his own students into researchers. One of Mr. Tavin's most important projects was to construct an electronic hypertext in which he studied an enormous number of intertextual relationships among an advertisement and its associated visual and interpretive texts within various social, political, aesthetic, artistic, and pedagogical contexts. This hypertext has the characteristics of both a scholarly treatise and a work of visual art. Now Mr. Tavin's students, elementary education majors who have taken his classes at Penn State, have developed their own astonishingly complex and insightful hypertexts and they are delivering papers about them at art education conferences. I've had a hand in mentoring a mentor and Kevin Tavin is changing what we teach and how we teach it.