

mentor's introduction

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Fiona Blaikie grew up in South Africa, graduating from a school system where examinations in the arts were taken for granted. It is therefore not surprising if she should have been led first to wonder at the lack of assessment in those subjects in North American schools; then to inquire about assumptions held by various stakeholders that have resulted in very precise assessment, at one end of the scale, and no assessment, at the other.

Fiona Blaikie's topic could not be more timely, given the disarray prevailing in North America as administrators scramble to provide evidence of increase in competency among the student body, in skills, attitudes, and understanding. Abandoning those value premises on which art programs have reputedly been assembled, educational decision-makers have sought evidence of art competency in simplistic paper and pencil tests. The result can only be regarded as a lowest common demonstrator. Failure to account for all the ambiguities of interpretation that have brought so many cognitive tests into disrepute must make reliance even on that lowest denominator suspect.

Ms. Blaikie chooses to approach the topic from a totally different and, I am convinced, a more productive perspective. She is concerned with the elucidation of value systems, as these inform, or are evident in criteria for evaluation. Given her cosmopolitan background, she has looked beyond the confines of North America for her material. The study promises to compare and contrast material that is often considered the domain of philosophers of education, and the more pragmatic conclusions of bodies concerned with the development of methods of assessment and evaluation. If contrasts exceed comparisons, she will have documented evidence of a gap between theory and practice that will have to be lessened, if we are to have a more realistic accounting of what we do as art educators and teachers, and how well we do it.