

Handout for NAEA 2006 Chicago, Seminar for Research in Art Education  
Research Session for Graduate Students in Art Education  
March 23, 2006 (Thursday 6:00 ~ 8:50 pm)  
Joliet Room, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Hilton Chicago

AN APPRENTICESHIP IN MASK MAKING:  
SITUATED COGNITION, SITUATED LEARNING, AND TOOL ACQUISITION  
IN THE CONTEXT OF CHINESE *DIXI* MASK MAKING

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The Ohio State University, 2006

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This study unmask Chinese Dixi mask makers, who have been masked in Chinese history for centuries. Instead of writing their history, this study tells their mental stories. Instead of understanding them through interview, this study assumes an apprentice's role to learn a mask maker's way of thinking and his community's worldview. This apprenticeship (situated learning) is also adopted as an alternative method to the individual-centered methodology commonly used in the science laboratory. Thus, it sheds new light on the understanding of artistic cognition.

Mask maker's cognition is considered as a process of imaginative cognition because mask making is to materialize the divine images socially constructed by the mask ritual community. While divine images belong to the immaterial realm, mask making is material production. How do mask makers translate these mental images into concrete masks? Where do mask symbols come from? And, how can this mental representation process be taught and acquired? These answers might help art educators to bestow students with cognitive tools to foster their imagination.

The apprenticeship in mask making is further accentuated by the analysis of acquiring mask-making tools. What mask making tools are to the mask ritual community, technology is to modern society. The theory of tool acquisition as a process of enculturation attempts to construct a basis for building psychological theories of technology education.

The electronic version of this dissertation is utilized to demonstrate how technology can be integrated into learning and research. It is also essential to this study's theoretical framework, as tools and media facilitate, and situate, cognition. On the other hand, through this electronic dissertation, the Dixi mask performance, which I recorded during my fieldwork, can be globally distributed. Such a global presentation has been the mask performers' desire: to share with global citizens their arts, of which they are proud. On the other hand, senior performers worry about diminishing faith in Dixi mask ritual, which sustains their values and tradition. By presenting their ritual performance on the Web, I hope this study can make some contribution to their tradition while expressing my appreciation for their participation.