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Many art teachers in the public schools are in a seemingly constant struggle to legitimize their programs in the eyes of school administrators, the public, and their students. These art teachers; our colleagues, often find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to react to educational policy that may negatively impact upon the art programs of their school district or state.

In such a scenario we cannot assume that educational policy is constructed with sophistication and input from all quarters that might be affected by those decisions; on the contrary, policy may be made with little heed given to the potentials of art education to enhance our society. Perhaps 10-15% of our students in high school are enrolled in art classes, a situation that produces an adult society whose acquaintance with the visual arts occurred in the form of a mandatory dose of art at the seventh or eighth grade level; a society best described as naive rather than sophisticated in its ability to secure or express meaning in the visual arts. These then are characteristics of import when one considers who forms educational policy and with what understanding it is formed.

It is not the purpose of this paper to treat at great length the value of art education for our youth; I would remark however that human potential for learning seems to be governed by two significant factors: what our natural endowments equip us with and what our culture provides in the way of opportunities to actualize those endowments. Our schools are a very great part of the cultural opportunities provided our citizens as they mature.

The schools are ostensibly the seat of learning, the agency charged with encouraging human potentials to become functional for the benefit of our society.

The schools and their curricular offerings, patterns of course selection, patterns of student characteristics for those enrolled in art and other subjects all seem to suggest that art is held in low esteem by the general public as well as by sub-populations of parents, administrators, and students. We also understand that human beings are multi-dimensional in their abilities. We have the ability to read, to write, to compute, to know art and biology and many other forms of knowledge. A restrictive understanding of human potential would disallow the broad possibilities for human development; a restrictive curriculum says, in effect; we will nourish and enable learning in some content areas and ignore others. Those content areas, components of mind if you will, that are not afforded opportunities for growth will wither, not become actualized and result in a debasement of human potential--a waste of human resources resulting in continuing generations of citizens naive where sophistication could have occurred. This then is the legacy of ill-formed educational policy. Are there opportunities to initiate strategies for change that would enable policy cognizant of the potentials of art education? Although a litany of strategies to affect policy could be listed here, I will identify one that seems to hold some promise.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the greatest long term effects for managing educational decision making will come as art teachers begin to acknowledge the problem and look for opportunities to enable responsive policy. Surely one area of investigation should be the preparation of art teachers. New accreditation standards

for art education in our colleges and universities must include a demonstrated involvement with policy management as an area of inquiry. Our teachers must be familiar with purposes and strategies that will encourage educational policy responsive to art education. The preparation of art teachers must first of all be undertaken by those with credentials in art education and who themselves are prepared to deal with policy issues. There appears to be the need of a marriage between art education, and the administrative or managerial expert.<sup>2</sup>

A cadre of socially committed, politically savvy art educators who are not reluctant to inform and educate those in our society charged with making educational decisions could be a powerful step toward insuring a society whose people have the opportunity to realize a greater range of their potentials. Educational policies and decisions that recognize the contributions art education can make may indeed effect a social transfiguration.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Two works that have appeared recently which provide information about educational policy and strategies to enable enlightened decision making are: Chapman, Laura H. Instant Art Instant Culture: The Unspoken Policy For American Schools. N.Y.: Teachers College Press, 1982, and Hatfield, Thomas A. An Art Teacher In Every School? A Political Leadership Resource For Art Educators. Columbia S.C.: Whitehall Publishers, 1983.
2. For an example of new accreditation standards responsive to issues voiced here see Regulations For Certifying School Personnel And Accrediting Institutions And Approving Programs Offering Teacher Education Kansas State Department of Education, Topeka, Kansas, May 1983.

## SOCIAL THEORY AND SOCIAL PRACTICE IN ART TEACHER EDUCATION

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### THEORY AND PRACTICE

The connection between theoretical and practical activities is not always direct. A sculptor friend of mine believes that elementary art education should be practical in the most concrete, sensory way: children should simply have the opportunity to touch things, explore things, and fully sense their physical presence. It would be a mistake, in his view, to transfer a discourse on symbol systems from the university art education seminar to a third grade classroom. And I agree, for both philosophical and developmental reasons. There is no harm, no loss of holistic integrity, for a teacher to separate discussions of symbol systems from exercises with clay, just as reading and running can each be profitably experienced without being blended together. But while there is not always an obvious application of theoretical discussion to artistic practice, there is a very important sense in which the larger concepts of art education give meaning to even the most manual and visceral practices. Theoretical models are useful for teachers because they illuminate the relationships between art and the wider sphere of human values. Feldman's (1970) thesis on the value of art criticism for social understanding, or Giffhorn's (1978) critique of the lack of social value in North American art education, are examples of this kind of theoretical discourse. They are useful because they specify both the goals of the art program (e.g., social understanding rather than a conventional production of art objects) and the types of activities that are likely to achieve those