

ADVOCACY & the Arts

The Importance of an Arts Education

- The arts are worth studying simply because of what they are. Their impact cannot be denied. Historically, the arts have served to connect our imaginations with the deepest questions of human existence: Who am I? What must I do? Where am I going?
- The arts are used to achieve a multitude of human purposes: to present issues and ideas, to teach or persuade, to entertain, to decorate or please. Becoming literate in the arts helps students understand and do these things better.
- The arts are integral to everyone's daily life. Our personal, social, economic, and cultural environments are shaped by the arts at every turn.
- The arts offer unique sources of enjoyment and refreshment for the imagination. They explore relationships between ideas and objects and serve as links between thought and action. Their continuing gift is to help us see and grasp life in new ways.
- The arts help students develop the attitudes, characteristics, and intellectual skills required to participate effectively in today's society and economy.

Source: *The National Visual Arts Standards*, developed by the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations.

The Four Principles of Arts Advocacy

Advocacy must be principled, that is, bound by ethical responsibilities and commitment. Keeping in mind four general principles will help guide your arts advocacy efforts:

- **Public Awareness:** The public often lacks an understanding of the significance of the arts in education. A number of strategies need to be employed to encourage individuals in the community to become personally involved in the arts. These include advertising events, publishing curriculum guidelines, and addressing stakeholders in the community.
- **Professional Development:** Generalists and specialists alike need to feel confident with the subject matter they are teaching. If this confidence is not achieved, arts programming is jeopardized. Therefore, the principle of professional development must be continuously addressed for and by all educators.
- **Policy-Making:** All arts organizations, at all levels need to be concerned with developing and promoting art education policy. Ideally, policies from one level to another should be philosophically parallel, reflecting a professional consensus.
- **Patronage:** While increased funding is important there is even a greater need for support through informed advocacy. Non-professional patrons of the arts need to become informed as to what constitutes a quality arts education program.

Source: "Informed Advocacy and Art Education" by Rita L. Irwin in the *BCATA Journal for Art Teachers*, v33 n1 Spring 1993 Also see ERIC Document: ED404220

Art Education and American Public Schools

In 1988, a survey examining arts education programs in American public schools was sent to 1366 randomly-selected elementary and secondary schools. In addition to the findings drawn from these surveys, comparisons were made with the 1962 survey conducted by the National Education Association. The data collected resulted in the following conclusions:

- Art specialists are essential to viable art programs. Music and visual art programs have benefitted greatly from the presence of specialists at every level of the public school.
- Music educators need to give serious consideration to broadening the music program beyond performance to include greater emphasis on music, history, criticism, and aesthetics.
- The concept of DBAE has influenced art educators to broaden the thrust of art programs beyond production.
- The small amount of time allotted to the arts in elementary school represents nothing more than lipservice to their value. A substantial increase in time allotment is essential.
- There exists an urgent need for increased funding for all programs of arts education.
- While art programs met the societal and educational needs of the past, two significant developments affect art education in the future: the educational reform movement and the rapidly changing ethnic composition of student populations.

Source: *Status of Arts Education in American Public Schools. Report on a Survey*, by Charles Leonhard and the National Arts Education Research Center at the University of Illinois, 1991. Also see ERIC Document: ED338551



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