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## *Overcoming Fear*

The function of this week's articles served as a way to step out of the daily practice of art education in the classroom and observe, contemplate and reflect on major contemporary issues that are occurring in the implementation and practice of art education in the school curriculum. Some of the topics explored are the role of art teaching and making in the curriculum, issues that art teachers face in providing an art education in conjunction with cultural expectations, how art educators can promote social change, and how art education can reclaim its place as a valid form of learning and instruction within the school curriculum.

As I read the various articles this week I experienced a range of emotions. My eyes were opened to new ways of thinking about art education when reading, "The School Art Style: A Functional Analysis," by Arthur Efland (1976), whereas I felt motivated to make changes in my objectives and approaches as an art teacher after reading the respective articles by Kerry Freedman and Elizabeth Delacruz. The article that elicited perhaps the most profound emotional reaction though was David Darts' (2008), "The Art of Culture War: (Un)Popular Culture, Freedom of Expression, and Art Education." Reading this article was an eye opener and made me confront some of the issues of censorship and conservative ideology that I know exists but rarely think about from day to day. Through reading individual art teacher's experiences and loss of jobs due to the inherent nature of art making and teaching practices, I was forced to put myself in the shoes of other art teachers that have had their teaching practice placed under extreme scrutiny and devalued, and imagine what sort of attacks I could be at risk for based on the education I provide.

As artists and art teachers, we take on the role of question askers and answer seekers and educate our students on the importance of asking questions and not accepting everything we learn in schools, read in books/ newspapers/ online, or see on the news and television as the truth. We encourage our students to look at life from multiple perspectives and be actively

engaged. This practice can ultimately lead us into controversy because we expose our students to a variety of cultural issues and encourage them to become active in their investigation and be critical in vocalizing their personal, yet informed, viewpoints. As Darts explores, “ongoing arguments over the current state and future curricular direction of the field have exposed fissures in fundamental belief systems and highlighted important differences in social, political, moral and artistic values,” (p.106). Understandably, there are researchers and teachers that support a more formal approach to art education and focus on developing technique and self-expression verses others in the field of art education that support and advocate a curriculum in favor of creating socially active, aware, and democratic citizens. I view this as a reaction that some art teachers choose to take the safe road, while other art teachers are less afraid to travel down a more dangerous path. How, as an art teacher, do you choose which path to travel down when developing curriculum when the ultimate price could be having your teaching practice be scrutinized by parents, administrators and the community as being unfit for students and could lead to losing your job and career? I understand why both sides of the spectrum exist and find myself carefully choosing which paths I travel down after considering the school climate, observing the lifestyles, opinions and politics of school administrators, and evaluating the family backgrounds of the students I am teaching. After becoming informed of my audiences, I carefully consider my teaching approach and curricular objectives. I believe we have to know our audience and how they might react, but that we also have to be willing to suspend fear of how others might react in order to take advantage of the school platform art education presents in educating our youth about contemporary issues and developing active and engaged global citizens that are invested in creating social change. We have a social responsibility, as art teachers, and we cannot afford to teach in fear.

As Darts, Delacruz and Freedman all express, we have to band together as educators and use resources, such as the NAEA, to back us and support us in the aims of our curriculum. Delacruz (2011) states in her article, “The Teacher as Public Enemy #1, a Response...,” “We have our vote, our voice, our intellectual skills, our compassion, and each other in our collective endeavors to inform and shape the public debate over education,” (p. 7). Ultimately, as educators, our objectives are all for the good of humanity and not to create harm or dissonance. Somehow we need to get the administration, community, local, state and national governments to see the value of art education. This involves making radical change to the “school art style”

defined by Arthur Efland (1976), which he explains, “tells us a lot more about schools and less about students and what’s on their minds,” (p. 43). Also, as explored in the article, “Leadership in Art Education: Taking Action in Schools and Communities,” Kerry Freedman (2011) states, “Even administrators who support the arts tend to have limited acquaintance with the amount and types of learning that students accrue through their experiences with visual culture and the power of arts as an educational foundation,” (p.42). We have to use our creativity, as artists and art educators, to educate our administration, parents and community members on what our aims and objectives are through our art education programs and gain their collective support.

Maybe all of our talking and lobbying isn’t the only route to take in our efforts to become acknowledged as an important subject area in the school curriculum. As Delecruz supports, members of higher education can unite with k-12 teachers to, “refine our own tools, strategies, and resources for developing reasoned and persuasive political speech, and for tapping into influential power structures at the local and state levels,” (p.7). Perhaps as art educators, we should research the education objectives and aims of administrator curriculum. What do individuals study when becoming an administrator? Is there any part of their education that addresses the importance and learning objectives of the arts within the school curriculum? If we cannot get the superintendents, principals, headmasters, and deans to listen to us and understand our educational aims through our student artwork, than perhaps they need to be introduced to such concepts through the constructs of formal education. Perhaps we need to figure out how to communicate with others in ways that they comprehend and learn instead of trying to get others to see through our eyes. Only then, maybe, will education leaders, community members, and local, state and national government be able to fully visualize, understand, and support our curricular objectives to create social change.

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