

National Standards For Visual Arts Education

Jerome J. Hausman
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National standards for arts education have been finalized as part of the national education agenda outlined in *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, the national education legislation. This is the outcome of work done by the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations (Music, Dance, Theatre, and Visual Arts). It is part of a larger initiative involving standards setting in other academic disciplines: English, Math, Science, History, Geography, Civics, and Foreign Language.

Within the field of art education there are understandable concerns and apprehensions to be balanced against the advantages of this effort. After all, we are all aware of the unhappy consequences of standardized instruction in the arts. We, in art education, pride ourselves in the fact that the visual arts encompass differing forms and styles. Art forms range from drawings, paintings, prints, and sculpture to industrial design, product design, architecture, photography, film, video and folk arts. Creating visual forms involves a wide range of tools, techniques, and processes. Also, works of art can be seen and understood as objects of history. In addition, they can serve as sources for understanding personal and cultural values. The hope being expressed is that the standards we establish will be responsive to the nature of artistic processes as well as the qualitative dimensions involved in making critical judgments and developing historical insights. All of this is to say nothing of the importance of understanding growth and developmental factors as well as contextual circumstances within which students are learning.

There are positive considerations that should invite our active support for adopting and utilizing national standards.

- The *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* recognizes that the arts are as important to public education as other firmly established disciplines.
- Art educators have written the present standards statement! It is a “benchmark” statement that outlines the intended character and sophistication of what good education in the visual arts should achieve. The standards will be subjected to ongoing review and modification in succeeding years.
- Art educators have worked with colleagues in Music, Dance, and Theatre in establishing a general framework within which we have organized our standards. An important dialogue is now underway at the national level in which we are cross referencing educational standards for each of the arts.
- The standards are voluntary; they are not a federal mandate for schools. Each school district can choose how to use the standards. Adopting the standards will not require the adoption of a single curriculum with prescribed teaching methods or materials.
- The standards make clear that a comprehensive structured program in the visual arts is an essential part of the education of every student. When states and school districts adopt the standards they will be taking a stand for rigor and discipline in arts instruction.

- For many communities, the standards will prompt new visual arts education programs. For communities with existing programs, the standards can encourage the setting of more rigorous expectations.
- As presently proposed, the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* authorizes \$427 million in FY'94 for states to reform elementary and secondary education. Including the arts as a subject-goal for students to achieve competency is expected to have a significant impact on arts education.

The Standards for Visual Arts have been developed from a generalized perspective of what students should know and be able to do in the visual arts Grades K-4, 5-8 and 9-12. Content and achievement standards are outlined. Six content standards have been identified. They are as follows:

1. Selecting and using visual arts media, techniques, and process to communicate ideas;
2. Using knowledge of sensory elements, organizational principles, expressive features, and functions of the visual arts to communicate ideas in visual terms and identify how these characteristics and structures are used in the visual art works of others;
3. Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas to be expressed in visual terms;
4. Understanding the visual arts in "relation" to history and cultures;
5. Reflecting upon, interpreting, analyzing, and critically assessing the characteristics, qualities, processes, and merits of their work and the work of others; and,
6. Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines.

The above six are intended to serve as core content standards for **all** instruction in our elementary and secondary schools. The more specific delineations of these content areas varies depending upon students and the context for instruction. For each of the six content standards, there are more specifically articulated achievement standards. These, of course, differ in relation to developmental expectations.

At long last, education in the arts has been placed in our "national agenda". Parallel with our standards setting initiative is work being done as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a Congressionally mandated project of the National Center for Educational Statistics. A framework for a proposed 1996 Assessment of Arts Education has been completed. This framework describes and recommends an approach to arts education assessment. If adopted, it will open possibilities for alternative modes of assessment (performance measures, portfolios, student journals, etc.) more appropriate for assessing what students know and are able to do in the arts. Also, where appropriate, we would continue to use more traditional means of assessment.

For those of us who have long championed the centrality of the arts in the education of all students, this is an opportunity and challenge. We are being asked to set forth our "standards". The challenge is that of becoming clearer and more disciplined in projecting what students ought to learn and be able to do. In a recent article ("Standards and Assessment - New Initiative and Continuing Dilemmas," *Art Education*, March, 1994.) I stated: "In writing standards and designing assessment strategies, we need always keep in mind the spirit of art — an openness to ideas, a generosity of spirit, multiple perspectives and an awareness of great traditions in creating and responding" ... "In the long run, we need to keep in mind that the end in view is the realization of qualitative as well as quantitative standards in the personal experience of students and teachers" ... "The standards we write and the assessment strategies we adopt should give encouragement to teachers and communities to engage in the breadth and depth of experience afforded by the arts."

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