

LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY STRATEGIES: WHAT EVERY ART EDUCATOR SHOULD KNOW AND DO

**Dr. Bonnie Rushlow, NAEA Southeastern VP-Elect
Coordinator of Fine Arts and Professional Development
School District of Oconee County, Walhalla, SC**

The current status of arts education in our nation is somewhat uncertain. On the one hand, the inclusion of the arts in Goals 2000 legislation and the development of national arts standards have brought about a renewed sense of hope among the art education community. On the other hand, extensive cutbacks have left some school districts with little choice but to dismiss art specialists. The latter is indeed a step in the wrong direction if quality art education is to become a reality. Even with the national emphasis on arts education, schools across our nation continue to do little or nothing more than maintain their arts programs. If art teachers are serious about making art central to the educational process, they must become actively involved and diligently work toward that end. If not, their programs may dwindle or even worse, perish. With this in mind, the following strategies are offered to help art teachers improve the position and quality of art education at the local level.

YOU HAVE TO LEAD — Art educators must take the initiative to lead; no one is going to do this for you. It takes only two or three interested art teachers to get started. If art teachers sit back and wait for others in the school district to improve the quality of their programs, nothing is likely to be accomplished. Permission should be requested from the district administration and all art teachers should be invited to share in the organizational effort. Each art teacher should be given an opportunity to be involved in analyzing the needs of and setting the goals and objectives for the district's art program.

YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE YOU CAN LEAD — Art educators should adopt a positive "I think I can" attitude when dealing with administrators, other teachers, parents, students, and the community as a whole. Art teachers who focus on the negative aspects of their programs, i.e., budget cutbacks, lack of administrative support and/or proper facilities, and overcrowded classes, cannot expect positive results. Instead, they must focus on solutions and on finding ways to make their principal, school, district, and community look good.

ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO LEAD — College students, first-year art teachers, and even experienced art educators must acquire the necessary skills for working effectively with administrators and other decisionmakers. "If we are to survive, let alone flourish, as an integral part of the educational system, we must train art teachers to make decisionmakers sensitive to our contributions to the educational system" (Dunn, 1985, p. 6). Pre-service training for art education majors should include information on the role and responsibilities of school administrators. Most teachers would be more effective if they had a better understanding of what their principals' job entails.

READ THE LITERATURE — Art educators should keep up to date about the trends and issues in art education. By reading art education literature, attending seminars and conferences, and continuing to pursue other professional development opportunities, they will be better equipped to deal with problems at the local, state, and national levels. Through membership in the National Art Education Association and their state organizations, art teachers can share their knowledge and expertise with others who have similar concerns in the field of art education. Art educators can utilize NAEA publications and *Advisorys* to help administrators and others learn about the importance of the arts in education.

DO YOUR OWN RESEARCH — Art educators should conduct their own studies and publish the results of their research. "The notion of working in groups often runs counter to the traditional training art teachers receive in learning to paint, draw and create various art forms as individuals" (Hatfield, 1983, p. 49). This assumption will continue to be accepted unless art educators are made aware of the values of working together. They should submit articles to magazines such as *Arts and Activities*, *School Arts*, and *Art Education* to report their findings to the art education community at large.

LEARN NEW SKILLS — Art educators must develop skills in the art of advocacy. A study by the Getty Institute found that "political skills are among the most crucial, but neglected, instruments for fundamental reform in art education. Using these skills, advocates can generate the support and build the coalitions to press for change" (1985, p. 54). Art educators should be encouraged to make presentations at state and national conferences which address the subject of advocacy and how it can positively effect art education. Art teachers must learn proper techniques for "marketing the arts" (Dunn, p. 54) and for developing leadership skills through in-service programs and seminars.

USE THE SKILLS LEARNED — Poor advocacy is often worse than no advocacy at all. Art educators must be skillful in their attempts to advocate. Their public relations programs should provide more than visibility; they must be educationally sound as well. "Art education cannot prevent wars or heal the sick. Overstated claims are too detrimental and invented benefits are simply wrong. What is necessary is systematic, continuous dialogue with decisionmakers about the worth and place of art in the schools" (Hatfield, 1980, p. 22). Art teachers who embellish the truth will only diminish the value of art education. Public relations programs which enhance the position of art education in the schools must be put into practice.

BE A PART OF THE SCHOOL — Art educators must make contributions to the total school program if they expect support for their own programs. The art teacher can be a valuable asset in helping other teachers develop meaningful integrated experiences. With the current emphasis on computer literacy, art educators have an opportunity to become the technology leaders in their schools. Special effort should be made to focus on student learning in all programs in the school, and not on being just the school decorator and poster-maker. Volunteer for the site-based team; attend other committee meetings; be at the school table; get involved!

DEVELOP A STRONG ART CURRICULUM — Art programs must be developed, implemented, and assessed just as other academic subjects. A program that lacks scope and sequence is not worth promoting. A strong art program which parallels the National Standards for Arts Education and state and/or local frameworks will take extensive planning and organization on the part of art teachers. Art educators must seek every opportunity to strengthen, as well as to report on the status and successes of, their programs to principals, superintendents, and school boards. This requires more than merely having an annual art exhibit.

MAKE THE SYSTEM WORK FOR YOU — Art educators must find ways to reach and persuade political decisionmakers as they make policies which affect art education. "An art teacher alone cannot easily reach a state governor or a U.S. Congressman or have an impact on the state department of education or the state legislature—but the state art education association, working in close cooperation with other organizations outside the profession, can become a powerful force. Policymakers will listen! This is political action. Political action requires careful planning and a united effort—often along with other organizations, in order to reach the policymakers and help them realize the values of art education and enlist their support of present programs and needed changes" (NAEA, 1972, p. 26).

As art educators work together to put these strategies into practice, "energies are economized, efforts are maximized, visibility is magnified, and support is mobilized" (Saunders, 1979, p. 13). Art teachers can make a difference if they are willing to put forth the effort. Making art education basic to the curriculum in the nation's schools will take an enormous amount of work.

References

- Dunn, P. C. (1985). Building support for the visual arts: Fifteen ways to improve your program's position in the educational system. In *Promoting School Art Programs*. Reston, VA: NAEA.
- Hatfield, T. A. (1983). *An art teacher in every school?* Columbia, SC: Whitehall Publishers.
- Hatfield, T. A. (1980, December), South Carolina: How did it happen? *Art Education*, 33(7), 22-23.
- Getty Center for Education in the Arts. (1985). *Beyond creating: The place for art in America's schools*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.
- National Art Education Association. (1972, November). *Public relations for art education*. Summary of ideas presented at the NAEA Miniconference in Washington, DC.
- Rushlow, B. B. (1993). Art teachers as leaders: Organizing to promote quality art education in the schools. *SCAEA Perspective*, Summer Newsletter, Columbia, SC.
- Saunders, K. (1979, September). Arts up front: Approaches to advocacy in the secondary school. *Art Education*, 35(5), 9-13.