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Mary Ellen Connelly

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PROFESSIONALIZATION AND CHANGE IN ART EDUCATION

Mary Ellen Connelly

Professionalization is a little understood and relatively undeveloped concept in art education. My interest in professionalization evolved as I became increasingly aware of issues in art education and my potential to change my public school art program through a variety of professional behaviors. Two aspects of professionalization - college preparation and in-service workshops - were receiving much attention in recent educational reports. Neither of these aspects have been adequate in producing quality art education programs in the majority of the nation's schools (NAEP, 1981). Other aspects of professionalization have been more productive to my professional development, such as attending professional conferences, reading professional literature, joining professional organizations, taking graduate course work in art education, and contacting art educators at various levels and in a variety of roles.

A closer look at the definitions and meanings of the concepts of profession, professional, professionalism, and professionalization in sociological literature has sharpened my perspective regarding the problem of change in art education.

There is much ado about change in art education. The 1980's appear to be a revival of many of the ideas initiated in art education in the 1960's, based on the educational philosophy of Bruner and translated into art education theory and curriculum by Barkan and others. Currently, the National Art Education Association, the National Endowment of the Arts, The Getty Trust, a substantial number of art educators and others are joining forces to improve the quality of art education in the schools by integrating the disciplines of aesthetics, art criticism, art history, and art production.

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Past efforts at art educational reform have failed to significantly impact art programs nationwide. Most programs are "unadulterated studio programs justified by invoking the icon of creativity," (Lanier, 1975). Explanations for past failures are numerous and varied, but none centers upon art teachers' lack of access to the underlying theories and research related to art educational change. If there has been very little change in practice, it is not due to a lack of ideas, research, or interest in change.

I believe it is due to a low level of professionalization among art teachers. A low level of professionalization infers limited access to the channels through which knowledge is disseminated. A preliminary glance at the relatively small percentage of art teachers involved in professional organizations, subscribing to professioanl literature, and attending professional conferences suggests a low level of professionaliztion within art education. One of the major tasks of my thesis is to construct a theory of professionalization in art education. Professionalization can be thought of as the extent to which members of a given occupation exhibit certain identifiable professional behaviors.

My structure for professionalization consists of nine components, with a sub-structure providing a continuum of high level to low level professional involvement. Following is an outline of this structure:

A Model of Professionalization in Art Education

1. Pre-college experiences and the decision to seek a career in art education
2. College art education preparation
3. Occupation/Career levels
4. Post-graduate work in art education
5. Membership in professional organizations
6. Attendance at professional conferences
7. Reading of professional literature

8. Contacts with art education related professionals

9. Contributions to the art education profession

Individual art teachers' levels of professionalization can be measured using these criteria. A method developed by Kreitler and Kreitler (1976) which elicits beliefs about self, others, norms, and goals has been shown to be reliable as an indicator of behavioral intent.

A second task of this thesis is to assess the cognitive orientation of art teachers toward a comprehensive curriculum which incorporates aesthetics, art criticism, art history, and art production. This relationship is valid if curriculum is the means by which theory is translated into practice. The purpose is to determine whether there is a relationship between professionalization and change. It is expected that the higher the level of professionalization, the greater the degree of openness to change.

Conclusion

If there is a low level of professionalization in art education it is possible that the chances for significant change are also low. Change in art education in the nation's schools is not likely to occur if art teachers do not have access to the current information about the problem - its goals, objectives, and methods of implementation. We must strive to understand all of the possible ways in which practitioners access ideas and research. Only then can we cultivate the channels of communication between theory and practice.

Professionalization is the concept which encompasses the entire scope of professional behavior, and unites all of the members of a given profession. It is hoped that this study will stimulate further research into the complex areas of professionalization and change, both within and without the field of art education.

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