

Identifying Factors Related to Guidance Counselors' Attitudes Toward Visual Arts Programs in Public Schools

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**IDENTIFYING FACTORS RELATED TO GUIDANCE COUNSELORS'
ATTITUDES TOWARD VISUAL ARTS PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Pamela Gill

One of the ongoing assumptions in art education is that guidance counselors have a negative attitude toward art. They often encourage specific types of students (e.g. low achievers) to enroll in high school art programs as Chapman (1982) points out in **Instant Art, Instant Culture**. She suggests that counselors recommend art as a suitable elective for unruly students or for those who are not enthusiastic about academic work. Chapman maintains that counselors make these recommendations believing art is therapeutic, i.e. art is for students who are abnormally troubled.

The assumption that guidance counselors have a negative attitude toward art has a history. This point of view was first expressed by leading art educators twenty years ago. In 1965, Silverman and Lanier found that many art teachers were finding a disproportionate number of emotionally disturbed youths assigned to their elective classes. The students appeared in the art class because their counselor believed that participation in art activities would somehow help to resolve or alleviate their emotional problems (Silverman and Lanier, 1965). These authors pointed out that counselors were supported in this view by their observation of what they considered typical art-class practices. They argued that counselors misinterpreted the easy-going, happy, manipulation-of-materials program as being one in which a permissive climate prevailed. Also addressing the issue of guidance practices in regards to visual arts programs during this time, Barkan stated:

Guidance practices in programming student study schedules

tend to discourage or even exclude enrollment in visual art courses. The academically able students are led to believe that study in the visual arts will contribute little if anything to their attention to the so-called solid subjects, where proficiency will prepare them more readily for admission to the colleges of their choice.

(1962, p. 43)

Eisner (1974) and Chapman maintain that these fundamental attitudes, which are thoughtlessly perpetuated in education, have detrimental influence on the high school art program. Such attitudes promote the belief that the study of art is unnecessary. Chapman contends that many young people graduate from high school with the impression that art is undemanding, unless one has talent, and irrelevant to contemporary life, unless one has the wealth and leisure to indulge in it. She goes on to say that since the majority of young people complete their formal education with a high school diploma, school is one of the few possible places for them to become acquainted with the visual arts. However, she adds, art continues to be regarded as a "soft" nonacademic elective by school counselors. She states:

There are two predictable features of high school programs. First, the student who is college-bound will not be encouraged to take art electives. The student who is academically oriented may prefer to avoid art classes, especially if they are perceived as easy or if the classes attract students who have a reputation for unruliness. In either instance, counselors in high schools feel justified in steering the academically gifted student away from art classes. (1982, p. 76)

The primary purpose of this study was twofold: 1. to describe factors related to guidance counselors' attitudes toward visual arts programs in public schools; and, 2. to investigate whether counselors attitudes toward visual arts programs in public schools can be

explained and/or predicted from a combination of factors, i.e. counselors' attitudes toward visual arts programs in their school, counselors' attitudes toward visual arts careers, counselors' knowledge of visual arts careers, and counselors' previous instruction in visual arts (the main independent variables). In addition, alternative independent variables were examined. They were counselors' participation in visual arts activities, educational level, age group, gender, and number of years experience as counselors. Demographic information was gathered to aid in the interpretation of data.

Method

Design

In conducting this study, ex post facto research was utilized. Kerlinger (1973) defined ex post facto research as:

empirical inquiry in which the scientist does not have direct control of independent variables because their manifestations have already occurred or because they are inherently not manipulable. Inferences about relations among variables are made without direct intervention, from concomitant variation of independent and dependent variables. (p. 379)

In this case, data were gathered using a survey instrument. The design of the study was the one-shot case study. Gay (1981) defined the one-shot case study as the investigation of a group conducted at one point in time.

Subjects

Subjects were randomly selected from a list of high school counselors in Ohio by computer-generated random numbers ranging from 1 to 3335. The first 327 numbers generated were used to identify numbered subjects. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) have found that the

sample size required to be representative of the factors related to 3335 guidance counselors' attitudes relative to visual arts programs in 327. All counselors whose number corresponded to the first 327 numbers generated were surveyed.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study can be summarized into seven questions. They are:

1. Are guidance counselors' attitudes toward visual arts programs in public school related to their previous instruction in art?
2. Are guidance counselors' attitudes toward visual arts programs in public schools related to their attitudes toward visual arts programs in their particular school?
3. Are guidance counselors' attitudes toward visual arts programs in public schools related to their attitudes toward visual arts careers?
4. Are guidance counselors' attitudes toward visual arts programs in public schools related to their knowledge of visual arts careers?
5. Are there other factors related to guidance counselors' attitudes toward visual arts programs in public schools, e.g. age group, gender, number of years experience as a counselor, educational level, and frequency in participation in visual arts activities?
6. If we know the factors related to guidance counselors' attitudes toward visual arts programs in public schools, can we then explain and/or predict counselors' attitudes toward visual arts programs in public schools?
7. Will demographic information (e.g. type of counselor, type of high school where counselor is employed, setting of high school where counselor is employed, type of undergraduate institution counselor attended, type of graduate institution attended, and counselors' grading of the quality of visual arts instruction in their school) allow for better interpretation of the data?

Data Collection

The instrument, accompanied by a cover letter and a stamped return envelope, was mailed to each counselor included in the sample. All mailings were to the school address of each counselor.

A code number was assigned to each counselor and placed on the instrument for follow-up purposes. Two weeks after the first mailing, a postcard follow-up was sent to all subjects. Three weeks after the original mailing, a second questionnaire, accompanied by a follow-up letter and a stamped return envelope, was mailed to counselors that had not responded. Ten days later was the termination date for receiving questionnaires.

Data Analysis

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation will be used in order to explain the factors related to guidance counselors' attitudes toward visual arts programs in public schools. A correlation coefficient will be computed between two variables from the research questions. Therefore, nine correlations will be computed. Frequency counts and mean scores for each type of demographic variable will be computed. Frequency counts and mean scores for each type of demographic variable will be computed to allow better interpretation of data.

Regression analysis will be used to find a linear combination of the independent variables that best predict scores on the dependent variables. Regression analysis will allow identification of the independent variables that contribute significantly to the prediction of dependent variable (Ary, et al, 1985). Therefore, the important factors related to guidance counselors' attitudes toward visual arts programs in public schools will be identified. Results of the data analysis will be provided at a later date.

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