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J. Ulbricht

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Helping Students Contemplate a Career in Art

BY J. ULBRICHT

Art teachers often ignore teaching about careers in art for a variety of reasons. Some teachers find that they are too busy. Some think that career education is not appropriate for the age of their students, while other teachers believe that it is beyond the scope of art education.

Most art teachers believe that art education is for everyone and schooling just for talented, career-oriented students is not consistent with the goals and objectives of art education. This was probably the rationale of the National Education Association's Committee of Ten on Drawing in 1899 when it included objectives such as "to prepare students for industry is purely incidental" and "the development of professional artists is not the aim of art education" (Klar, Winslow, & Kirby, 1933, p. 27). The unwritten objective of providing art instruction for each student assumed that art instruction should be of benefit to everyone. If art was just taught for a limited number of fine and applied artists, it would certainly be considered a frill and not worthy of public support.

Although not consistent with the goals of the Committee of Ten and those of many art teachers, art career education has been a desired instructional outcome of art education

periodically. In the 1850s, William Minifie of Philadelphia, and later Walter Smith of Boston, saw art and specifically drawing as an aid to industry. At the time educators and industrial leaders perceived that drawing instruction was instrumental for the development of competitive manufactured goods.

Later, after the economic crash of 1929 and the Great Depression of the 1930s, Haggerty (1935), then Dean of Education at the University of Minnesota, advocated an applied art focus for art education. In Haggerty's Owatonna Project, the curriculum included design instruction for interior spaces, landscapes, and architecture. Haggerty's project had positive public support since it was perceived to have practical benefits for everyone.

Although not stated as a goal of art education, many elementary and secondary art teachers continue to prepare students as potential artists in spite of the fact that some former art students initially find it difficult to support themselves from their efforts. To broaden the scope of art education, many art educators during the past 20 years emphasized education in the disciplines of art including studio, art history, aesthetics, and criticism. This emphasis often excluded the application of artistic principles for home, industry, community, and student needs. Although career education is a growing concern of some legislators and industrial leaders, art educator Geahigan (1981) found only 40 U.S. school art programs that emphasized career education in 1980. Since that time, it appears that education about and for careers in art has not been a major concern of authors whose work appeared in *Art Education* and *Studies in Art Education*.

Today, art educators should rethink their visual art career goals for several

Advanced students who have learned a lot about art often have little knowledge of how to use their knowledge in an art career. To keep students from becoming discouraged or making inappropriate career decisions, art teachers should help students to see how they can use their art knowledge and skills once they leave school.

reasons. With growing opportunities to study art, many art students are learning to appreciate it and consequently seek ways to use their art knowledge and skills in future art vocations. Advanced students who have learned a lot about art often have little knowledge of how to use their knowledge in an art career. To keep students from becoming discouraged or making inappropriate career decisions, art teachers should help students to see how they can use their art knowledge and skills once they leave school. Art educators should consider such information a part of the body of knowledge in art.

Rationale to support art career education at all grade levels can be seen in the number of people who claim to be artists and the growing opportunities for people with art skills. According to the

U.S. Bureau of the Census, there were 1.8 million artists in the United States in 1990, a 127% increase from the previous census of 1970 (The National Endowment for the Arts, 1996). With the rate of increase in art employment one can assume that the number of employed artists will continue to expand in the future.

Further rationale to support art career education can be seen in the fact that the visual is replacing the linguistic as our primary means of communication (Mirzoeff, 1999). Since the demand for visual imagery has increased and more visual imagery is available to view, one can assume that there will be more visual employment opportunities in the future. According to Tufte (1983), the need for individuals who can improve the visual display of quantitative information will continue to accelerate.

Many companies are looking for individuals who can provide creative visual solutions to their problems (Boston, 1996). Once industrial leaders establish the need for artistic solutions, they often find it easier to employ artists with creative problem-solving skills than train technicians to think like artists.

With increasing production, consumption, interest, and employment potential in the visual arts, art educators should make every effort to develop career education programs especially for students at the middle and secondary levels who are in the process of developing their self-images and deciding on future educational objectives. With many art and art-related vocations from which to choose, teachers should provide art students with enough knowledge so they can make intelligent choices.

The reasons listed here support a renewed interest in art career education, thus it is the purpose of this paper to expand the dialogue about career education and make suggestions for career-oriented activities, units, and courses to better prepare students for life in art beyond the classroom.

Numerous books (Grant, 1991, 1994; Haubenstock, 1988; Ito, 1993; Lazzari, 1997; and Michels, 1983) are available to help readers learn about art career development. In such books well-meaning authors have explored topics for beginning and advanced artists who want to improve their knowledge of visual art careers. Because many of the books noted here are not appropriate for younger students who have years of schooling to complete, teachers need to design their own lessons for students who may not have considered all the art career possibilities.

Procedure

When designing a series of lessons for specific grades, teachers should first consider the goals of art career education. For a comprehensive career education program, students should know about the (1) variety of art careers, (2) multidimensional nature of art careers, (3) education and skills

required, (4) possibilities for growth, and (5) the interrelationships of various career options. With this information students would not only know about art and its creation, but avenues for future involvement in the many worlds of art.

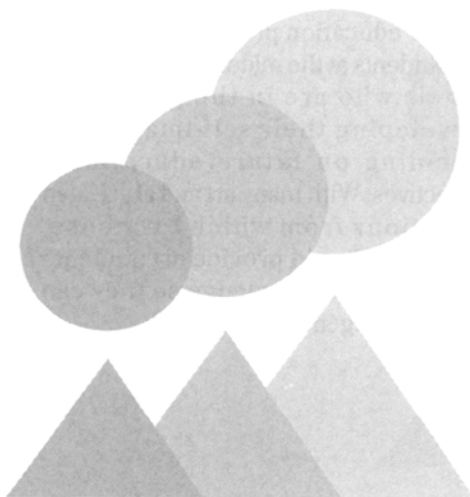
● **Learning About Different Art Careers.** With regard to art vocations, art students often begin by considering the possibility of being an artist. Only after some study do they learn about other related art careers. While there are many types of artists who produce art (e.g., painters, sculptors, and illustrators), there are also a variety of art vocations that support art (e.g., art teachers, critics, art historians, arts administrators) and use art for a variety of purposes (e.g., art therapists, architects, and city planners). Teachers should inform students that individuals in the later two groups probably outnumber those in the first group.

● **Multidimensional Nature of Careers in Art.** After learning about a variety of art careers, art educators can teach students about the many skills required for each art vocation. Careers such as multimedia specialists, arts administrators, entertainment lawyers, computer artists, landscape architects, museum educators, conservators, and

book illustrators require comprehensive art knowledge in addition to relevant competencies in music, drama, business, social studies, programming, botany, art history, and literature, respectively. Because many practicing artists are also independent contractors they may need additional skills in advertising, public relations, and accounting. Teachers should help students understand the multidimensional nature of most vocations in art.

● **Art Aptitude and Education Required.** Having learned about the multidimensional nature of many art careers, teachers can help students match personal skills, abilities, and values with specific art vocations and consider the options that are suitable for various individuals. Not all jobs are appropriate for everyone, and to make intelligent choices and grow in a profession teachers need to help students analyze their skills and abilities and make students aware of future educational opportunities suitable for a variety of art and art-related vocations.

● **Growth Potential.** In addition to looking at aptitudes and skills required for specific vocations, teachers should also motivate students to learn about how people grow in their careers. Like



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most people, individuals in art are in a state of becoming (Rogers, 1961) and to succeed in an art career they must continually learn new skills. Artists and others in related art careers evolve as they look for inspiration, new ideas, and concepts.

Beyond exploring possibilities for personal growth in art vocations, teachers should encourage students to look at how various vocations might expand in the future. Here students should consider the visual impact of new technological innovations and resulting jobs that have been created. While some would try to avoid contact with technological, media, and entertainment industries, most people cannot escape exposure to them. Visual images and communication through new technologies—or what some call our visual culture (Mirzoeff, 1999)—will become more accessible and pervasive in the future. Since innovations such as the personal computer, Internet, television, digital camera, and cellular phone will become more integrated, affordable, compact, and visually interactive in the future, teachers should prepare students for careers that incorporate new technologies.

Most technological innovations are designed to improve the quality and quantity of visual and graphic information for business and government. With the increasing development and reliance on visual information, there will be a growing need for more graphic artists, visual software engineers, and multi media specialists. Both applied and fine artists with technical skills will inevitably develop concepts, formats, and visual representations that are unknown today.

With the creation and consumption of more information, advertisement, and entertainment, there will also be a growing need for people who can design educational programs to assist in the

education of students who are accustomed to learning almost everything from the media. Currently, educational publishers and web designers are busy producing visually exciting learning programs and virtual books for students and schools. Educators and legislators are making it possible for more students to learn with the aid of portable computers and the digital media process.

With regard to education, we should not overlook the need for teachers and critics who can interpret the changing visual culture. Because of the pervasiveness of visual information, the media revolution is transforming society without our knowledge (Duncum, 1999). Teachers should encourage students to consider careers that analyze and critique how visual symbols and products are produced and how they portray the concerns and interests of investors, designers, and consumers.

● **Purpose, Functions, and Interrelationships.** Obviously every job has its purpose and function. Artists want to document, excite, stimulate, and be expressive, among other things. Computer graphic designers are interested in the presentation of knowledge in an informative and appealing manner. Teachers want to present information so that others can enjoy what they have come to know. Having studied the variety of art careers, some students might think that the applied technological art vocations are more plentiful, lucrative, and interesting than other art vocations.

Although technological art vocations can be exciting, teachers need to help students understand the growing interrelationship between fine and applied artists. Wayne Thiebaud, for example, was a commercial artist before he started producing art that was exhibited in galleries and museums. Many contemporary artists (e.g., Roy

Lichtenstein, Roger Brown, Keith Haring, and Peter Saul) created art by borrowing ideas from popular imagery. The author (Ulbricht, 1976) documented an artist who used his photographic skills to produce “bread and butter,” corporate, and personal work almost simultaneously. Graphic designers often secure conceptual and stylistic ideas from the work of fine artists. Many fine artists use newly developed commercial art techniques and technologies. While some art teachers may resist getting overly concerned with certain careers in art, open-minded teachers should be able to see the interrelationship of different art vocations.

Suggestions For Teachers

1. Many of the goals for art career lessons outlined above can be realized if teachers begin with a comprehensive definition of art and ask students to investigate art vocations in the community. With a broad definition of art, teachers can ask students to name community members who have been instrumental in the creation of paintings, posters, buildings, gardens, critical reviews, and art-related activities. To learn about the variety of art careers that are available, teachers can invite individuals with art vocations to give class presentations. The author has found that computer artists, architects, graphic designers, gallery owners, critics, and arts administrators are more than willing to share their insights with students. Visiting speakers can talk about their training, how they started, what kept them inspired, and how their careers developed. The teacher should videotape each presentation for reuse in the future.

2. With the teacher's guidance, more advanced students could learn about art vocations through personal interviews with community members. For this activity, teachers should outline for students the kind of information that is expected. Separate pages on the interviewee's career objectives, development, environment, tools, and philosophy, plus definitions of unfamiliar words encountered in the interview process, could be required in each student's final report. With more time, teachers could help high school students find individuals to shadow during an entire day when school is not in session. Learning about work on the job differs from learning about simple job descriptions.
3. To help students investigate alternative art careers, teachers should encourage students to play detective and think about individuals who created objects and images that are seen in the immediate environment or through mass communication. Through personal research in the library or via the Internet, teachers can help students learn about individuals who created identified images.
4. Today new technological innovations are producing multiple forms of visual imagery that one can readily find in every home and community. To motivate students and explore employment opportunities in industries that use new technologies, the teacher could investigate and schedule field trips for students to television studios, publishing firms, and advertising agencies that use or produce visual imagery.

5. To help students discover and match personal strengths with future art vocations, teachers can use the results of preference tests, personal essays, interviews, and observations. Through storytelling (Zurmuehlen, 1987) and reflective journals (Stout, 1993), teachers can help students discover latent sources of inspiration for future vocational endeavors.

Conclusion

Although teaching about art careers and preparing students for specific art vocations has not been a readily stated concern of art education during the past 100 years, awareness of student needs and the many worlds of art may help art educators rethink the goals and objectives of art education to include more of an emphasis on career education. With good intentions, art educators have resisted the production-line corporate model in favor of humanistic education. However, we cannot ignore the expansion of art knowledge, visual culture, and needs of our students who are contemplating their future endeavors. If teachers design lessons with some of the suggestions outlined here, students will be better prepared for their continued education and lives in art beyond the classroom.

J. Ulbricht is Chair of the Art Education/ Visual Art Studies Division in the Department of Art and Art History, The University of Texas at Austin. E-mail: julbricht@mail.utexas.edu

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