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## Teacher Leadership in Art Education Preparation

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*In this essay, I set forth arguments for including teacher leadership in art education preparation in order to empower emerging professional art educators with the skills necessary for teaching content that engages contemporary visions of art education. An analysis of relevant literature suggests that art educators have begun to examine the importance of leadership in art education preparation. My essay discusses goals and pedagogical practices for inclusion of leadership as content for art teacher preparation. Discussion includes goals that will empower future art teachers with strategies I have found to be useful in varying educational contexts. As I argue here, these strategies must be informed by a vision that embraces contemporary socio-cultural theories that will require careful adaptation to current pre-K–12 school cultures.*

We have all seen it. Look into a beginning art education student's eyes after introducing her to curricular theory that advocates cultural and social theory as central to making meaning in art. She is excited, yes, but I will never forget when one of my students blurted out: "What, you can teach *this* out *there*?" Her question implied that she already knew what many of us, with years spent in the public schools, know: Schools can be conservative, highly political environments, where value is placed on tradition, and change is a difficult and complex undertaking.

Over 15 years ago, I wrote my dissertation on teacher leadership (Cera, 1998). I find myself now in an art education preparation program asking many of the same questions regarding the benefits teacher leadership could bring to our field. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, advocacy was thought to be

important. Advocacy at that time was largely concerned with promoting school art programs because doing so would bring about aesthetically enlightened and culturally informed people. But art education in the 21st century now endeavors to reshape society and foster a critically engaged citizenry. For such a transformation to occur, I argue here that pre-service art education programs of study need to move beyond mere advocacy. They need to teach leadership, and teach it directly. My own students, future teachers, always trade looks of surprise on the day I say: “Welcome to government work.” They have little understanding at that time, of the political complexities of this profession and the role that leadership skills will play in their success as future teachers. As their teacher, I am determined to empower them with knowledge about and skills in teacher leadership.

### Why Teacher Leadership?

University-based art educators advocating contemporary visions of art education curricula, whether influenced by visual culture or the myriad social justice orientations with which we concern ourselves, should understand that we are likely asking our students to begin their practice by leading a cultural change in their school. Many art education theorists connect school change to cultural change, advocating for the creation of an entirely new culture (Darts, 2008; Fay, 1992; Glatthorn, 1992; Lieberman, 1992). For example, Stuhr (2003) described the art education curriculum at her university as a course of study emphasizing the importance of cultural and social context in curriculum development. Bain, Newton, Kuster, and Milbrandt (2010) further asserted: “If novice teachers do believe in going beyond teaching studio techniques, then they must learn how to advocate for and lead curricular changes from within their school districts” (p. 243). Stuhr (2003) observed: “Yet when our students get out into the field for student teaching experiences and/or take their first teaching job, often something happens to them that seems to eradicate this knowledge base” (p. 305). Acknowledging the power of the culture of schools to initiate novices into current practice and thus stifle change, Stuhr (2003) explained:

Even when pre-service and in-service elementary and art students and teachers saw the value of the social and cultural curriculum that I was having them investigate and design, they were leery about my judgment on what was appropriate for implementation in schooling. Some felt the art teachers in the field knew more in this regard and felt that *it was the new teachers' duty to fit in by doing what has been done before, because inevitably these would be the standards, whether written or implied, to which they would be held accountable.* (p. 312; emphasis added)

Similarly, Bain et al. (2010) found: “Yet it is clear that when novice teachers transition to the public school system, they are quickly asked to assimilate into the culture and maintain the procedures and content that contributes to the status quo” (p. 243).

The institutional culture of a school is a tremendously powerful force, and leadership skills are foundational to attempting school change or reform. Often, the novice art educator faces a school community that has grown used to traditional studio art experiences that diverge widely from the sort of critical theory-oriented practice now being encouraged in many college and university art education preparatory programs. Hence, beginning art educators find themselves in situations where they may desire to become agents of change in their own schools, but in which they are encouraged to take the path of least resistance. Becoming enculturated into outmoded practices conflicts with and unravels their social-change-oriented preparation. While teacher leadership education endeavors empower practitioners to become agents of change (Thurber & Zimmerman, 2002), clearly, resisting the pressures of school culture is an intricate task added to the already daunting challenges faced by most novice teachers.

Real-world teacher leadership skills are acquired through on-the-job experience (Cera, 1998), yet novices are the most susceptible to resistance and enculturation from the onset of their time in real schools (as opposed to hypothetical schools that are talked about in pre-service courses). This is where pre-service education becomes particularly important. In my own teaching, early exposure to teacher leadership helped me resist the sort of enculturation discussed by Stuhr and by Bain et al. I posit several contentions here. First, pedagogies of teacher leadership can enhance the ability of novice art educators to navigate the political terrain of schooling successfully. Second, our students should not have to wait for on-the-job training or mentoring in order to practice and learn these skills. Third, the ability to lead curricular reform is only one of the many potential benefits of teacher leadership, but has perhaps the most far-reaching benefit in terms of its potential for creating real change in public school art teaching. And fourth, teacher leadership training should be included as an element of art education preparation in pre-service programs of study. Before examining a pedagogy of teacher leadership, it seems crucial to understand various positions about leadership and teacher leadership present in art education discourse.

### What Is Teacher Leadership in the Classroom and in the Larger Institutional Culture?

Teacher leaders are classroom practitioners who collaborate throughout the school and community to guide and facilitate improvement and transformation. For the

purpose of my essay, the improvement under consideration is the local implementation of socially or culturally centered art curricula. Teacher leadership is a particular vein of educational leadership. Only specific kinds of leadership express as teacher leadership, and a particular leadership style characterizes it. As members of a collegial profession, educators often hold egalitarian ethics that value collaborative leadership above directive styles. The definition of teacher leadership specifically excludes top-down administrative school leadership. But although hierarchy and power do not characterize teacher leadership, understanding them is essential.

The teacher leadership movement got its start in the 1980s in the literature of general education and school reform (Lieberman 1988a, 1988b, 1992). The concept of teacher leadership evolved from early definitions based on teacher roles and emphasis on teachers' instructional expertise and student achievement. Wasley (1992) provided a popular definition that focused on relationships with peers as well as students: "Teacher leadership is defined as influencing and engaging colleagues toward improved practice" (p. 21). The reference to *improving practice* in Wasley's (1992) definition provides for an element of leading *change* or *reform*. This emphasis on *colleagues* is of particular importance to art educators who are reconstructing their curricula and who may need to incite curricular change in their school community. We do not have to undertake these changes alone. We need to reach out to colleagues.

The literature on teacher leadership is strongly related to the notion of professionalizing teaching. Teacher leadership theorists are interested in empowering teachers and envision them in charge of their own profession (Brandt, 1989; Fay, 1992; Livingston, 1992; Maeroff, 1988). This aspect of the scholarship on teacher leadership complements research in art education regarding the potential of critical theory and cultural pedagogy to work toward the empowerment of students. Unfortunately, the transformative agenda of critical theory has largely ignored the emancipation of teachers in favor of an emphasis on the emancipation of their students (Cera, 1998). It is logical to assume that empowered teachers would be in a more advantageous position to work toward student empowerment.

### A Snapshot of Leadership Discourse in Art Education

In order to examine how art education theorists have discussed leadership, I conducted a search for relevant literature from two different electronic databases. I looked for the term *leadership* in the text of articles in *Studies in Art Education* and in *Art Education* (the two main academic journals of the National Art Education Association). I analyzed and coded 100 published essays according to the type of leadership discussed by the author. After the initial cull of completely unrelated articles, 65 studies remained for my analysis. Many articles were eliminated because

the only mention of leadership was in the title of a journal in the references section. Of those remaining, 23 essays dealt substantively with leadership in an institutional, organizational, or policy/advocacy sense. But these studies fall outside of my definition of *transformative teacher leadership* posited in this essay. I found that while many authors mention or call for leadership, there is little specific scholarship on teacher leadership in the preparation of art teachers, and almost no empirical studies of leadership *in situ*, in actual classrooms or schools. Only 17 authors dealt with leadership as it manifested in the schools. Among these, only two authors (Keifer-Boyd, 2007; Sandell, 1991) wrote about leadership in a curricular or pedagogical context directed at students *and* their teachers. Notably, Freedman (2011) distinguished advocacy as activity to support and maintain programs, observing that “leadership enables change, improvement, and the cultivation of new ideas” (p. 41). In summary, art education scholars have been concerned with leadership in one way or another for decades. However, with a few notable exceptions (Boyer, 1995; Freedman, 2007; Hoffman, 1980; Irwin, 1998; Reisberg, 2008; Thurber & Zimmerman, 2002), almost all of the essays mention or describe leadership issues in art education but without providing empirical or in-depth analysis (see Figure 1).

#### *Leadership by and for Practicing Art Educators*

Of the small number of studies that dealt directly with teacher leadership for art educators, I found 12 articles that discussed developing teacher leadership in the context of in-service art educators. The emphasis in these articles was on efforts

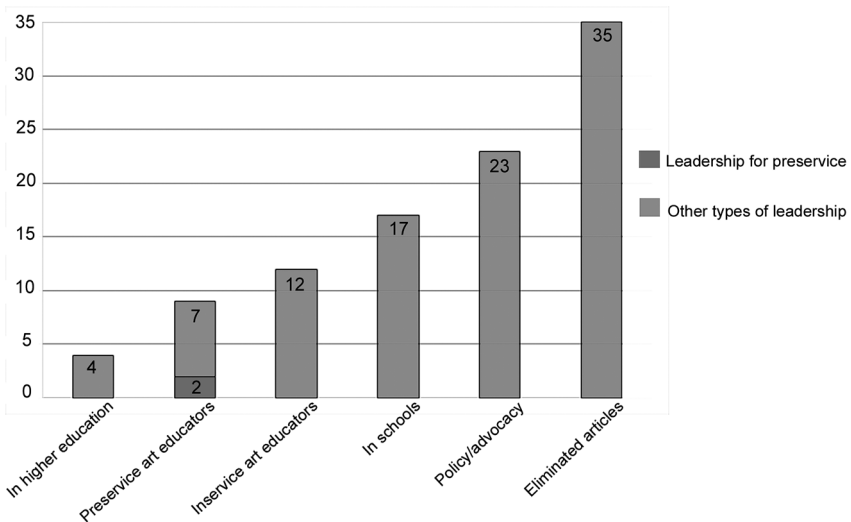


Figure 1. Types of leadership in a survey of 100 articles.

aimed at policy influence. Two of these examined leadership in depth (Irwin, 1998; Thurber & Zimmerman, 2002). Thurber and Zimmerman (2002) documented the actions and products of personal and professional empowerment manifested in various examples of leadership in the public arena. These public practices included diverse examples of leadership and teacher leadership: exhibitions; curriculum development; publishing; outcomes of effective networking and advocacy such as acting as an agent of change; mentoring; promoting high professional standards; and assuming institutionalized, administrative, or other leadership roles (Thurber & Zimmerman, 2002). These examples help practitioners envision leadership and apply it in their own contexts. Elaborating on the need for leadership in art education, Rita Irwin (1998) reviewed various forms of leadership including transformational leadership and feminist leadership. She concluded: "Art education needs teacher-leaders who are willing to form communities, or carnations, of practice. Art education also needs teacher-leaders who are willing to reincarnate, grow and change, *to be empowered to challenge and create new visions of practice*" (Irwin, 1998, p.50; emphasis added).

#### *Leadership in the Preparation of Art Educators*

Art education theorists discussed leadership development as a part of the preparation of art teachers in only nine essays. For example, Hoffman (1980) observed that art educators were not taught leadership skills:

In fact most art education curricula, courses in administration and supervision and textbooks in art education, and most leaders in the field, talk only in generalities about leadership (the word leadership is not listed in the table of contents or index of ten leading texts in art education). (p. 22)

Only two authors, Freedman (2007), and Reisberg (2008), discussed leadership as a means to empower pre-service students to create the conditions necessary to be able to implement a curriculum that may not fit into the cultural expectations in which they find themselves as beginning teachers. Reisberg (2008) proposed a place-based pedagogy and advocated that art educators should be well versed in a list of nine suggested areas beyond the typical art education curriculum. She included leadership skills in two of these suggested areas. One of Freedman's (2007) central points was that leadership is a critical component of professionalism in this field. Freedman concluded: "This means that teacher educators must assume the responsibility to act as leaders and to transform pre-service and in-service programs to prepare teacher leaders. These changes call for a dramatic shift in the focus of professional program planning" (p. 212).

Herein lies the problem of my essay. My study located only two articles, out of 100 published papers from the main journals of the National Art Education As-

sociation, that examined in any detail the need for developing teacher leadership skills in pre-service art educators as a means toward empowering them to implement their curricula in their classrooms (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The fact that we deal sparingly with teacher leadership for art education students is also substantiated by my past research (Cera, 1998), and I believe we are making a serious error of omission in this regard.

## Recommendations for Pedagogy of Teacher Leadership

### *Art Teacher Leadership Knowledge Base and Goals for Instruction*

A critical pedagogy of teacher leadership in pre-service art education should include instruction in the components of the teacher leadership knowledge base. The following goals also serve as targets for my own teaching. I aim for my students to understand the skills underlying successful collaboration; issues surrounding the professionalization of teachers; the decision-making structure of schools and the ability to identify the major stakeholders in the process; group process dynamics and facilitating group decision making; and the benefits of appropriating cultural capital (Cera, 1998). Many of these skills are familiar to veteran educators. Of particular interest to me is the concept of *cultural capital* and its place in my instruction. McLaren (1989) explained cultural capital as follows:

The concept of cultural capital, made famous by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, refers to the general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed on from one generation to another. Cultural capital represents ways of talking, acting, modes of style, moving, socializing, forms of knowledge, language practices, and values. (p. 190)

Appropriating cultural capital by immersing oneself in the knowledge base related to the issue at hand is an important tool in the teacher leader's skill set. Art educators, who are able to understand budget decision-making processes, curriculum adoption processes, or the currents of theory in the practices of general education position themselves to enter these processes and conversations seamlessly. They may thus reduce the amount of "otherness" often experienced by "specialists" in the schools. By helping art education students to understand that, on occasion, they need to expand their awareness and their knowledge to areas outside of art education, we help them increase their own agency.

### *Doorways and Opportunities*

Art educators in higher education pre-service programs of study can include instruction on teacher leadership within the existing pre-service curriculum. As mentioned earlier, an emphasis on emancipative education in critical theory and



cultural pedagogy provides a conceptual fit with issues of empowering and professionalizing teachers. In my experience, rethinking the content of courses in art education curriculum development at the undergraduate level to include introduction of the basics of critical theory, has provided my students with a lexicon to employ as we examine the issues connected to teacher leadership. Providing varying foci for the students' early observational field experiences related to the goals and components of the teacher leadership knowledge base has resulted in lively class conversations regarding the real-life situations they encounter in schools. In these conversations, we analyze what they observed and hypothesize on other scenarios, outcomes, and possible actions on the part of teacher leaders. Recently, a student was speaking to the burdensome amount of paperwork her cooperating teacher had to manage in concert with lesson planning: daily lessons had to document all appropriate state standards and benchmarks in order for her co-operating teacher to prove competency for a merit-based incentive system. Other students witnessed parallel requirements of their mentors. The students reflected upon what they might wish to be their own response to this situation. We discussed the development of the corporate model of accountability-culture, currently wielding power in public schooling. Students brainstormed and discussed the potential ramifications of participating in or resisting said culture, in terms of political shrewdness and working toward sustaining their future art programs. A critical pedagogy of teacher leadership that considers the effects of social, cultural, and political issues in schools prepares future teacher leaders to analyze the knowledge/power relationships that keep hegemonic ideology in place in schools. Understanding the complexities of the dialectical nature of power inherent in the ever-changing political landscape of schooling would aid art teachers as they navigate this complex terrain.

There are many other possible entry points in our existing curricula in art education preparation that might serve to provide the opportunities to teach about teacher leadership. Dispositions regarding professionalism beg us to examine issues connected to taken-for-granted assumptions, power, dominance, resistance, and progress in education. An introduction to the roles of teachers' unions, professional associations, and the sorts of positions on issues that these organizations advocate would help pre-service art teachers understand some of the global issues connected to professionalization. The emphasis on visual culture with regard to students' ability to examine and comment on issues of power and privilege embedded in visual experience, and the re-conception of art making as a place from which to situate ideological struggle offer intriguing possibilities for meaning-making by art education students in their own creative production. For example, I have asked future art teachers to use culture-jamming techniques to turn their scrutiny toward the intersection of social issues, culture, place, and justice in

schools. They created sophisticated imagery of poor children, middle-class teachers, dilapidated classrooms, government intervention, and similar comments on their field experience observations. They also created empowering messages regarding the power of art education to speak to life, death, and everything in-between.

### Effective Pedagogical Practices

As a firm believer in the power of the individual creative act of teaching, I am loath to prescribe a concrete approach to the instruction of teacher leadership. I am painfully aware that there is still much to be done to examine the successes, failures, barriers, and strategies relevant to practicing teacher leadership in the art classroom. I am also cognizant of the fact that schools are conservative and sometimes hostile places when it comes to change, social justice, or disrupting the status quo. But the excitement, maturity, and empowerment I observe growing in my students in our conversations regarding teacher leadership energize me for the task.

Teaching art education students about teacher leadership requires teaching about the culture of schools, school reform efforts, professionalization, and empowering teachers. We can do all of this through a pedagogy that utilizes an emphasis on the real world of schools and their political complexities, including institutionalized resistance to change, along with strategies for effectively dealing with that resistance. We can use scenarios, role-playing, directed field observations, and analysis and coaching during role-playing and field observations. We can teach future teachers how to collaborate, not just on the level of engaging with colleagues on interdisciplinary planning, but to help them understand how to form successful alliances. We can teach how power functions, how to identify power structures within institutions, and what means are available to engage those structures. We can rethink and redirect some of the experiences that take place in our student-teaching programs in order to help cooperating teachers introduce the necessities of leadership as they mentor students.

Successful inclusion of teacher leadership practices by school-based mentors also requires mentors to reflect on their own involvement as teacher leaders. Ensuring that mentors of student teachers engage these pre-service leaders in conversations on the importance of teacher leadership allows for the enlistment of their collective creativity providing real-life contextual exposure to site-specific leadership opportunities as key elements of the student-teaching experience (e.g., including the student teacher in faculty meetings, school district committee meetings, parent-teacher conversations, etc).

The current state of K–12 education demands that teachers be leaders in determining their professional futures. Best practices for training pre-service teachers

for their leadership roles are still being assessed, but it is essential that tomorrow's teachers are equipped to serve as leaders.

### Note

1. I make no claims as to the exhaustiveness of this survey. Certainly, some writings exist that may not be represented in the search sample, and some will have been published since the search was originally performed. Of course, there are many other journals that were not included in the scope of this survey. There are other conversations on leadership within art education professional associations at all levels. The findings of this study do ring true with my personal experience as a reader of *Studies in Art Education* and of *Art Education* for almost 30 years.

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