

Thomas Brewer, University of Central Florida

Twenty Years of Art Education at SECAC: Where've We Been and Where Are We Going?

It is an honor to be included among this group that will share some general and specific observations about the history of SECAC. My part in this session addresses advances in art education and will cover some personal and professional SECAC history including some colleagues that I have encountered within the organization, certain scholarly connections and interfaces that have surfaced through the agency of SECAC, some of the professional benefits that persons engaged in the field of art education have gained through membership and participation in SECAC, and the current status of art education within the organization along with some speculation about its future.

My first acquaintance with and exposure to SECAC came in 1991 when interviewing with Lloyd Benjamin and Don Van Horn for a tenure-track position as an assistant professor of art education at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Little did I know at the time that the faculty and administrators at this university would introduce me to an organization that would play such a significant role in my professional life. During my time at UALR, Floyd Martin and I were co-presenters at the 1993 Arkansas Art Educators Conference, and he prepared a paper specifically geared for public- and private-school art teachers entitled "Teaching Art History: Research and Synthesis." It is very rare for art educators to have art-historical research methods and content specifically fashioned for their teaching needs. In this paper that remains viable today, Floyd made many significant points that art educators need to apply to their teaching and with their students: that images should not be used merely to "illustrate" the history of literature, that gender roles and political issues are often significant in works of art, that art history adds an academic dimension usually lacking in school art classes, and that art and its history is an integral part of a well-rounded education. Occasionally Floyd and I have discussed revising this paper for possible publication, but neither of us is lacking for other things to do.

During the same year that the first-ever National Standards for the Arts were published, our organization entered the policy arena with the "SECAC Policy for Visual Arts Education" statement, which grew out of the 1994 meeting in New Orleans. At that conference, President Lloyd Benjamin asked me to chair an *ad hoc* committee to write an art education policy statement for faculty and administrators. The purpose behind this statement was to provide information to SECAC institutions and individual members about how art education programs function and the sort of professional pursuits in which their faculty might engage and on the basis of which they might be evaluated. University art or arts education faculty might use the policy statement to establish program expectations within their respective departments or colleges. Chairs and deans could use the statement to make a case for improved art education policy at the university level. Long-time SECAC member Robert Mode made arrangements for the committee to meet at the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies in the spring of 1995. There we drafted a statement and presented a panel discussion entitled "Who Makes Public Policy in Art Education?" That statement was revised and then adopted at the 1995 SECAC meeting at Georgetown University.

A good bit of the history behind this policy statement and of the development of art education in SECAC since my membership began in 1991 can be found in my 2007 *SECAC Review* paper entitled "The Significance of Art Education Policy in the Southeastern College Art Conference." The highly productive work of developing the 1995, 2004, and 2010 "SECAC Policy for Visual

Arts Education” statements has been presented and publicized frequently in national venues, and it is the foundation for my book chapter, “Finding the Core of Art Education Policy Development,” in an art education research text entitled *Inquiry in Action: Research Methodologies in Art Education* published in 2014 by the National Art Education Association. The work that has emerged from SECAC reaches far beyond the organization itself and impacts a wide audience, not only regionally but nationally and internationally.

The status and place of art education PK-20 (that is, pre-kindergarten through graduate degree) has always been precarious. At the higher education level you will find art education programs housed in a number of different departments, and it almost always seems to be an awkward fit. Not only is the fit usually forced, but art education programs and preparation are not always highly valued or looked upon favorably. It’s often a matter of respect. This condition always raises questions about how to prepare art teachers for their professional careers and what sorts of things do they really need to know.

One of the major benefits provided by SECAC to art educators is that its meetings offer a venue for presentations of their scholarship and research outside the parameters and constraints of the National Art Education Association. Indeed, the number of dedicated art education slots at SECAC meetings has increased. In this way and others, there is no question that over the past twenty years SECAC has opened the door for young faculty and graduate students in art education to grow professionally. And yet, while a few *SECAC Review* articles about art education have been published, and likewise a few SECAC awards have been conferred on art educators, these are areas that probably need to be bolstered.

Another boon for art educators at SECAC is the opportunity to collaborate, mix, and learn alongside studio art and art history faculty. Making long-lasting, mutually beneficial connections of this sort can enhance the quality and content of our professional development and teaching.

With the advent of Common Core Standards for Art and the brand new Visual Arts Standards, the time is approaching—four years after the last revision—to convene another *ad hoc* committee to draft and put in place a newly updated “SECAC Policy for Visual Arts Education” statement. Yet updating the position of our organization on such a matter of national importance and debate is but symptomatic of what is increasingly clear: that in the past twenty years, slowly but surely, art education has come to represent a larger constituency within SECAC than ever before. It is a fact that prior to 1995, in order to register their profession, art educators had to check the “other” box on the SECAC membership application form and fill in the adjacent blank space. Minor advance though it may seem, there is now a check box explicitly for art educators. Current members checking the “Art Education” box on the membership form number sixty-six out of a total of 1058, or about six percent, certainly a benefit for SECAC at large. Also, as alluded to earlier, this year there are five scheduled conference sessions addressing art education topics, up from what had been a mere two dedicated slots in years past.

Many of the positive descriptors that come to mind when I think back on my participation in SECAC are inviting, non-exclusionary, encouraging, fostering, mentoring, and not dominated by self-promoters who step over bodies for an imagined professional leg up. To me, SECAC represents professional development and service to the profession at its best. Whether or not we realize or recognize it, we are all art educators of some stripe. Our joint concern and central professional goal is our students’ education.

As an addendum, a few of the people at SECAC whom I would like to single out for thanks are Anne Thomas, Bob Lemon, Beth Mulvaney, Rachel Frew, Debra Murphy, and Jason Guynes. In addition, I wish to recognize the following faculty members who served on SECAC's 2004 Art Education Policy Committee: Richard Siegesmund, Robert Mode, Read M. Diket, Charles Bleick, Cynthia Colbert, Susan Slavik, and Mary Lou Hightower. Similarly, I acknowledge those faculty members who participated on SECAC's 2010 Art Education Policy Committee: Ronald Aman, Bryna Bobick, Victoria Fergus, Karen Heid, Sheri Klein, Linda K. Neely, Audra Price-Pittman, and Anne C. Grey. Former graduate students who contributed to either the 2004 or 2010 Art Education Policy Committees include Melanie J. Goodman-Smith, Clinton W. McCracken, Ami Patel, Jay C. Triplett, Chad Allman, Krista Beavers, Kathryn Bryan Bethea, Kelli Coats, Ruth Currey, Mary Edenfield, Chrystal Henry, Jason High, Kristy Hilfinger, Stephanie Jordan, Jennifer Kessler, Jack Krzyminski, Maribel Lopez, Dawn Mauldin, Megan Sellner, and Jennifer Swanson. The following organizations have endorsed our work: Florida Higher Education Arts Network (FHEAN), 2004 & 2010; Tennessee Art Education Association (TAEA), January 2011; Pinellas County School District, Florida, 2004; and Brevard County School District, Florida, 2004.

References:

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