

ate due to content they consider too mature or even obscene. Arts educators often respond by pointing out that it is the nature of the arts to challenge conventions, and that because art is a medium for individual expression it is natural that students' personal works may explore themes about which they have strong feelings.

Many school districts have chosen to develop official policies on religious content (see Appendix L), and some have developed guidelines for art content that is "appropriate" for display in school exhibits. For example, many schools exempt students whose religious beliefs are at odds with the text of a particular sacred choral work from singing that work. Schools typically allow the drawing of nudes as a necessary part of visual arts training at the high school level, but some choose to limit the kinds of paintings that may be displayed in exhibits on school property. When developing guidelines on these issues, districts may refer to the section in this chapter titled *Dealing With Controversial Issues* on pages 195 – 197. Regardless of whether there is a written districtwide policy, it is important that arts faculty members and administrators at the school level discuss and reach agreement on an approach to these issues.

The following excerpts from the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) 1986 publication entitled *Guidelines for Performances of School Music Groups* may be useful when developing policies on religious art:

Music teachers should be sensitive to the views of all cultures, religions and ethnic groups when choosing music for study and performance. Music with a sacred text is acceptable as long as the goal is secular education, not religious indoctrination.

Although the First Amendment of the United States Constitution ensures the separation of church and state, the use of sacred music by music educators is not in violation of the law when it meets the test of Chief Justice Warren E. Burger's three questions, raised in *Lemon vs. Kurtzman* (1971). These questions should be asked of each school-sanctioned observance, program or instructional activity involving religious content.

1. What is the purpose of the activity? Is the purpose secular in

nature, such as studying music of a particular composer's style or historical period?

2. What is the primary effect of the activity? Is it the celebration of religion? Does the activity either enhance or inhibit religion?
3. Does the activity involve an excessive entanglement with the religion or religious group, or between the schools and the religious organization?

From *Guidelines for Performances of School Music Groups*. Music Educators National Conference (MENC), Reston, VA, 1986. Reprinted with permission.

In addition to the above questions, the MENC booklet also suggests asking the following: "Is the music selected on the basis of its musical qualities and educational value rather than its religious intent?" With only slight rewording, all of the above questions also are applicable to other arts disciplines.

Arts content should be relevant to the objectives of the curriculum and be both age appropriate and sensitive to individual beliefs. Educators should make reasonable efforts to accommodate community concerns, even when they are held by a minority, as long as such accommodations do not interfere with students' learning.

Appendix L contains a policy statement from the South Windsor, Conn., public schools on the use of religious content in the arts and other disciplines. The following additional resources also may prove useful to individual educators and district policymakers as they consider their approach to religion in schools:

- Jones, Rebecca. "December Dilemma: What's a school board to do come holiday time? An authority on religious liberty offers some answers." *The American School Board Journal* (December 1996): 26-28.
- *Religion in the Curriculum*. 1987 Report of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's (ASCD) Policy Panel on Religion in the Curriculum. Stock no. 611-87052.
- *Religion in the Public School Curriculum and Religious Holidays in the Public Schools*. Free brochures sponsored by consortia of religious and educational organizations. Available by contacting ASCD in Alexandria, VA at (703) 549-9110.

The National Art Education Association offers the following guidance for art educators in its NAEA "Advisory on Censorship and the Arts:"

Freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Constitution. This freedom of expression includes both verbal expression – speech and writing – and nonverbal expression, which includes the "language" of the various arts.

Free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. Now, as always in our history, art works – literature, theatre, painting, sculpture, music and dance – are among our most effective instruments of freedom. They are powerful means for making available ideas, feelings, social growth, the envisioning of new possibilities for humankind, solutions to problems and the improvement of human life.

On the other hand, suppression of ideas and of artistic expression leads to conformity, the limiting of diversity of expression to a narrow range of "acceptable" forms, and the stifling of freedom.

As art educators in a free society, we confirm the following:

- Freedom of expression in the arts must be preserved.
- The individual has the right to accept or reject any work of art for himself or herself personally, but does not have the right to suppress those works of art to which he or she may object, or those artists with whom he or she does not agree. The free individual and the free society do not need a censor to tell what should be acceptable or unacceptable, and should not tolerate such censorship. All censorship is contrary to democratic principles.
- It is the duty of the art educator to confront students with a diversity of art experiences and to enable students to think critically. The art educator need not like or endorse all images, ideologies and artists he or she makes available to students, but should allow the individual student to choose from among widely con-

flicting images, opinions and ideologies. While some works of art may indeed be banal and trivial, and some works may be repugnant and unacceptable to some individuals, the art educator should insist upon the right of every individual to freely express and create in his or her own way and to experience, accept or reject any particular work of art.

- The art educator should impress upon students the vital importance of freedom of expression as a basic premise in the free democratic society and urge students to guard against any efforts to limit or curtail that freedom.

*From Censorship and the Arts.*  
Adopted by the Board of Directors  
of the National Art Education Association (NAEA),  
Reston, VA, September 1991.  
Reprinted with permission.

### Additional Reference

American Alliance for Theatre and Education and Speech Communication Association (1991). "Freedom of Artistic Expression in Educational Theatre." *The Drama Theatre Teacher* 5, no. 3.

### Dealing With Controversial Issues

The following policy statement, "Controversial Issues," was adopted by the Connecticut State Board of Education on October 4, 1978.

Learning to deal with controversial issues is one of the basic competencies all students should acquire. Controversial issues are those problems, subjects or questions about which there are significant differences of opinion based for the most part on the differences in the values people bring to the appraisal of the facts of the issue.

Controversy is inherent in the democratic way of life. The study and discussion of controversial issues is essential to the education for citizenship in a free society. Students can become informed individuals only through the process of examining evidence, facts and differing viewpoints, by exercising freedom of

thought and moral choice, and by making responsible decisions. The perpetuation of the fundamental principles of our society requires the guarantee that there be opportunity for students to read, to gather information, to speak and to hear alternative viewpoints, and to reach honest judgments according to their individual ability.

In order for students to learn these competencies, teachers must be free to help students to identify and evaluate relevant information, to learn the techniques of critical analysis, and to make independent judgments. They must reinforce the student's right to present and support their conclusions before persons who have opposing points of view. Teachers should also endeavor to develop a flexibility of viewpoint in students so that they are able to recognize the need for continuous and objective re-examination of issues in the light of changing conditions in society and as new and significant evidence becomes available to support a change in point of view. Further, teachers should direct the attention of learners, at the appropriate levels of maturity, to significant issues and promote a lively exchange of ideas about them. Although teachers have the right to express their own viewpoints and opinions, they do not have the right to indoctrinate students with their personal views.

It is recommended that all Connecticut boards of education develop and disseminate a written policy which supports the concept of teaching about controversial issues and resists pressures and charges by special interest groups seeking to impose only one side of an issue upon the schools.

**The following policy statement, "Academic Freedom and Public Education," was adopted by the Connecticut State Board of Education on September 9, 1981.**

Academic freedom is the freedom to teach and to learn. In defending the freedom to teach and to learn, we affirm the democratic process itself. American public education is the source of much that is essential to our democratic heritage.

No other single institution has so significantly sustained our national diversity, nor helped voice our shared hopes for an open and tolerant society. Academic freedom is among the strengths of American public education. Attempts to deny the freedom to teach and to learn are, therefore, incompatible with the goals of excellence and equity in the life of our public schools.

With freedom comes responsibility. With rights come obligations. Accordingly, academic freedom in our public schools is subject to certain limitations. Therefore, the State Board of Education affirms that:

Academic freedom in our public schools is properly defined within the context of law and the constraints of mutual respect among individuals. Public schools represent a public trust. They exist to prepare our children to become partners in a society of self-governing citizens. Therefore, access to ideas and opportunities to consider the broad range of questions and experiences which constitute the proper preparation for a life of responsible citizenship must not be defined by the interests of any single viewpoint. Teachers, school administrators, librarians and school media specialists must be free to select instructional and research materials appropriate to the maturity level of their students. This freedom is itself subject to the reasonable restrictions mandated by law to school officials and administrators. At the same time, local school officials must demonstrate substantial or legitimate public interest in order to justify censorship or other proposed restrictions upon teaching and learning. Similarly, local boards of education cannot establish criteria for the selection of library books based solely on the personal, social or political beliefs of school board members. While students must be free to voice their opinions in the context of a free inquiry after truth and respect for their fellow students and school personnel, student expression which threatens to interfere substantially with the school's function is not warranted by academic freedom. Students must be mindful that their rights

are neither absolute nor unlimited. Part of responsible citizenship is coming to accept the consequences of the freedoms to which one is entitled by law and tradition. Similarly, parents have the right to affect their own children's education, but this right must be balanced against the right other parents' children have to a suitable range of educational experiences. Throughout, the tenets of academic freedom seek to encourage a spirit of reasoned community participation in the life and practices of our public schools.

Since teaching and learning are among the missions of our public schools, the State Board of Education affirms the distinction between teaching and indoctrination. Schools should teach students how to think, not what to think. To study an idea is not necessarily to endorse an idea. Public school classrooms are forums for inquiry, not arenas for the promulgation of particular viewpoints. While communities have the right to exercise supervision over their own public school practices and programs, their participation in the educational life of their schools should respect the constitutional and intellectual rights guaranteed school personnel and students by American law and tradition.

Accordingly, the State Board of Education, in order to encourage improved educational practices, recommends that local school boards adopt policies and procedures to receive, review and take action upon requests that question public school practices and programs. Community members should be encouraged, and made aware of their right, to voice their opinions about school practices and programs in an appropriate administrative form. The State Board of Education further recommends that local school boards take steps to encourage informed community participation in the shared work of sustaining and improving our public schools.

Finally, the State Board of Education affirms that community members and school personnel should acknowledge together that the purpose of public edu-

cation is the pursuit of knowledge and the preparation of our children for responsible citizenship in a society that respects differences and shared freedom.

**The following references provide excellent information about presenting art and imagery that deals with controversial issues:**

Barrett, T. *Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1994.

Barrett, T. "Principles for Interpreting Art." *Art Education* 47, no. 5 (1994): 8-13.

## Education Vs. Entertainment

One source of common confusion about the role and nature of arts education in schools stems from the fact that, in the world *outside* the school, the arts often serve to entertain. This causes some to erroneously view arts classes as purely recreational, or to assume that students can receive an arts education through simple exposure to performances or exhibits. That would be analogous to assuming that students can learn to read through simple exposure to books or by visiting libraries. Artistic experiences such as concert attendance or residencies have value, but they cannot substitute for an arts education. For students to learn to create, perform and respond to the arts they need substantive, well-planned, sequential instruction over time.

The following will serve as a concise summary of the differences between arts entertainment, exposure, enrichment and education.

### HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE: ARTS ENTERTAINMENT VS. ARTS EDUCATION

- Arts Entertainment:** *Casual experience with any art form/media already known*  
(Example: listening to Top 40 music in the car while taking a date to the school dance.)
- Arts Exposure:** *"One-shot" event that provides a new experience with the arts*  
(Example: an artist visit to a school without prior study, follow-up or connection with the school's arts curriculum.)
- Arts Enrichment:** *Individual arts experience designed to reinforce or enliven aspects of the sequential curriculum*

(Example: a school field trip to a museum or concert after students are prepared by studying the art works to be experienced, the artists or composers who created the works, and their time period or style)

**Arts Education:** *Carefully designed sequence of learning experiences which, continued over time, enable students to master the broad body of skills and understandings of an arts discipline*

(Example: following a sequential curriculum over a period of years, thereby learning to create, perform and respond to a wide variety of art works from an arts discipline.)

From a 1994 statement issued by the National Arts Education Association (NAEA), Reston, VA. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the artistic repertoire/literature children study and the instructional activities they experience should be of educational and aesthetic value, either assisting students to master the objectives of the local curriculum or providing them with additional depth or breadth of learning relevant to the broader goals of the school. The recreational value of arts study does not lie in entertainment, but in the satisfaction that comes from creating, performing and responding to the finest possible art work.

Similarly, performances and exhibits by students should serve primarily to enhance their education, rather than to entertain themselves or their audiences. Although an important part of the educational experience for students is to engage them in designing and carrying out presentations of their work that appeal to the public, such presentations should be means to educational ends rather than ends in themselves. Guidelines for student performances and exhibits are elaborated further in the section of this chapter titled Performances, Exhibits and Competitions (see page 200).

## Accessing Community Arts Resources

Connecticut is a state rich in arts resources. Virtually every community boasts some combination of artists, arts organizations, museums, concert halls, community ensembles, arts guilds and other cultural opportunities. These resources provide a wealth of options for schools in bringing arts experiences to students or students to the arts.

Community arts resources can serve a number of important roles, such as:

- enriching the school arts curriculum (e.g., students might deepen their understandings or skills in an art form they are studying by working with a resident visual artist whose specialty is different from that of the art teacher in the school);
- providing exposure to underrepresented arts disciplines for students in schools that may lack quality programs in that area (e.g., students who attend schools in which dance is taught primarily by integration into music and physical education classes would benefit from opportunities to work with expert dancers from a local dance company); and
- enriching the school curriculum in non-arts areas. The arts offer many connections to other areas of the school program. For example, the arts play an integral role in history and culture, dance is a major strand of physical education, theatre is a major strand of language arts, and communicating about the arts – such as when writing critical reviews of arts exhibits and performances – offers rich opportunities for language arts experiences.

Community arts resources have the greatest impact on student learning when:

- their use is jointly planned by school and community arts personnel (Effective arts experiences generally are linked to the school curriculum by clarifying the learning that will occur, and often by identifying the standards that will be addressed. Artists in effective programs develop an understanding of the students' educational levels and are assisted in preparing experiences appropriate for the students. This is best achieved by involving the students' teachers, particularly their arts teachers, in the planning process.);
- students are prepared in advance for the arts experience; and
- school personnel and/or artists provide follow-up after the experience, during which students deepen and apply what they learned.

As suggested by program goal 9, students should be encouraged to become involved in community arts activities and should learn where they can find venues to see and hear the arts that fall within their personal areas of interest.