Advancing *Media Arts* Education in *Visual Arts* Classrooms: Addressing Policy Ambiguities and Gaps in Art Teacher Preparation

James W. Bequette  
*University of Minnesota*

Colleen Brennan  
*University of Minnesota*

Since the mid-1980s, arts policymakers in Minnesota have positioned *media arts*—defined as the “study and practice of examining human communication through photography, film or video, audio, computer or digital arts, and interactive media”—within the realm of aesthetic education and considered it one of six arts areas. This article explores the historic policy decisions that led to the nation’s first academic standards in media arts education. We argue that implementation of these benchmarks in state public schools has been hampered by inservice and preservice art teachers’ lack of familiarity with the theory and practice of media arts education. To that end, we propose initiatives that 1) develop an “add-on” certificate program in *media arts* for licensed arts teachers; and 2) require media arts coursework for preservice teachers seeking admission to art education licensure programs.

This article critically examines education policy relevant to the *Minnesota Academic Standards in the Arts K-12* (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2003), specific to media arts. The authors of this article teach in an art education preservice licensure program at an urban Land Grant university. One is an assistant professor who taught photography and visual arts for 15 years in K-12 schools, learning, often from his students, how photographic media and the promise of digital technology were changing artmaking. The other is a licensed art educator, teacher of animation and graphic design at her state’s magnet high school for the arts as well as a doctoral student in art education. Our research explores the significance of describing learning in the media arts as *aesthetic-based*\(^1\) and defining the seemingly nebulous media arts as “the study and practice of examining human communication through photography, film or video, audio, computer or digital arts, and interactive media” (King, Ostrom, Paulson, & Richard, 2004, p. ma1). We look at how this distinction permitted the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to write policy that establishes boundaries, both theoretical and artistic, for study in a still evolving interdisciplinary field. Furthermore we trace the history of the decision making that in the early 1990s led to legislation that included these technology driven art forms as one of “six, distinct arts areas: dance, literary arts, *media arts*, music, theater, and visual arts” (MDE, 2007, emphasis added) in Minnesota’s first iteration of standards.

---

\(^1\)In this context, “aesthetic-based” refers to an approach to learning in media arts that is based in using software, hardware, and tools of specific media arts processes to varying expressive ends through creative employment of elements of space, time, light, motion, color, and sound.
We posit that creating content standards in the media arts represents policymaking that was ahead of its time, but as is often the case, there is evidence of shortsighted decision making both before and after this bold move was made. Examining this process can provide clarity and direction for future policy and classroom work. Mazzoni (1993) reminded us that Minnesota has a reformist tradition of activism in education policy making and considerable capacity for policy innovation. He included teacher certification governance of 1973 that made licensure in visual art and other subjects mandatory and the charter school law of 1991 that arguably began the “outcome-based schools” movement nationwide, among other moves, as evidence of bold Minnesota policymaking (pp. 358-359).

This article shares findings from our study of media arts education in Minnesota. First, we trace historical developments in art education that foreshadow the migration of electronic media into arts curriculum. Next, we explain our rationale for conducting this research and the centrality to this work of the question “Why have media arts standards not reached capacity statewide?” The sections that follow address that question by examining: 1) the progression of events that led to passage of a body of legislation that situated media arts in Minnesota’s arts standards; 2) ambiguities in a policy that failed to legislate what type of licensure a highly qualified media arts teacher should hold; 3) the pronounced and seemingly ignored gaps in the media arts content knowledge of inservice teachers statewide; and 4) a model for a new Minnesota Board of Teaching (MBOT) sanctioned certificate program to enhance the knowledge of licensed art teachers, and new media arts prerequisites for preservice teachers entering art education licensure programs at our university and others.

Theoretical Considerations

At the end of the last century and the beginning of the 21st, arts educators and policymakers in North America turned their attention to an emerging area of curriculum: media arts. Minnesota in 1997 became the first state, and to date the only state, to publish distinct academic standards for media arts that position this still evolving discipline as one of six recognized arts areas for which graduation standards have been legislated (P. Paulson, personal communication, November 20, 2007). When defining “media arts” as “the study and practice of examining human communication through photography, film or video, audio, computer or digital arts, and interactive media” (King et al., 2004, p. ma1), arts policymakers knew using the term “media arts,” a signifier that does not point to one particular medium, might be confusing. In the lexicon of K-12 education, at least in Minnesota, the media arts have collectively represented amorphous technological processes related to the photographic arts, some old, some new, some still evolving. Put another way, media art forms have represented a new language encompassing multiple literacies—digital, visual, cyber,alphabetic, intellectual (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005).
According to one Minnesota visual arts teacher, good teaching in a media arts course has engaged students to critically examine collective means of mass communication—what some call “mass media” or simply “the media”—as well as make imaginative use themselves of media in studio settings (typically digital photography and video, software, webpages, and the like). The theoretical and historical components of a media arts course, therefore, have included an introduction to traditional and newer forms of media: print media such as magazines, newspapers, other texts; electronic media such as movies, television, radio, telephones; and computer media such as the Internet, video games, e-mail, and blogs. On the other hand, studio practice in a media arts course has included production of works of art that students create by using hardware and software now commonplace in elementary and secondary schools, particularly in computer labs and art classrooms.

Given this two-pronged theory-practice approach, successful media arts education has been described as empowering students to become critical consumers of converging forms of media through inquiry that scrutinizes the human communications that play crucial roles in their lives. Opportunities have followed for refining students’ technical expertise using hardware and software, tools of specific media arts processes, to varying expressive ends—computer generated images, digital movies, or hybrid art combining old and new media, for example. What Minnesota’s media arts standards hope to achieve has been in keeping with what Buckingham (2000) reported happening in Britain: “[R]ather than leaving children isolated in their encounters with the ‘adult’ world of contemporary media” teachers thus find “ways of preparing them to cope with it, to participate in it, and if necessary to change it” (p. 199).

In Minnesota, standards for academic performance in media arts, like benchmarks for visual art, literary arts, music, theater, and dance have constituted K-12 arts education. Despite these specifications, confusion has still existed over who is highly qualified to teach media arts. Teachers in the state from at least three subject matter areas ubiquitous to comprehensive high schools—visual arts, English/theater, trades and industry—might have reason to include media arts coursework in their daily schedule. We acknowledge the interdisciplinary nature of the media arts (Scholz, 2005), but we argue that courses topically related to media arts processes—and thus presumed to satisfy state mandated graduation requirements in the arts—must aestheticize and intentionalize students’ studio/lab work with electronic media.

In keeping with that thinking, active digital artist and arts and engineering theorist Simon Penny championed postsecondary media arts education as a “radically trans-disciplinary mixing of engineering, computer science, a wide range of the arts … humanities … social sciences, and increasingly the biosciences” (cited in Tardiff, 2003). He described synthesizing technical, creative, historical, and philosophical knowledge in “pedagogy for digital cultural practices.” Theoretically, it is this conception of teaching that underpinned our belief that visual arts practitioners in elementary and secondary grades can also blur territorial distinctions between doing computer science
and making art without ignoring what Penny argues is a “long history of new media technologies developed by artists.” In other words, students must understand the valuable role artists play “in blue-sky, first-cut envisaging of the potentials of new technologies being brought together … and being placed in different social and cultural contexts.”

Children today grow up digital: They play computer games, write computer code, and often leave grade school with surprising media and online competencies (Hagood, 2003). “[N]ot only is it important to examine the role of new media and online literacies in youngsters’ lives … it is also crucial for researchers … and teachers to be interested … because these literacies affect us, too” (p. 387). For example, California’s largest school district recently called upon 70 media arts professionals to contribute to interdisciplinary models of instruction for integrated study of various literacies. This gathering was part of a research and development initiative to enhance student understanding of the global distribution of goods and ideas through communication made possible by a variety of technologies. These K-12 and post-secondary educators, media artists, and representatives of arts organizations and industries helped draft the district’s recommendations for a “holistic” approach to incorporating media arts into standards-based education (Los Angeles Unified School District [LAUSD], 2005).

Concluding that teaching and learning in this discipline should be part of the growth and development of arts education district-wide, this study group characterized media arts processes as a “true renaissance of aesthetic expression outside the four traditional art forms [dance, theater, music, visual arts]” (LAUSD, 2005, p. 6). However, the group concluded “[m]edia art is interdependent with other art forms” (p. 8), and students in K-12 media arts education “need a balance between technological skills, aesthetic valuing and artistic process” (p. 9).

The application of new media and electronic technology in real world scenarios, working as an animator for example, without grounding one’s creative efforts in the broad history of human artistic endeavor and a solid knowledge of paint, pencil, clay, and other classroom tools has further suggested media arts learning has a place in arts education. As Pixar University Dean Randy Nelson stated, “Teach sculpture with clay first, and once students have clay under their fingernails … [and] know you have to walk around a sculpture to experience it, they can start on 3D computer modeling, where you stand still and rotate the artwork” (California Department of Education, 2004).

The media arts images, artifacts, environments, and/or events young people intentionally create, produce, or distribute, have therefore been perceived as descendants of more traditional “aesthetically contrived” (Carroll as cited in Chapman, 2003) art forms in the visual, literary, and performing arts. When describing media artworks, we have likened Chapman’s (2003) criteria that aesthetically contrived means “techniques and devices [are] deliberately used to … attract attention … organize ideas … evoke responses through imagery … and … narrow the meanings perceivers are likely to ascribe to
their experience” (p. 231) to what Minnesota’s media arts standards define as aesthetic based. That is, in pursuit of a range of expressive ends, student work in the media arts has involved deliberate use of elements like space, time, light, motion, color, and sound as devices for artistic emphasis, organization, meaning making, and ultimately to elicit viewer response/action.

Movement within our field to what some call the study of visual culture (Duncum, 2001, 2006; Freedman, 2003), mass arts (Chapman, 2003), or material culture (Bolin & Blandy, 2003), or some combination thereof has presumed art educators are well suited to facilitate students’ investigation and appreciation of a “range of objects, artifacts, spaces, expressions, and experiences” (Bolin & Blandy, 2003, p. 246). The notion that students have needed “a set of critical tools for the investigation of human visuality” (Mitchell as cited in Duncum, 2001, p. 9) is in keeping with each of these stances, as is the expectation that teachers can help young people interpret “the interaction of images, music, architecture, science, electronic communication, kinesthetic experience, performance, storytelling, the design of computer code, [and] the multitude of other materials that shape and define culture” (Bolin & Blandy, 2003, p. 247).

What Minnesotans have set out to accomplish with their academic standards for media arts should not be conflated with a particular theoretical stance for art education. Ideally, media arts education that embraces both theory and practice has elicited student outcomes consistent with the goals of visual culture studies, comprehensive art education, or another foundational approach to teaching art. Standards have merely provided practical direction for curriculum design.

Including Popular Media in Arts Education

In the late 1960s a small cadre of arts educators, most notably Vincent Lanier (1966, 1968), proposed including the study of popular media in art curriculum, believing students found movies and television engaging and relevant to their lives in ways the fine arts were not. At that point in time, photography was already well on its way to being legitimized as a studio art medium with applications in K-12 classrooms. The addition of electronic media that captured moving images seemed like a logical next step (Lanier, 1966).

Outside art education, teachers of literature, writing, and theater also embraced the photographic arts, especially film media. Courses that critically examined the history of cinema, taught screen writing, and/or film production appeared in select schools. When courses of that sort did not fall under the umbrella of either the English or performing arts department, they often had humanities-style monikers like “film studies” or “communication studies.” Visionaries from literary and performing arts disciplines who saw ways to capitalize on young people’s aesthetic response to popular media, particularly by tapping disadvantaged and disinterested students’ familiarity with television material rather than great books (or great art), posited these were “new ways of talking about the old ideas of the true, the good, and
the beautiful.” In short, starting where the pupils are rather than where the adults are became a way for the schools to get “plugged in” to students’ backgrounds, to understand them, and teach better (Culkin as cited in Lanier, 1968, p. 36).

Meanwhile in response to the needs of the marketplace, vocational teachers in the 1960s and 1970s were already dabbling in areas very much akin to what Minnesota policymakers a decade or so later labeled as media arts. Occupational programs taught commercial photography and graphic arts processes like phototypesetting and offset and screen printing to prepare students for the workforce. By the late 1980s, mechanical technologies that once facilitated mass communication, with the advent of digital processing, morphed into trades and industry education focused almost exclusively on the workings of computers and electronic media. Training in computer programming, network systems design, desktop publishing, CAD (computer assisted drawing) and other digital design software now has become the norm in careers and technical education (CTE) that prepare students for information-age jobs.

The trades and industry approach to teaching about digital media has differed from the more artistic embrace of media arts processes preferred by arts educators. The difference in the two approaches? A well-schooled media artist has moved beyond what Warren Sack characterized as “crafts training (i.e. programming)” or learning a set of fixed technical skills. Notions of placing too much emphasis on software programs has been similarly problematic for software and performance artist Amy Alexander because “it leaves out the history of the tools that [media artists] are using, the politics of these very machines and the all permeating social context” (both cited in Scholz, 2005). Like Penny (cited in Tardiff, 2003), neither Sack nor Alexander was opposed to a student’s mastery of the technological nuances of electronic media. They did, however, suggest our field’s interest in and definition of media arts is unique when teachers emphasize understanding both the techno-social and political underpinnings of “digital cultural practices” (Penny, cited in Tardiff, 2003) and the artistic possibilities for engendering aesthetic response when using digital tools.

Though Lanier’s (1966) theory that “media themselves are studio devices with an expressive potential in the visual arts for pupils in our classrooms” (p. 7) was not immediately embraced by art teachers, in time his stance would ring true. A more cross-disciplinary interest in studying the media of mass communication often grounded in the photographic arts—first traditional analog media and now digital derivatives—did begin creeping into North American schools. By the end of the last century content specific to media literacy—either to make students critically aware of the media’s persuasive prowess, expressive and imaginative potential, or its vocational relevance in globalized economies—made its way into classes of many stripes.

For instance, in arguing that “the media have remained outside the school curriculum at the same time as they have come to dominate so many aspects of our society,” Ontario’s Ministry of Education (1987) nudged provincial
schools to consider a media literacy model for teaching young people how powerful and pervasive communication technologies were becoming in their lives. Three years earlier, roughly 200 miles south of the Canadian border, the chair of the Minnesota Council on Economic Opportunities in the Arts, a legislative task force, authored recommendations that state lawmakers fund vocational training programs in electronic media, film, video, and sound recording to “prepare artists to create in this field and to compete in the cultural marketplace of these media” (Cox, 1984, p. 1). These reform efforts and others that arts educators argue positioned Minnesota as the leader in media arts education are examined next.

The Minnesota Experience

Minnesota’s academic standards for media arts education have epitomized, at least in spirit, Lanier’s (1975) once maverick stance that including the study of “film arts (photography, cinema, television)” (p. 185) in art classrooms would further students’ visual literacy, creativity, and aesthetic education. Legislation that in 1997 codified distinct standards for media arts education was a policy move that has not been duplicated through most of the United States or Canada. In fact, Minnesota arts policymakers often have advised other states in this area, as was the case in 2005 when California’s largest school district invited a team of three experts to share their experiences with media arts education at a Los Angeles conference. California, and a number of other states to a lesser degree, now have included digital media, video, design, and/or photography competencies under existing visual arts standards (California Department of Education, 2004).

Research that Examines the Current Status of Media Arts Education

Given this history, our mixed methods research examined the status of media arts education in Minnesota. Survey data collected from over 100 licensed art teachers attending the 2006 Art Educators of Minnesota conference yielded data relevant to their media arts knowledge, classroom practice, and needs assessment for further inservice training. In asking where higher education media arts coursework is currently offered, we queried current teachers for names and course descriptions of those classes. Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) published documents, and the Department’s websites guided our analysis of state policy and statutes. Conversations with the executive director from the Minnesota Board of Teaching (MBOT) and arts policymakers from the Perpich Center for Arts Education (Perpich Center) helped explain the mechanics of licensure, add-on certificates, and graduation requirements. Finally, we looked more broadly at the literature on policy implementation and why some initiatives fail while others succeed.

Lessons Learned from Media Arts Standards Implementation

The decision to research Minnesota’s academic standards for media arts education (King, et al., 2004) was inspired by discussions with MBOT and Perpich Center administrators about the feasibility of adding state licensure exclusively for media arts teachers. Those conversations began in the fall of 2006. We quickly realized that questioning why media arts education had not
blossomed statewide (given that accountability measures had been included in various iterations of state policy since the mid-1990s) was perhaps less important than identifying ways to hasten implementation of existing media arts standards.

After meetings with the Perpich Center media arts teacher and deputy director, both of whom had a hand in creating the first media arts framework, it seemed they were learning a lesson made clear in McLaughlin’s (1987) research on policy implementation: “It is incredibly hard to make something happen, most especially across layers of government and institutions” (p. 172). McLaughlin advised policymakers to consider in advance whether those expected to implement reforms at every level have sufficient knowledge, motivation, and will to do so. Knowing that implementation of media arts standards was moving slowly, we asked a question Hope (2004) believed arts policymakers sometimes overlook: “How much and what kind of thinking is being done about the short- and long-term ramification of real or prospective changes?” (pp. 93-94).

We learned minimal effort was made to familiarize school-level stakeholders with *Minnesota Frameworks for Arts Curriculum Strategies* (1997), known as the FACS, a document that explicates what content and learning in media arts should look like in schools. Similarly, MDE had not surveyed how many teachers statewide had the content knowledge to weave media arts education into their practice. Few provisions, therefore, were made for teacher training. Efforts to ensure that school administrators understood the FACS and the expressive and aesthetic components of media arts learning were never a priority. Not surprisingly, over time school principals began assuming technologically robust but aesthetically lean courses taught by teachers who held trades and industry licensure met the standards for media arts education.

The conundrum for us, at least from a research perspective, was much like the proverbial “Which came first?” question. We asked, “Which came first, the Minnesota media arts standards, or teachers with enough media arts savvy to implement them?” In Minnesota, our findings revealed, the standards were written long before there were enough teachers with sufficient media arts content knowledge to implement them statewide. We have not, however, seen a need for separate media arts licensure for teachers. Solving this teacher shortage by creating a new media arts licensure program, while a potential solution to the implementation woes of those standards, was described as a long and complicated process by insiders at the Board of Teaching. Separate licensure in media arts would also increase the already intense competition for teaching positions, an option practicing visual arts teachers, we learned, strongly oppose.

In light of these constricting circumstances, we argue that visual arts teachers should be responsible for ongoing efforts to implement media arts standards. Few, however, are presently highly qualified to do so. Implementation of existing media standards, we believe, will more quickly reach capacity if the preparedness of visual arts educators is increased. To
that end we propose training inservice teachers and raising expectations for preservice teachers in media arts. We detail our rationale for creating these professional development options after first explaining why a first-in-the-nation policy described as “revolutionary” by more than one Minnesota policymaker failed to assess the needs of its intended implementers.

The Evolution of “Revolutionary” Standards

In the mid 1980s, the Minnesota State Legislature focused attention on the arts learning of the state’s K-12 students. During his second term, Governor Rudy Perpich and his wife Lola Perpich provided vision for the creation of a central arts education resource center in the state. The Minnesota School of the Arts and Resource Center, now called the Perpich Center for Arts Education, was established in 1985 legislation. The long list of duties the Perpich Center was to undertake for the state included development and pilot testing of an interdisciplinary education program. Legislation called for an academic curriculum with special programs in the six art forms “in both the popular and fine arts traditions” (Laws of the State of Minnesota, 1985, Ch 12, Article 5, Section 6 [129C.10], Subd. 3.4).

In 1989, the “arts high school” component of the Perpich Center opened with juniors and seniors in attendance from across the state. In the 1992 special legislative session, Minnesota statutes were amended, placing the Perpich Center in alignment with the Minnesota Department of Education, yet defining it as a separate state agency under a special directive to shape arts education, arts education research, and arts educational policy. Nationally at this same time, outcomes-based education was gaining momentum. As a reaction to the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, many states, including Minnesota, began to develop high school graduation standards for implementation in K-12 schools, replacing traditional Carnegie units, criticized for providing no reliable, consistent assessment of what students learned.

In 1997 Minnesota unveiled the *Profiles of Learning*, newly developed standards in 10 academic areas. That same year, the Perpich Center, working closely with MDE, released FACS in dance, literary arts, media arts, music, theater and visual arts. These frameworks identified and supported “key areas of learning, curriculum and instructional design to assist schools across the state in developing consistent learning for all students in the arts,” or in other words, “a focus and foundation for schools to meet the Minnesota Graduation Standards” (MDE, 1997, p. ii).

Now having its own FACS, the media arts were characterized as creative and imaginative exploration central to the communication process. Notions of students imaginatively using technology and an artistic understanding of space, time, light, motion, color, and sound to express their perspectives were important components of that definition. Media arts were positioned as part of an aesthetic tradition and as practices that “use elements and tools of current and emerging technologies to create works that express feelings and ideas” (MDE, 1997, p. 1).
Students should understand media arts as challenges in “communication” rather than challenges in employing “technology,” as languages for the exchange of meaning rather than so many lights and knobs on a box. Such an approach emphasizes media arts’ essential continuity with the traditional arts, whether literary, aural, or kinetic. (MDE, 1997, p. 2)

The FACS thus provided an eloquent argument for situating this type of learning and instruction amongst other arts disciplines, and highlighted distinct creative and artistic process goals for curriculum standards.

The 1997 FACS were reevaluated by the Perpich Center and morphed into the 2004 iteration of standards dubbed *Engaging Students in the Arts: Creating, Performing & Responding*. This new framework was developed to meet the *Minnesota Academic Standards in the Arts K-12* (2003) and contained updated information on arts standards and artistic processes to assist teachers in developing and implementing high quality arts curriculum. Again, these arts standards included media arts as a distinct arts discipline, and the document maintained the definition of media arts as articulated in 1997, adding only:

Media arts employs technologies and processes developed and implemented during the past two centuries while maintaining essential continuity with the traditional arts. Creativity and imagination are essential elements of the media arts process. Successful media production comprises excellence in aesthetics and communication in conjunction with technical competency.

*(King et. al., 2004, p. ma1)*

**Policy Gaps and Overlap**

By tracing the history and succession of the media arts graduation standards in Minnesota, from a vision of a statewide arts school and resource center program to the implementation of media arts reforms statewide, we better understood why pioneering this legislation has been laudable. Applying Hope’s (2004) maxim, “We have standards because we have the visual arts, not the visual arts because we have standards” (p. 109) to the Minnesota case, standards were created because of the evolution of media arts. But our findings also revealed that having standards long before there were enough teachers with sufficient media arts content knowledge to implement them statewide was, in many ways, problematic.

In describing what defensible policy in art education might look like, Smith (1984) asked: “Does a policy offer good prospects for achieving its basic purposes and goals?… That is, can appropriate estimates of success be made?” We argue that there was little likelihood the Minnesota media arts standards could reach capacity because there is little evidence arts policymakers made provisions for the professional development needs of art educators already in the field when drafting this legislation. We applaud the efforts of the high school media arts instructor from the Perpich Center who each summer teaches university-sponsored extension courses in media arts...
theory and practice in the Twin Cities. But beyond this few MDE-initiated statewide professional development efforts to further implementation of the 1997 media art standards have been made (P. Paulson, personal communication, November 20, 2007).

Currently, Minnesota law has required that students successfully complete a minimum of eight elective course credits, including at least one credit in the arts, to graduate (King, et al., 2004, p. 1). State policy and academic standards language has continued to delineate media arts as a unique, artistic discipline through which students can earn high school graduation credit, yet as noted above, there has been no teacher licensure program for media arts in Minnesota. Our survey of over 100 licensed Minnesota visual arts teachers, working in all grade levels found that 72% reported they currently teach media arts in their visual art courses to meet graduation standards in schools.

According to the MDE website, career and technical education (CTE) courses have been options that meet media arts graduation standards. “[c]ourses that could deliver media arts include: videography, multimedia computer graphics, audio/video productions … photography (both digital and film), graphics” (MDE, 2004, pp. 11-12). This overlap of standards has suggested licensed teachers in CTE fields, a subset of trades and industry education, are also qualified to teach media arts.

We see this licensure overlap as problematic for two reasons. First, upon examining graduate and undergraduate preservice teacher licensure programs in CTE disciplines at state colleges and universities, we learned CTE coursework emphasizes learning to teach career and technical skills in experientially based curriculum. In other words, these are courses that relate to the workplace, life, and “technological knowledge … to solve problems and extend human capabilities” (Bruening, Scanlon, Hodes, Dhital, Shao, & Liu, S. 2001, p. 3). Those seeking teacher licensure in CTE disciplines have focused on technological literacy and have not been required to study artistic expression or aesthetics in depth. That philosophical stance has placed media arts education much more in line with principles found traditionally in visual arts, and as Lanier (1975) argued, technical literacy without an understanding of artistic expression is not enough.

Second, our survey data also indicated that 60% of the art teachers who said they are teaching media arts content also suggested they lack appropriate discipline-specific expertise—that is, the technological, aesthetic, and pedagogical knowledge to integrate more sophisticated and theory-based media arts practices in their classrooms to help students meet the graduation standards in this area. We also found that 80% of these teachers requested access to further training and coursework to address this gap in content knowledge.

Conclusions

An Obvious Need for Professional Development

The Milken Exchange on Education Technology found that “in general, teacher-training programs do not provide future teachers with the kinds of
experiences necessary to prepare them to use technology effectively in their classrooms" (Moursund & Bielefeldt, 1999, p. i). In light of the media arts knowledge base of visual arts teachers we surveyed, this has appeared to be the case. Although students may enter teacher preparation programs in visual arts with varying backgrounds using old and new tools to make art, the level of exposure to media arts processes prior to beginning these programs has tended to be heavily dependent on the student’s age, undergraduate major, course resources available at his/her institution, and the placement of that art education program either within a college of art or a college of education.

A preliminary search for sequential course offerings in media arts pedagogy and methods revealed few examples within art teacher preparation programs nationwide. Coursework directly related to teaching visual culture was perhaps the main avenue for preservice teachers to critically examine knowledge specific to new media and electronically assisted artmaking.

We make two recommendations to address gaps and overlapping areas in Minnesota arts education policy and CTE policy, specifically resolving questions concerning who is highly qualified to teach media arts. First, we outline an initiative to remedy pronounced deficiencies in licensed visual arts teachers’ content and pedagogical knowledge in media arts. Next, we examine whether coursework specific to media arts is necessary for preservice teachers entering K-12 licensure programs in visual arts.

A media arts certificate program for licensed teachers. We propose assembling 12-15 credits of media arts coursework to increase the theoretical and practical knowledge of visual arts teachers. Designed for inservice practitioners, this certificate program would update and/or increase their 1) technological skills; 2) facility using digital media for artistic expression; 3) pedagogical knowledge; and 4) ability to construct rigorous curriculum for media arts coursework that meets Minnesota graduation requirements.

Developing a university-based professional development program such as this provides a model for MBOT use. It expands the breadth of content knowledge of existing visual arts educators without creating a separate pathway for other practitioners to media arts licensure. We expect this program will in time sort out confusion over which teachers are qualified to teach media arts courses. Those who hold this new certificate should be motivated to broadly implement current media arts standards.

Media arts prerequisites for admission to preservice licensure programs. We also propose adding course prerequisites in media arts for preservice teachers. If more students enter visual arts licensure programs with digital artmaking skills and theoretical knowledge of the historical, political, and social contexts in which the media arts operate, upon induction into the field they can better implement existing standards. Adding coursework in media arts to the list of two- and three-dimensional studio requirements for preservice teachers will broaden their understanding of the concepts, tools, and structures of our discipline.
Teacher educators who already develop courses that address future practitioners’ command of the methods and pedagogy of art education, in turn, should be encouraged to include study of Minnesota’s media arts standards and how they might be actualized in P-12 classrooms. Finally, MBOT-required assessment of preservice teachers’ effective practice creating meaningful learning experiences for young people should also include their grasp of including media arts in these lessons.

Implications for Art Education Elsewhere

We believe our study of media arts education is telling, although some may argue that this work is Minnesota-centric and does not speak to the litany of broader policy issues facing art education in the United States and globally. The notion that a group of Minnesotans recognized over 20 years ago that “media arts represent a new curriculum requiring new competencies and a new definition” (Consadine & Haley, 1992) is important, as is the ambitious goal of encouraging study of various literacies and making all students critical consumers of media that inspired the creation of the nation’s first distinct media arts standards.

Arguing that “media arts can no longer be an optional ‘enhancement’ to education” (MDE, 1997, p. 2), Minnesota arts policymakers persuaded their legislators that maximizing students’ facility with technologies of visual and auditory communication was essential. Their success in defining media arts as a subset of arts education, rather than as career and technical education, hinged on the argument that media-literate students define “their perceptions through the process of analyzing, evaluating and producing media art works” (King, et. al., 2004, p. ma1). Closer examination of this strategy and how the Minnesota policy was drafted and implemented may help other arts advocates who face similar challenges. These Midwestern policymakers made it clear that “[m]edia arts is aesthetic-based and uses elements and tools of current and emerging technologies to create works that express feelings and ideas” (MDE, 1997, p. 2).

Mistakes were made in Minnesota, and when deconstructed, these too can help inform those in our field. For example, efforts to put the media arts standards into practice have languished statewide because policymakers failed to recognize a critical need for art teacher professional development. Questions about who is highly qualified to teach media arts arose in response to ambiguities in the policy regarding graduation requirements in the arts. In time, even those deeply invested in shaping these reform efforts began wondering if separate licensure for media arts teachers was needed.

Teacher educators in this state or others nationally can learn from these missteps. Our own analysis of key policy flaws, for instance, has led us to argue that visual arts teachers should be entrusted with the responsibility of shepherding Minnesota’s media arts standards toward full implementation. To reach that end we offer professional development initiatives that potentially will help Minnesota’s inservice and future preservice art teachers become more media savvy. Of course, a different approach would be to develop
another media arts certificate program for non-arts licensed educators, primarily CTE teachers. This would include rigorous coursework exploring the aesthetic thinking and decision making that are central to using software, hardware, and tools of specific media arts processes to varying expressive ends through creative use of space, time, light, motion, color, and sound. This path, though challenging, also deserves our attention.

References


Laws of the State of Minnesota. (1985). Ch. 12, Article 5, Section 6 [129C.10], Minnesota School of the Arts and Resource Center, Subd 3.4.


