INTRODUCTION

As this Handbook indicates, policy questions and issues surface when decisions are made about the purposes and objectives of arts education, curriculum design, teaching and learning strategies, the selection of content, teacher preparation, administration, and types of advocacy and research. A judicious and coherent policy is one that is ethically acceptable, descriptive of the state of affairs it is intended to realize, implementable, and amenable to assessment. There are also questions about the sources of policy and the forces driving it.

What then is the state of affairs that policy for visual art education intends to bring about? Who should decide such policy, and how is policy enacted and implemented? How is it to be assessed and who should be the assessors? What are the conditions and forces influencing changes in policy? Policymaking is often a function of collaboration among federal agencies, states, and communities, professional arts organization, institutions of higher education, cultural organizations, and a variety of special-interest groups. States, school districts, and local school boards, moreover, usually provide some leeway in the selection of content, methods of implementation, and instruments of evaluation, as evidenced, for example, in the implementation of the national standards for arts education. The tendency of professional arts associations has been to emphasize the distinctive educational values of arts education and how they might be realized in the young. Federal and private organizations, often in tandem, tend to concentrate on national priorities. Special-interest groups further complicate matters. Because a serious tension exists between professional arts education associations and a complex of federal and cultural organizations with potent lobbying powers, a major issue for the field of art education has become the preservation of the core values of art education. Such tension raises issues about the sources of policy, the credibility of policymakers, and the dynamics and politics of collaboration.

All policymaking ultimately derives from more or less explicit assumptions about the inherent values of art and how they figure in justifications of art education. What, for example, are the more immediate values of artistic and appreciative activities in art education and their effects
on other human values considered to be important? Contributors to this section have much to say about this issue as well as several others: the dilemma of policymakers in a period of cross-purposes (Hope), the uses and abuses of advocacy (Gee), the credibility of research claims (Hetland and Winner), the state and fate of aesthetic literacy (Smith), the mixed consequences of multiculturalism (Blocker), and the problems of understanding new and controversial art in both classrooms and museum education programs (Lankford and Scheffer).

The most informed writer about policy for arts education is Samuel Hope. He has written extensively about the subject and has been a leader in formulating and enacting policies, having played a major role in the creation and publication of the national standards for arts education. Moreover, as an executive editor of *Arts Education Policy Review*, he helps maintain an important forum for debates concerning policy relating to K-12 arts education. He thus brings a valuable background to a discussion of visual art education.

What stands out in Hope’s views on policy is not only his treatment of a series of policy issues, each one of which he illuminates by asking a number of key questions, but also his making a case for policy-based research. His articulation of issues and questions, which range from discussions of purposes, techniques, youth cultures, technology, and teacher preparation to philosophy, curriculum, support sources, and standards, constitutes a primer for thinking about policymaking. Making distinctions between the survival and the health of the field and between activism and wisdom-seeking, he highlights the basic values of the field, the degree of control the field has over maintaining and attaining such values, and the forces that impede their realization. Most important, he emphasizes putting policy analysis and enactment in the service of a substantive art education that emphasizes the creation and experience of works of visual works of art for their intrinsic values in contrast to views that place art education in the service of extraneous goals.

Whereas Hope provides a general framework for thinking about policy, Constance Baumgarner Gee examines a number of specific examples of policymaking that could have potentially adverse consequences for what Hope calls the security and health of the field. Having written extensively about the subject, she is principally concerned with the abuses of advocacy and the emergence of a complex of federal, cultural, and university collaborations that have less to do with the young realizing art’s distinctive values than with connections between art education and nonarts outcomes. Accordingly, she stresses the importance of asking key questions and making important distinctions. For example, what can school-based programming do that arts organizations cannot? To what extent do the objectives, overt and covert, of arts organization contribute to the erosion of school-based learning? Should it be assumed that any kind of art activity is educational and that anyone associated with art is an educator? If so, what are the consequences for the support of school programs of art education and professional teacher-preparation programs? Is there empirical support for those claiming significant nonarts benefits of art education? Gee’s stance is critical and skeptical and questions whether the field of arts education associations can effectively compete with a powerful arts organization complex whose priorities are often at odds with those of the field. Gee sees an encouraging sign, however, in the successful effort of the arts education associations to counter legislation that would give arts organizations considerable influence over policymaking. Her own convictions about the values of art education are grounded in reasonable assumptions about the contributions of art education to spirit, mind, and body, and in her belief that engagement with works of art is one of the greatest satisfactions of human experience.

One would think that anyone taking a serious interest in the arts would concentrate on their manifold aesthetic properties and meanings, which is to say their intrinsic values. The same should be true of the objectives of research programs that study the dynamics of teaching art. Yet a considerable amount of research is being devoted not to discovering the ways the young develop knowledge about art’s intrinsic value but to attempts to detect the effects of arts
education on such cognitive non-arts outcomes as reading, mathematical, and spatial reasoning skills, not to mention a variety of social behaviors. In short, research is centered more on art’s instrumental than on its core values. This priority seems to have two motivations. One motivation addresses the national concern about the eroding of basic skills in the population and a number of social problems that the schools are believed capable of ameliorating. The other motivation stems from curiosity about the ways the brain functions when undergoing certain kinds of acts. In her chapter, Gee enumerates a surfeit of instrumental values that advocates say are realizable through the study of the arts. What does a systematic and comprehensive assessment of such research conclude?

This was this question Lois Hetland and Ellen Winner set out to answer in REAP (Reviewing Education and the Arts Project). Using the method of meta-analysis, they synthesized clusters of individual studies that tested the effects of arts education on learning in non-arts domains. The results of the research were first published in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* (Summer/Fall, 2000), copies of which provided reading material for participants in a conference sponsored by the Getty Center that further addressed the problem of transfer. The proceedings of the conference were published by the Getty in *Beyond the Soundbite: Arts Education and Academic Outcomes* (Los Angeles, 2001). The results of the REAP study were also the subject of a symposium in *Arts Education Policy Review* (May/June, 2001), and an executive summary of the study was distributed by the National Art Education Association as part of its series that translates theory into practice.

Stating that REAP offers the most trustworthy knowledge currently available about the relations of arts education and cognitive transfer, Hetland and Winner concluded that overall there is as yet no compelling evidence that the study of art forms leads to improved academic performance. There were some exceptions. The use of dramatic techniques in the general classroom not surprisingly improved verbal skills. Musical instruction was shown to have had some effect on types of spatial reasoning, but Hetland and Winner nonetheless say that these studies provide no basis for thinking that policies should mandate listening to classical music for its extra-aesthetic benefits, whatever the audience. The Mozart effect, moreover, remains problematical so long as the mechanism responsible for it has not been found. With regard to the effects of visual art education, of most interest to readers of this *Handbook*, Hetland and Winner likewise found no compelling evidence to support claims for cognitive transfer. Different kinds of arts-rich education revealed no enhancement of either reading or math skills; the finding was the same for the effects of music instruction. Examinations of dance fared no better, although the paucity of dance studies was noted. It is not, say Hetland and Winner, that the studies they assessed have no value; the better-designed ones may provide insight into how the brain functions when undergoing certain kinds of activities. It is rather that cogent relevance to policy has not been established. Accordingly, the authors advise muting positive claims about the mechanisms of causative transfer.

Not only that. The authors question investing so much effort in studying arts education’s instrumental effects and ask whether there are important noncognitive outcomes of art education that are motivational and dispositional in character. Another approach might investigate whether the methods of teaching art suggest useful ideas for teaching other subjects. In short, the writers call for the right kinds of arguments for art education and the right kinds of evidence to support them. “The best hope for the arts in our schools,” they write, “is to justify them by what the arts can do other subjects cannot do as well or cannot do at all.”

The conviction that art education should do what it alone can do best also pervades contemporary writings about aesthetic education. Such writings conclude that education in the arts serves learning well by developing aesthetic literacy in the young, which is best attained by refining creative, perceptual, and reflective capacities. After indicating different senses of aesthetic education and its close ties to the branch of philosophy known as aesthetics, Ralph
Smith distinguishes between domain and nondomain interpretations; the former centers on the study of the arts and the latter on a variety of contexts in which aesthetic sensibility can find expression.

Before addressing contemporary literature and issues, Smith recalls the ideas of three generative writers on aesthetic education, Friedrich Schiller, Herbert Read, and John Dewey, whose expansive notions of aesthetic education inspired other theorists of arts education to argue the case for a more humane and aesthetic life. Consonant, however, with the prevalent temper of the second half of the twentieth century, expansive notions of aesthetic education gave way to more restrictive domain interpretations. Accordingly, Smith devotes less attention to nondomain interpretations that encompass, for example, the aesthetics of the natural environment and efforts to examine various aspects of education from aesthetic perspectives.

Questions and issues that arise in discussions of domain interpretations of aesthetic education center on the viability of such key concepts as aesthetic experience, aesthetic value, and aesthetic judgment. After a period when critical analysis (from both Anglo-American and Continental perspectives) questioned the tenability of certain aesthetic concepts, there has been a revival of interest in the aesthetic. Motivating this sentiment was the realization that too much was being lost in efforts to deaestheticize the experience of art. Moreover, the restoration of the aesthetic brought with it arguments for a closer relationship between aesthetic and ethical values.

Among the challenges facing policy for art education is a cluster of issues associated with multiculturalism. H. Gene Blocker, who has written extensively about the topic and spent considerable time living in different cultures, sorts out the basic problems and makes recommendations for policy. Blocker first mentions practical, theoretical, private, and cultural reasons for having art education: that is, self-expression, informed knowledge and appreciation of the art world, enrichment of life, and assimilation of the young into their culture. He then emphasizes that we are concerned with multiculturalism because North America itself constitutes an ongoing evolution of the integration and assimilation of different groups. While the roots of American culture have been primarily, but not exclusively, European, he says that the evolutionary process must now continue with the integration and assimilation of non-European groups. But so far as art education is concerned, how to do this has generated a wide-ranging discussion that extends from radical ideological interpretations of multiculturalism to more accommodating and conciliatory viewpoints. Although Blocker strongly favors the idea of cultural diversity and the assimilation of the young into their cultures, he devotes a large part of his chapter to exposing a number of myths and misconceptions that have influenced questionable policy decisions. Blocker’s work and disposition prompt him to recommend complementing Western conceptions of values, art, and aesthetics but without being anti-Western or anti-modern; and he cautions against the possibility of instilling in students a hatred of their culture that is the result of ignorance. Calling for sober reflection and consideration, he sides with those who say that all multicultural studies need not be about victimized minorities or express anti-Western sentiment. Nor is multiculturalism necessarily divisive.

Among the salient points Blocker makes is a recognition that multiculturalism is grounded in Western ideals of democracy and its ideals of equality, diversity, and freedom. Moreover, the charge that Western art and aesthetic theory have been preoccupied primarily with “art for art’s sake” proceeds from ignorance of Western aesthetics. Nor is the relatively detached appreciation of art uniquely Western. It is also stressed in some non-Western aesthetic traditions, for example, those of China and India. Knowledge about non-Western forms of art, moreover, is usefully conveyed by museum education programs, that is, in venues often condemned by anti-Western critics for their alleged role in defining and advancing Western art. Last, in the place of a multiculturalism that insists on introducing the young chiefly into the arts of their own ethnic backgrounds—African art for African Americans, etc.—there should be an
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Intercultural education that stresses a balance between assimilation into one’s own culture and transcendence of it in order to build a more catholic sense of self. Blocker’s recommendations call for greater depth and breadth in the definition of multiculturalism, better understanding of both Western and non-Western art and aesthetics, and more emphasis on the non-Western and native roots of American culture.

In his discussion of multiculturalism Blocker referred to postmodern critics of art museums who faulted them for what they took to be elitist policies typical of Western cultural institutions. Blocker countered by saying that such criticism notwithstanding, museums can play important roles in providing authentic knowledge about non-Western and native cultures. Louis Lankford and Kelly Scheffer address a different kind of problem museums have in fulfilling their educational obligations. They stress the need for policies and procedures regarding exhibitions of controversial art. Their discussion ranges from a description of the response of art museums to ever-changing concepts of art, the meaning of controversial art, types of controversies museums must contend with (e.g., internal organizational problems and external relations with the public and the media), to the character of the works themselves. For example, what should attitudes be toward works that are not only fragile, impermanent, confrontational, morally offensive, and of questionable origin and ownership, but also toward works that are more statements about art than aesthetically interesting objects. Consequently, the staffs of museums must be well versed in the history of Western art, cultural differences, and the changes that have occurred in the modern era, not to mention in philosophical aesthetics that provides insight into the problems of defining, interpreting, and evaluating art. Aesthetic education in the schools has similar responsibilities in preparing teachers of art for schools charged with inducting the young into the world of art, including the world of art museums. Many of the issues associated with controversial art are brought out in the authors’ extended discussion of Alma Lopez’s Our Lady.