

Christine Alexander, Courtesy: N.C. Arts Council

One Left Plus One Right Equals One Whole

A Rationale for Arts Education in North Carolina Schools

by Gloria Gillins Jackson and Steve Adams

To me, the arts are basic," Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr. said at a statewide conference on arts education in 1980. "And we must be candid and admit that we do not, today, have a well-rounded arts program in all of our schools." Eleven hundred participants in the Arts and the Child Conference in Raleigh were focusing on the Governor, waiting to hear a solution to this problem.¹

"Just as it is essential that every child learn from the beginning to read, to write, and to do math," Hunt continued, "it is also essential that every child in every school in North Carolina participate in good arts programs." The arts administrators and teachers began nodding their approval. Parents and artists were smiling.

The Governor, sensing a friendly audience, raced to his conclusion. "We've simply got to make a far better effort at the state level. We simply must commit in the state budget of North Carolina more funds for arts in the public schools. And I intend to see us do that!" The speech brought the house down.

Two lean budget years later, the Governor has not been able to follow through on the promise of putting more funds into arts

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education. State Superintendent of Public Instruction A. Craig Phillips offers this assessment of why: "He [Hunt] kind of waxed eloquent in his speech. But the commitment has not been realized yet," added Phillips. "We have a legislature and a governor who have not seen fit to put that kind of priority in their expansion budgets."

If the arts are in fact basic, as Hunt put it in his crowd-pleasing address, why do the arts usually fall behind reading, writing, math, and sciences in the funding line? North Carolina has made significant progress in arts education in recent years, but arts has neither achieved parity with the "three R's" at the core of basic school curricula nor emerged as an "essential" as have computer technology and other sciences. How has the state fostered arts education in the public schools? And what remains to be done?

In the meeting room of the State Board of Education hangs a framed bit of philosophy from former Gov. Charles B. Aycock (1901-05), a staunch advocate of good schools. We must give schoolchildren the opportunity to "burgeon out all that is within them," Aycock's ghost reminds the State Board every time it convenes. Gov. Hunt, who sat on that board for four years as lieutenant governor, used the Aycock quotation in his 1980 "arts-are-basic" speech.

How do state education policies reflect an effort to help every child "burgeon out" to his or her fullest potential? Put in the current vernacular, how do priorities at the state level incorporate arts into the "basics" of education?

"The back-to-basics movement has taken a narrow view of what the basics are," says Carl Dolce, dean of the School of Education at N.C. State University and long an advocate of "basic" education. "My own definition of basic education includes the arts, from a number of points of view and including a political point of view. The arts are the first area totalitarian governments clamp down on. During World War II, the people kept going to concerts even though they might get blown up doing it. The arts are an essential part of human experience."

Understanding what is basic for education requires some knowledge of the latest research on how the brain functions. For many years, scientists have been aware that the brain has two hemispheres, each of which has its own distinct functions. Most educators contend that both sides of the brain must be developed in concert. The left hemisphere develops linear, sequential thinking, in short, utilitarian skills—a mode of analysis. The right side of the brain processes visual and spatial information, in short, holistic skills—a mode of synthesis. When a child describes a painting, the left side of the brain is at

work. The child's emotional response to the painting reflects the right side of the brain in action.

The two hemispheres are connected by a bundle of nerves called the corpus callosum, which integrates information processed by each hemisphere. "Both [hemispheres perform] cognitive functions," writes educator Charity James. "In the fullest competent human being, they are in constant interplay, each taking priority as appropriate."²

Historically, American education has been preoccupied with "left-brain" learning. "It is apparent that organization of schools is predominantly based on capabilities found in the left brain," says a pamphlet issued by the Division of Arts Education in the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. "It also seems that we are largely educating only half of the child."³

North Carolina schools have begun to break from this tradition, but to what extent? In his 1980 speech, Hunt claimed bragging rights for the state's progressive reputation in the arts. Regarding arts and education, he pointed to:

- an official statewide curriculum which includes the arts as one of seven areas of learning;
- the N.C. School of the Arts, which provides highly professional training for gifted students (see article on page 53);
- the Governor's Schools (one in Winston-Salem and one in Laurinburg) which provide exceptional students an opportunity to concentrate in the arts; and
- the coordination of arts and arts-related ventures by the Department of Cultural Resources, formed in 1971, the first such cabinet-level agency in the country (see article on page 2). Indeed, North Carolina does appear to enjoy a progressive reputation in arts education, according to Dolce as well as Phillips.

To the extent that reputation is deserved, it is largely the result of developments in the past 23 years, and particularly the last 13. The state Department of Public Instruction hired its first music supervisor, with a staff of six, in 1951, and added an art supervisor in 1961. But not until 1969-70 was the Division of Cultural Arts, precursor of the Division of Arts Education, formed in the Department of Public Instruction. In 1973, the division hired the first state-level dance education consultant in the nation.⁴

In 1975, the state began certifying teachers in drama, in addition to art and music; in 1977, certification in dance began.^{5,6} In 1980, the division hired a consultant in the folk arts. Meanwhile, three significant policy initiatives reflected a growing commitment to arts education.

1. In 1975, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) began a voluntary accreditation program to assist local school systems with long-range planning in all areas, including the arts. DPI provides program outlines and specific criteria for assessing local school systems' efforts in art, dance, drama, and music.⁷ About 90 of the 143 local school systems have been accredited or are in the process of being accredited, according to Phillips. To achieve accreditation—which is voluntary—a local system must prepare a long-range comprehensive plan *in all areas*, including the arts, and must actively work to implement it.⁸ (Critics claim that in some cases accreditation has been awarded to systems with insubstantial arts programming in their plans. They cite this as an example of a less than total commitment to arts within the Department of Public Instruction.)

2. In 1977, the State Board of Education adopted the Standard Course of Study, the first unified statewide curriculum. Arts were included as one of seven curriculum areas.⁹ The Course of Study describes philosophy and program content in art, music, drama, and dance. In 1979, the board supplemented the curriculum guidelines with Goals and Performance Indicators, which outline criteria for measuring students' progress at each grade level.¹⁰ Prior to

1977, there was no formal mandate for the schools to provide arts programs. Now these documents have the force of law—technically at least—under the Administrative Procedure Act of 1973.¹¹

3. In 1985-86, a teacher Quality Assurance Program is scheduled to begin. Designed to improve the competence of teachers through screening, teacher certification, review, and other procedures, this program includes the arts in the specific subject areas covered by the program.¹²

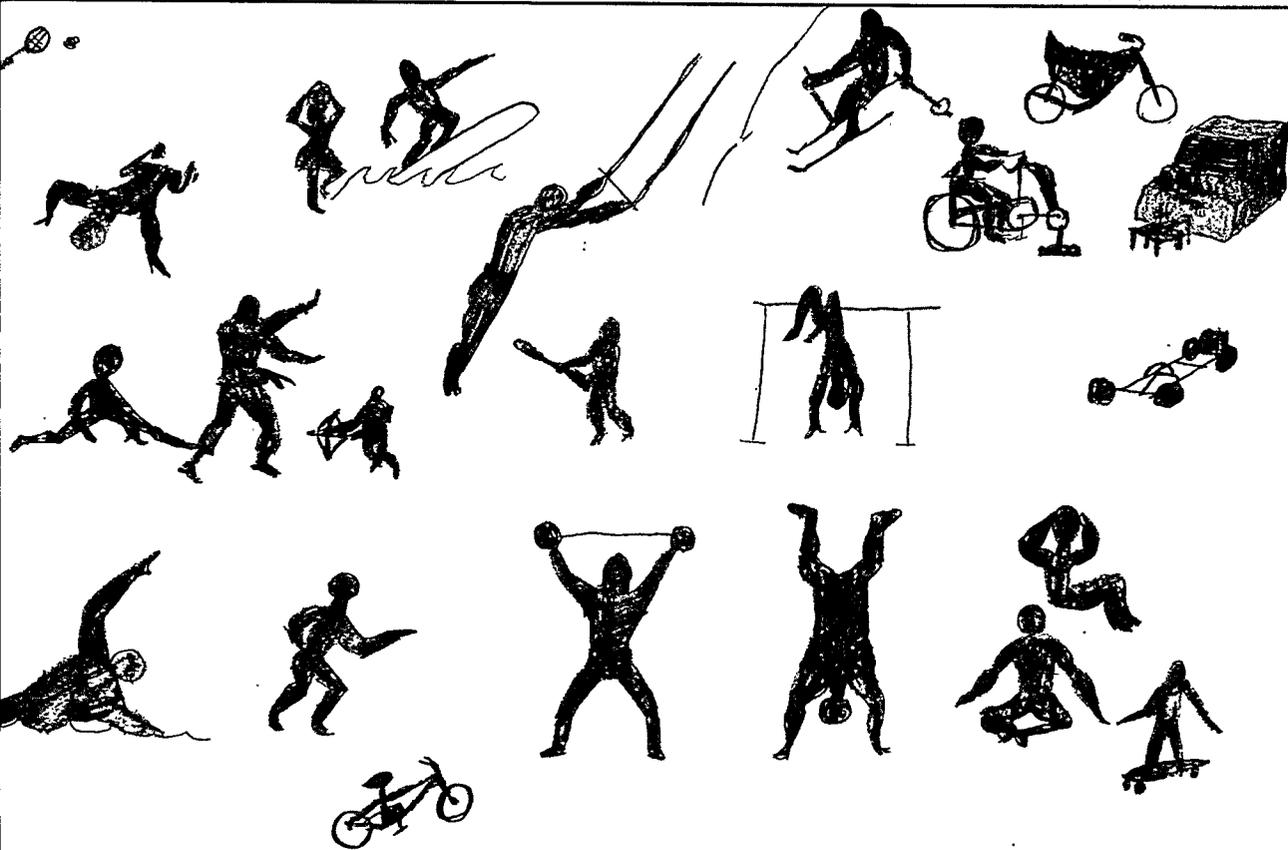
Thus, the state has, as Gov. Hunt suggested, developed a sound framework for arts education. It has increased the number of arts consultants at the state level, added certification in drama and dance, and incorporated the arts into its curriculum, long-range planning, and efforts to upgrade teacher training. "The study of the arts," says Dr. Preston Hancock, music consultant in the Division of Arts Education, "is not something you do when you finish basic education—the arts *are* basic education."

State policies don't always translate into concrete classroom experiences. The critical question, then, for arts education in North Carolina is this: How well does the philosophy articulated by Dr. Hancock—along with the state policies listed above—filter into the lives of individual children?

Arts education for most persons is concentrated at the elementary school level,

Courtesy N.C. Dept. of Public Instruction

Action People by Andre James, Daniels Middle School, Raleigh.



although educators agree that the development of creativity is a life-long experience (see other articles in this section for more on arts education for the aspiring professional and for adults.) In the early years, arts are integrated into the school day. As students move into middle and high schools, courses become elective and often specialized.

Not all areas of the arts are offered at all schools. Many schools must share arts teachers, and teachers complain that, because of the personal nature of arts instruction, overcrowding and split programs often reduce effectiveness. "In some school systems, the arts are highly organized," says Dr. Jerome Melton, deputy superintendent of Public Instruction. "They are mediocre in others. Most are somewhere in between."

Local leadership is critical to arts education because both state policy and the state budget deliberately are designed to allow flexibility for local school systems. All 143 local school systems now have an arts coordinator, or at least a central-office administrator whose responsibilities include the arts. Local programs often hinge on the effectiveness of these individuals, says Lynda McCulloch, dance consultant and assistant director of the Division of Arts Education. Many school administrators have backgrounds in coaching, but few come from the arts, adds McCulloch. As a result, she suggests, local leaders may tend to have stronger commitments to athletics than to the arts.

Since the 1930s, funding for North Carolina schools has been under a consolidated statewide system, where state revenues provide a budget base for all local systems—funding levels which may be supplemented by the individual systems through local and federal revenues. With minor exceptions, the state budget does not include line items for arts education.¹³ The state allocates teaching positions on the basis of enrollment, and local units allocate these positions among the subjects. The state also provides one "support" position for each 264 students. Arts specialists must compete with guidance counselors, media specialists, and assistant principals for these "support" slots. Put another way, the state budget allows local school officials the chance to choose athletics—or some other priority—over the arts.

Despite this local flexibility, state policy does play a role in how local systems allocate positions. Class-size legislation, for example, requires local systems to assign a minimum number of teachers to the regular classroom. Course requirements are another example of state influence. But of the seven curriculum areas in the course of study, only five are required for high school graduation. Two—cultural arts and

Christine Alexander, Courtesy N.C. Arts Council



vocational education—are not. Officials in the Department of Public Instruction acknowledge that the arts curriculum, while official state policy, actually offers only guidelines for local schools in developing programs.

Emphasis at the state level on other subjects—notably reading, math, science, and, more recently, writing—also may place the arts in a poor competitive position for scarce resources. The statewide annual testing program, for example, ranks every student by percentile in reading and math, and the test results are published school by school. There is no comparable accountability in the arts. In addition, the legislature funded the primary reading program in the late 1970s, putting reading aides in every primary-grade classroom, at a cost of some \$56 million per year. By comparison, the State Board of Education has requested only \$4.2 million from the legislature for the 1983-1985 biennium to improve instruction in *cultural arts, physical education, and science*. Moreover, the legislature has rejected similar requests in recent sessions. Finally, the Department of Public Instruction has consultants in a number of subject areas in its eight regional centers across the state. But the four cultural arts consultants all are based in Raleigh.

As a result of such factors, there appears to be a shortage of arts teachers. The Department of Public Instruction estimates that there are currently 2,600 to 2,800 arts teachers in the state but asserts the need is about 8,000. While no firm budget figures are available, Phillips says that hiring a teacher costs slightly more than \$20,000 a year in salary and benefits. These figures suggest that North Carolina schools currently spend some \$55 million a year in salaries for teachers in the arts and that some \$160 million

may be needed. The schools' total expenditure for salaries in 1980-1981 was about \$1.5 billion.¹⁴ Thus the state and the local school systems currently allocate roughly 3.7 percent of all teachers' salaries to teachers in the arts (\$55 million ÷ \$1.5 billion).

North Carolina has made significant strides in expanding arts education. It has incorporated the arts into its school curriculum, long-range planning, and teacher certification. Under the auspices of the State Board of Education, State Superintendent Phillips has recently appointed a 10-member Arts Education Curriculum Study Committee to review programs and make recommendations. These developments reflect a recognition that arts education is a vital part of learning. At least in the Division of Arts Education, the view is, as Lynda McCulloch puts it, that arts education is "a basic right that every child has."

Yet, as Phillips says, that commitment is not fully realized in the classroom. The quality of arts programs varies significantly among school systems, even at a time of austerity at every level of government. Both educators and politicians—from brain-development researchers to Gov. Hunt—seem to agree that a child can learn to read and write better (i.e., use the left side of the brain) if he or she is also offered the chance to develop holistic emotional skills (i.e., use the right side of the brain). Eliminating support for developing the right side also hurts the development of the left side. Scientists say the skills of the two sides of the brain develop most efficiently if nurtured in concert, not one at the expense of the other. Nevertheless, Phillips, Melton, and other top state education officials agree that the arts are especially vulnerable to the budget-cutter's knife.

In his 1980 speech, Gov. Hunt challenged his audience "to commit ourselves to the concept that in our schools, in our state, arts are basic. . . . If we do that, our efforts in other areas, in reading and writing and math, will be far more successful than they are today." How can the state—and the local school districts—fulfill the promise Gov. Hunt made in 1980, to integrate arts education into the basic educational commitments to children in this state?

Because many of the most critical decisions are made at the local level, a heavy responsibility for arts education falls on parents, parent-teacher associations, local school boards, and local administrators. At the state level, the Department of Public Instruction can maintain and strengthen its commitment to arts education through program standards, accountability, staff development, and stronger criteria for teacher training and certification. And the State

Board of Education can seek more money for the arts than it has in the past—and the legislature can provide it, if not in this very lean budget year, then next year. If all these things are done, then North Carolina schools might better complete the brain equation: one left plus one right equals one whole. □

FOOTNOTES

¹The Arts and the Child Conference in 1980 was sponsored by the N.C. Department of Public Instruction, the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources, the N.C. Alliance for Arts Education, and the Junior League of Raleigh. Financial aid was provided by the U.S. Office of Education, the N.C. Arts Council, and the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation.

²Charity James, *Initial Middle School Position Paper*, N.A.I.S. Middle School Task Force, Boston N.A.I.S. Press, 1975. For a further discussion on brain hemisphere research and creativity, see Thomas R. Blakeslee, *The Right Brain: A New Understanding of the Unconscious Mind and Its Creative Powers*, Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1980.

³"Creative Education through the Arts . . . an Alternative," Division of Cultural Arts, Department of Public Instruction, undated, p. 2.

⁴During this period, titles within the department changed from "supervisor" to "consultant." The proper title—consultant—is thus used throughout the article; the word refers to the person's title, not to a non-staff contract method of employment.

⁵For a comprehensive look at certification structures and policies, see the recently released N.C. Center for Public Policy book, *Teacher Certification: Out-of-Field Teaching in Grades 7-12 in N.C.*, 1983.

⁶"Arts Education Report," Doc McCulloch, submitted to Arts Curriculum Study Committee, Nov. 19, 1982, p. 2 ff.

⁷"State Accreditation Program Descriptions: Art, Dance, Drama, Music," Division of Arts Education, Department of Public Instruction, April 1981.

⁸See *Teacher Certification*, N.C. Center for Public Policy Research, 1983, p. 3.

⁹The seven curriculum areas are citizenship (including social studies and economics); communications (including language arts); cultural arts; healthful living (including health and physical education); mathematics; science; and vocational education.

¹⁰"Course of Study and Goals and Indicators: Arts 80," Division of Arts Education, Department of Public Instruction, 1980.

¹¹N.C.G.S. Chap. 150A. The rules mandating arts programs are codified in 16 N.C.A.C. 2E .0100, which states "The Standard Course of Study consists of a K-12 continuum in six [since increased to seven] broad curriculum or discipline areas: . . . Cultural Arts Education: This includes the fine and performing arts, recreation and avocations, and is addressed to both performance and consumer objectives [Section .0103(c)]."

¹²"Report on the Quality Assurance Program by the Liaison Committee Appointed by the North Carolina Board of Education," Teacher Education Area, Department of Public Instruction, October 1981, preface. See also "Quality Assurance Program Catalogue of Teacher Competencies," Teacher Education Area, Department of Public Instruction, February 1982.

¹³One line item for arts education, for example, is the Edwin Gill Theater Fund, which provides \$149,500 annually for professional drama performances in the schools.

¹⁴*Statistical Profile 1982*, Division of Statistical Services, Controller's Office, State Board of Education, May 1982, p. 1-72.