

Cleansing the Palette / NAEA News October 2009

It is hard to believe that during this school year, we will mark the end of the first decade of the 21st century! It's also hard to imagine that only about 10 years ago thousands of new websites were beginning to go online every day. One site that went live in April 1999 was www.cluetrain.com, home to the Cluetrain Manifesto, which stated a simple proposition we have heard countless times: the Internet changes everything.

But the developers of the Cluetrain Manifesto were particularly interested in how the Internet was changing the nature of communications in the global marketplace, especially when compared to the way corporations and organizations typically talked. They wrote:

“These markets are conversations. Their members communicate in language that is natural, open, honest, direct, funny and often shocking. Whether explaining or complaining, joking or serious, **the human voice is unmistakably genuine. It can't be faked.**” [emphasis mine]

As this has been proclaimed our “Year of Acting Assertively,” we must ensure that those tens of thousands of assertive actions we plan—both individually and collectively—are efficient and effective. Establishing our authentic voice, our *authenticity* as art educators among the general public, is an important first step.

A lot has been written about authenticity. The business world has already discovered its merits of authenticity—there are countless pop-business and cultural-commentary books about authenticity on the shelves of your local Barnes & Noble. For that matter, Barnes & Noble is a good test case for authenticity in its own right, as it tries even harder these days to be as appealing as the local independent bookstores that have survived the big-box stores with their cushy chairs and lattes.

Starbucks is another case in point, having found it hard to maintain the appeal of authenticity when there are two or three Starbucks dueling at many urban intersections. So hard, in fact, they've recently created an entirely separate franchise—15th Ave. Coffee & Tea—to provide a semblance of “local coffee shop” authenticity.

But the power of the Cluetrain Manifesto isn't so much its message, but its voice. Consider the following:

Thesis #3: Conversations among human beings *sound* human. They are conducted in a human voice.

Thesis #9: These networked conversations are enabling powerful new forms of social organization and knowledge exchange to emerge.

If our profession is to be effective in “acting assertively,” we can't leave our communications largely to a few spokespersons. Each and every one of us must seek out and climb the battlements ourselves and deliver our messages with a voice of authenticity. What does that look like? For many years, we have been good advocates—wearing our buttons and tee shirts and toting our bags proclaiming *You Gotta Have Art!*—but now we must assert ourselves by using our own authentic voices to make compelling cases for *Why* You Gotta Have Art!

Now, how do we do that?

Start a conversation

One way is to proactively seek out opportunities for public speaking at PTA, faculty, and community-based meetings or to present prepared statements at school board meetings. Take advantage of informal opportunities in the faculty lounge or in the supermarket checkout line—or on the sidelines of a soccer game. Ensure written narratives are included as a part of student art exhibits to provide context that deepens viewer knowledge and understanding of the value of art education.

Be yourself

It's a conversation you're starting. Boldly speak up and flash your authenticity. Tell others what you believe—and things they probably don't know. Make your conversation about your students and about the learning that takes place in your art classes! Through your conversation, offer a fresh and perhaps different perspective and challenge others to think about the truisms of education in a different way.

Tell everyone the visual arts are essential to a high-quality, effective, and balanced education.

Tell everyone all students deserve equal access to a balanced curriculum that includes the sciences, arts, and humanities.

Tell everyone, in Secretary Duncan's words, "The arts can help students become tenacious, team-oriented problem solvers who are confident and able to think creatively."

Tell everyone the federally mandated Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) identifies the arts as a core subject.

Tell everyone!

Many already think public education isn't everything it should be. With unprecedented federal funding support for education, U.S. Secretary of Education Duncan has challenged states, districts, and community-based organizations to implement innovative models for teaching and learning that can demonstrate effectiveness. As art educators, we are in a unique position to help shape innovative practices that ensure student learning and success in today's world. (See Duncan's letter in support of arts education on p. 7, and at www.arteducators.org/advocacy.)

KISS

This phrase "keep it simple, stupid" has been around more than 50 years for good reason—it has merit. You don't need a long list of talking points, just several concise messages. Go to NAEA's website, arteducators.org, and find compelling reasons for *Why You Gotta Have Art*. But remember—the authenticity comes from you. Your personal stories of students' intellectual growth and kindled curiosity will illuminate our messages and demonstrate the value of art education.

Show your passion

You're never more compelling than when you voice your personal investment in a cause. Tell your stories to others with the same deep conviction you've shared with me and your colleagues—you prove daily that the visual arts are a core subject, not marginal learning projects, and visual arts are essential to a high-quality and balanced education!



NaeA

Advancing Art Education

If we each communicate our authenticity beyond our own profession, we will assert professional knowledge and understanding that has great potential to influence education in the 21st century.

Arteeducators.org is a constant resource for shared information, strategies, and success stories; however, it is *your* voice—multiplied by the tens of thousands of authentic voices of our full membership—that will carry the day, reap outcomes from our actions, and bring success to our students!

P.S. And always know that, in minding our mission, NAEA champions your efforts in every way every day! Have you personally invited a colleague to join NAEA and your state association?

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