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MOVING RIVERS, SHIFTING STREAMS: PERSPECTIVES ON THE EXISTENCE OF A POLICY WINDOW

By

ANN M. GALLIGAN
Northeastern University

CHRIS N. BURGESS
The Ohio State University

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The Cultural Policy and Arts Administration Program
Department of Art Education, College of the Arts
The Ohio State University
258 Hopkins Hall, 128 North Oval Mall
Columbus, OH - 43210
Phone: (614) 292 5356
Fax: (614) 688 8219
Email: artspolicy@osu.edu
<http://arted.osu.edu/APA/index.php>

**MOVING RIVERS, SHIFTING STREAMS:
PERSPECTIVES ON THE EXISTENCE
OF A POLICY WINDOW**

This paper represents differing perspectives on the creation and establishment of the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network (ALN). At the heart of this discussion is whether or not the Rhode Island (RI) Task Force in charge of this process took advantage of what noted public policy analyst John Kingdon refers to as a “policy window” where policy issues move onto the government agenda and toward decision and action. Moving rivers refers to the presence of both major policy realignments as well as physical and demographic changes that were occurring in Rhode Island between 1999 and 2003.¹

Kingdon describes the process of opening a policy window as involving three convergent streams: the problem stream involving problem identification and recognition often based upon indicators or focusing events; the policy stream populated by disparate policy communities producing alternatives and proposals; and the political stream incorporating shifts in public opinion, administration changes, and interest groups in the determining of actor receptivity. These streams, all flowing independently with a life of their own and driven by differing forces, are coupled by policy entrepreneurs at critical points in time in an effort to influence agenda setting and advocate policy alternatives. A policy window then opens “because of change in the political stream or... because a new problem captures the attention of governmental officials and those close to them,” thereby providing the opportunity for action in the form of policy proposals and alternatives.² In essence, a policy window opens in either the political stream or the problem stream leading to coupling efforts on the part of entrepreneurs and a place on the decision agenda. If, however, coupling does not occur when the problem or political streams set the governmental agenda, there is little chance an item will rise on the actual decision agenda

¹ Rhode Island has one of the fastest growing Hispanic populations in the United States. Much of this population is living under the poverty line with a high rate of households headed by single females.

² Kingdon, John. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies 2nd Edition*. New York: Longman, 1995; p. 203.

on which action is to be taken, as the streams by themselves are not capable of setting decision agenda items. Thus, when a problem is identified and the political environment favorable, it is vital that the policy stream produce viable alternatives. Otherwise, the risk of an item fading from the decision agenda is vastly increased.

Therefore, in light of the use of Kingdon's model as an analytical framework, some central questions remain: Did a policy window open in Rhode Island? What changes actually took place and how so? Were the three separate streams Kingdon identifies actually in place? And if they were, how and when did they shift into a pattern that resulted in policy change? Moreover, is the use of Kingdon's streams the appropriate policy model guiding inquiry into the Arts Learning Network's formation or does another framework emerge as more advantageous? Ultimately, the actions of the Task Force itself dictate the answers to the questions posed above.

History of the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network

In March of 1999, Rhode Island Governor Lincoln A. Almond issued Executive Order 99-2 creating a Governor's Task Force organized as a joint effort of the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA) charged with the responsibility of examining "the relationship between education reform and the arts, and to make policy recommendations on how the arts can have a significant impact on the educational agenda of Rhode Island."³ Upon creation of the Task Force, Governor Almond commented "The arts can ... help prepare students for living in a diverse society, teach skills necessary to the workplace of tomorrow, and play a significant role in helping children develop the skills of literacy and a love of reading. Studying the arts allows students to understand the past, experience and derive meaning from the present, and envision and shape the future."⁴ The Task Force was made up of nineteen gubernatorial appointed individuals from the arts, education, and business communities. Dr. Warren Simmons, Executive Director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, was the chair. Dr. Ann M. Galligan, Co-Director of Northeastern's Cultural and Arts

³ The Governor's Task Force. *Literacy in the Arts: A Framework for Action. Report to Governor Lincoln A. Almond.* June 2001, p. 5

Policy Research Institute was the project director. The remaining eighteen members represented professional associations, arts disciplines, unions, school administrators, school committees, parent-teacher organizations, and teachers.

The Task Force identified four main themes at the outset that guided their deliberations:⁵

- 1) What role can and do the arts play in overall education reform?
- 2) What is the status of arts learning in schools and in community organizations? What is given, to whom, by whom, and to what effect?
- 3) What is the status of teacher preparation and training, both for arts educators and classroom teachers and for artists and community educators?
- 4) Is there a role for home and community in arts learning?

The themes were instrumental in framing the Task Force’s inquiry and in developing the vision statement, key findings and stated goals. These will be listed here and expanded upon in following sections.

*Vision statement:*⁶

We envision a Rhode Island where all children and youth have access to rich and challenging arts learning opportunities in their homes, schools, and communities, thus enabling them to become more creative and critical thinkers, effective communicators, responsible citizens, and knowledgeable adults.

*Key findings:*⁷

- **Finding 1:** Arts learning across home, school, and community is critical to the success of Rhode Island’s “All Kids to High Standards” education agenda

⁴ News Release, Office of the Governor (Rhode Island), July 9, 1999.

⁵ *Literacy in the Arts*, p. 7

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 29

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 11, 17, 19, 23

- **Finding 2:** Currently in Rhode Island there is a lack of equity in physical and programmatic access to arts learning opportunities for children and youth, both in and out of schools
- **Finding 3:** The Task Force has found a lack of strong, capacity-building infrastructure that would support quality arts learning opportunities for all young people across the state
- **Finding 4:** In spite of Rhode Island being arts-rich, there is no statewide coordination of arts learning for children and youth across the sectors of home, school, and community

*Goals:*⁸

- 1) All children and youth will have curricular experiences in school that will allow them to demonstrate proficiency in one or more art forms by graduation.
- 2) All children and youth will have ongoing access to community-based arts learning to enrich and extend their knowledge and skills.
- 3) All children and youth will have ongoing access to professional arts experiences that are school-linked and community-based.

After holding panels and public hearings over the course of eighteen months, conducting field surveys, reviewing scholarly research, meeting with national leaders, and inviting public discourse and dialogue, the Task Force submitted its final report, *Literacy in the Arts: A Framework for Action (LIA)*, to the governor in April of 2001. The committee used a set of guiding principles framing their inquiry that allowed for the development of findings and goals. Moreover, the committee put forth a set of recommendations in the form of strategies for the fulfillment of these goals and created a transition team coordinated in cooperation by RISCA, RIDE, and the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education (RIOHE), and three design groups charged with advancing the process the Task Force had begun.

⁸ Ibid. pp. 30-31

Some critics considered these steps as rather limited and worried that the sitting Task Force (whose term ended with the submittal of the final report) would not see their charge through to the end. They felt that little progress was being made toward the realization of the stated goals by the year 2008 in large part because the very people integral to the emergence of this issue on the policy agenda were not meaningfully involved. They perceived that responsibility for pursuing the goals detailed in the report had been passed to a transition team comprised mostly of volunteers who might not have the same time or passion as those originally involved.

The view from the other side was quite different. In actuality, all the major principals are still very much involved and significant progress is being made as seen from the matching of recommendations to concrete action steps by a wide range of still-invested principal actors and newly invested partners.

Recommendations

As mentioned above, the timetable for realization of these goals is 2008. Accordingly, the Task Force proposed specific strategies for goal fulfillment under the categories of resources, policy, professional development, and public awareness. The Task Force issued “Recommended Strategies” rather than articulating specific actionable policy recommendations, an important distinction. The primary thematic organization to these recommendations can be seen by the following report assertion:

In order to meet its goals, the Task Force believes that the gap that exists between its vision and the current status of arts learning in Rhode Island must be addressed. The Task Force also recognizes that in order to reach its goals, there needs to be an unprecedented collaboration of the three worlds – home, school, and community – in which young people live and learn each day. Therefore the Task Force recommends an arts learning network to coordinate efforts incorporating home (parent/family involvement), school (K-12 education), and community (e.g., higher education, arts organizations, youth development agencies, and ethnic organizations). Established as a public/private partnership, the proposed network would facilitate public engagement, assist in aligning resources (public and private/state and local), and facilitate dialogue and action between and among its partners, assisting them in serving their constituents.⁹

The recommended strategies or “activities” in the fulfillment of this statement include mapping of resources, coordination of programs on the state and local level, increased dialogue among community-based arts programs, an emphasis on standards, and a push for greater professional development opportunities for those providing learning in the home, school, and community. At the behest of the Task Force, this work was to be done by the Transition Team that would have a two-fold responsibility. One, an action plan, inclusive of measurable benchmarks, for the realization of the Network’s three goals would be formulated within one year through the use of design groups. Two, the structure of the arts learning network which would then be responsible for implementing the action plan of the team and design groups would be established. The Transition Team “would be composed of a diverse set of stakeholders (representative of home, school and community) and would function as a steering committee for the design groups.”¹⁰

Current Status of The Rhode Island Arts Learning Network

So where was the Network in 2003, and have these goals been realized? For the most part, the Network is alive and well, and its stated goals are in the process of ultimate completion. In the update of Summer 2003, the Network reported the following progress on its three goals.¹¹

Goal 1: All children and youth will have curricular experiences in school that will allow them to demonstrate proficiency in one or more art forms by graduation.

The first step in the action plan was to advocate for change in the state's graduation requirement, which was successfully completed in January of 2003. Organizations and individuals testified at the RI Board of Regents hearings on high school graduation requirements. They addressed the lack of equity and access to the arts with the existing 1/2 credit requirement for college bound students only, as well as other Task Force findings about the inequities of arts access outside of school. As a result, the Board of Regents passed a graduation requirement that, in Section 5.2 says, "Each student exiting a Rhode

⁹ Ibid, p. 31

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Update on the Arts Learning Network*, August 2003.

Island high school with a diploma shall exhibit proficiency in a common academic core curriculum that includes the arts and technology."

This seemingly simple statement is a profound change in state policy, and not just in the arts. The switch from a credit-based system to one of demonstrating proficiency is complex and will be ongoing over many years. Superintendents were required by June of 2004 to submit their plans for meeting proficiency and other new high school regulations to Commissioner McWalters. Students entering high school in September 2004 will be the first class operating under the new regulations.

The RI Arts Learning Network action plans were put into place to support these changes. For example:

- Four educator-artist-parent-student teams (in dance, music, theatre, and visual arts) have been working since January 2003 to define what this proficiency in the arts for "all kids" might look (and sound) like. The resulting document will give guidance to districts as they develop their plans to submit to the Commissioner of Education. The document was distributed in draft form for public feedback in Fall 2003, with the final version ready by January 2004 on the newly-created RI Arts Learning Network website (www.riartslearning.net).
- Additionally, the RI Department of Education has formed a professional network called Graduation by Proficiency, open to anyone interested in the issue. The RI Arts Learning Network was featured as a resource at the first meeting in June 2003. All the arts proficiency team chairs attended.
- Lastly, the RI State Council on the Arts is currently offering grants to school districts to help with planning for the new arts graduation requirement. Funds are also being sought by the Arts Learning Network to support proficiency implementation activity in the future. While many questions still remain, and there is *much* work ahead, the planning committee reports that, "we are (amazingly!) well on our way to meeting Goal 1 by the original target year of 2008."¹²

Goal 2: All children and youth will have ongoing access to community-based arts learning to enrich and extend their knowledge and skills.

Goal 3: All children and youth will have ongoing access to professional arts experiences that are school-liked and community-based.

The Network is now embarking on goals 2 and 3. First of all, proficiency means looking at what a student can demonstrate, whether the learning has been only in school, or also from the family and the larger community, a holistic “body of work.” The change in graduation requirement honors the Task Force vision that all children and youth learn in the three worlds of home, school and community. While proficiency will be assessed by school systems, and schools must provide what is needed for all students to achieve proficiency, family and community contributions are an integral part of the picture. The Arts Learning Network plans for goals 2 and 3 will support this integrated vision.

There are two Network infrastructure components—human and technological. In early winter of 2004, the Network engaged (on a part-time basis) five regional arts learning specialists (RALS)--people around the state who are familiar with, and advocates for, arts learning. They serve as information resources to the public, help to coordinate arts learning in and out of school, and work individually and together to solve problems around equity and access. The RALS are mapping their information on a public database that will become an integral part of the RI Arts Learning Network's website. In addition, state-of-the-art mapping technology is being used by the RALS to create a database of arts learning resources. This will enable a young person, a principal, an artist, a parent—any interested party—to call up varied levels of information about arts learning by geographic location and in visual and text formats. In addition to the above, other players are involved including the RI Office of Higher Education (one of the Network's three state partners), colleges and universities, and lastly community arts and educational organizations.

Professional development for arts learning providers (schools, arts organizations, social service agencies, individual artists, etc.) will be ongoing. Funds are being sought for professional development that will address "best practices" in arts learning for children and

¹² Ibid.

youth. In keeping with the home/school/community model, these events will be geared to a variety of audiences - - school-based arts educators, arts organization teaching artists, parents, and social service agencies. Arts learning providers will be contacted over the coming years to gain feedback on the "proficiency for all kids" document drafted by the four design teams, and information on various arts programs for children and youth for the Network database and website. In addition, input on the design and content of professional development institutes and feedback on how the Network system of access to information is working will be sought so that the system can be modified as needed.

The Transition Team concluded their August 2003 update:

Our vision and plans are long-term. Like most large-scale policy initiatives, progress is slow and steady, with many challenges and occasional quick leaps forward. We will continue to grow, change, and succeed because of the political will and creative problem solving that each arts-supporting Rhode Islander brings to bear on behalf of ‘all kids.’ Our strength is our diversity of skills, opinions and energy coming together in a coordinated vision. What we are doing, is seen by many as a national model--what can happen when people cross boundaries and organize to serve children and youth. We look forward to another exciting year!¹³

What Really Happened: Did Streams Shift?

As first introduced, at the heart of this discussion is whether or not the Task Force took advantage of what Kingdon refers to as a “policy window” where policy issues move onto the government agenda and toward decision and action. According to Kingdon, a policy window is an opportunity for advocates to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems. Clearly, this is what happened in Rhode Island; but was it a true “policy window”, or was it a “pre-window,” a foreshadowing for arts advocates and education reformers in *beginning* the public stage of issue definition in an effort to create their own opening and to begin building a broad-based political constituency to support the solutions they would eventually prescribe? Rather than taking advantage of an existing window, were they pulling together the policy community forged across the arts and

¹³ ALN Update, August 2003.

education fields in order to identify issues and articulate the problems commonly recognized; and were they building their own form or frame for an anticipated policy window at the same time they were creating the arts education panorama that would be visible “on the window’s other side? For those at the helm, the answer was that is precisely what they were doing.

However, there are also those who take the position that the Task Force failed to capitalize on the perceived policy window, an argument that perhaps has its roots in the series of events leading up to the creation of the Task Force. According to the report, “[t]he need to examine the role of the arts in education reform was raised at the Brown University/Providence Journal Public Policy Conference on the Arts, held in 1997. As a participant ...Governor Almond and several members of his Cabinet articulated the need for a more systematic look at how the arts are serving the public purpose in Rhode Island, including the area of education.”¹⁴ Indeed, it was at this time that McWalters highlighted the need to assess the manner in which the arts could meaningfully be effective in “changing the face of education in Rhode Island.”¹⁵ Yet, the actual genesis of the Task Force likely lies in an American Assembly convening exploring the arts and public purpose. In fact, the work of Dr. Ann Galligan was instrumental in the shift of focus for the abovementioned public policy gathering from censorship issues to an exploration of the arts and the public purpose, a direct result of participation in the American Assembly. Additionally, Randall Rosenbaum, Executive Director of RISCA and a member of the Governor’s Cabinet, and Sherilyn Brown, RISCA Education Program Director, were involved, as well as RIDE Commissioner Peter McWalters and Richard Latham, RIDE education policy specialist.

Accordingly, these primary actors spent a considerable amount of time in creating an appropriate forum for discussion of the issues surrounding arts and education. The Brown/Providence Journal conference featured evening speakers who presented the nation perspective and the morning sessions explored local issues and concerns. In effect, what

¹⁴*Literacy in the Arts*, p. 5

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

was happening in Rhode Island, and elsewhere, was a climate shift away from previous political animosity towards the arts, and apathy towards the value of arts in education. The 1997 American Assembly had given advocates a way to approach policymakers with issues other than censorship and lack of funding. Governor Almond was receptive to this, and McWalters, in particular, was willing to explore ways to use the arts to effect school reform. In addition, the Governor, a Republican, was about to serve a final term in office, and thus, had no political trepidation in championing the arts. At this juncture, there was no political or financial cost for either in taking a position favorable to the arts, particularly arts education. In fact, McWalters could gain a great deal from such a stance, as he was then about to assume the national role of Chief of the Chief State School Officers.

For many, these circumstances clearly appeared to signal that a policy window of opportunity was opening as two influential political actors were expressing open receptivity to the issue at hand by coupling it with a seemingly more pressing problem. An opportunity would appear to be emerging at this point for arts education advocates to link themselves to school reformers, with significant backing from well-placed political actors friendly to the idea that the arts can have a meaningful role in this reform. Despite the seeming public perception of the arts as a secondary policy issue to education, both the Governor and members of his Cabinet clearly expressed a willingness to concede a role to the arts in education. An argument may be made at this point that the window has been cracked and the agenda has been reordered. The arts in this situation can be seen as an answer to a perceived problem, that of inequitable schools and failing children, and political support is secured. Thus, critics of the Task Force might argue that the streams have definitively merged thereby creating a window of opportunity for substantial policy change, a situation not capitalized upon by Task Force members.

But was a policy window ever created?

The issue of the arts' relationship to school reform was clearly on the table. Yet defining an issue is different than defining the subsequent problem or problem sets that need to be addressed, much less their probable solutions. In many ways, the issue was clear; but there were multiple problems that the Task Force was addressing simultaneously and, as critics

argued, the agenda was vague as a result. Issues of access and equity, shifting demographics and the increased diversity of the RI school population, and the very need to better understand the nature of arts learning, loomed large before the Task Force. Before concrete recommendations could be formulated, there first needed to be greater consensus on what the problems at hand involved. Arts educators saw one burning set of issues, arts organizations and school administrators another. Even the vocabulary the Task Force members shared reflected the need for increased dialogue and consensus. For example, one member representing Parent Teacher Organizations objected to the notion of “proficiency” fearing that her own children had little arts talent and would not be able to graduate from high school if these recommendations passed.

Yet the arts education/school reform alliance was a powerful one in Rhode Island, as it was increasingly so across the nation. This situation is best exemplified in the three main “bedfellows” serving as Task Force chair and the two conveners. Dr. Warren Simmons, director of the Annenberg Institute for School at Brown University, and chair of the Task Force, father of the New Standards Movement, was passionate about school reform and positive youth development, but a late convert to the value of the arts in achieving these goals. McWalters was deeply enmeshed in issues of school reform and was open to the arts as an engine of change. Rosenbaum was a champion of the arts and open to partnering with education forces to realize the goals of a richer arts environment in the state for all citizens, including children and youth. While coming from different vantage points, all three were open to defining the problem in a way that served the needs of their various constituencies. The fourth partner, William Holland, Commissioner of Higher Education (and his deputy, Nancy Carriuolo), also saw the need to broaden the scope of the problem to include teacher training and preparation. Finally, the major arts institutions and teachers unions were willing participants in helping to define the framework for future action, but the group did not feel there was enough consensus on specific action steps to push their agenda at this juncture.

Thus, the main challenge for this body was not only how to define the problem in a way that resonated with all involved, but also how to move the second stream into place:

developing and advocating a feasible solution. Rather than prescribing fast action steps that had not been vetted fully, the Task Force chose to slowly define and articulate the problems and to build a strong political constituency of politicians, decision-makers (elected officials, principals, superintendents, teachers, unions, arts organizations, artists, parents, students and friends) receptive to recommendations resulting from this process. Given the timeframe, the Task Force unanimously opted to turn the creating of specific action steps over to another body, along with the guiding principles they had developed.¹⁶

While critics felt the Task Force lacked a clearly defined problem statement in the LIA document as well as any meaningful problem solving or alternative formulation, the three principals, now a team of four with the active participation of Deputy Commissioner of Higher Education Carriuolo, felt they had set the stage for a smooth transition to the next phase of making arts learning a reality in the lives of Rhode Island children and youth with the involvement of an expanded constituency now creating meaningful recommendations with realistic and measurable goals.

However, there is little question, critics argue, that the Task Force's LIA report falls short as a direct stimulus for policymaking. No action plan is presented but rather a call for a transition team to create such a plan. It seems to be a policy framework rather than a policy document capable of stimulating change or motivating policymakers. So how can the view that the Network is moving forward be reconciled with the view that the LIA report is weak and ineffectual? One might safely conclude that the LIA is not sufficient as a policy document in that the problem to which it links itself is not resolved through the goals and recommendations. Moreover, critics felt the main players had abandoned the effort. Yet in the eyes of these principals, the process was on track and they were firmly in control of that process. In fact, they were largely responsible for determining that the original Task Force could not produce meaningful recommendations for action within the charged timeframe. They had two options available: Expand the timeframe for the original

¹⁶ A majority of the original Task Force members and staff are actively involved in this process, more than two years after the Task Force delivered its report and technically "went into extinction."

Task Force; or create a plan for a second phase, where an expanded body would produce the action steps needed.

Option two was deemed desirable for a number of reasons. First, the Governor would soon leave office and the steering committee felt it needed to give the existing administration a political “win” while at the same time holding back on specific recommendations and policy actions in order for the next administration to take ownership of the initiative. Second, they understood that the original Task Force could produce a meaningful plan for future action that had considerable buy-in from all constituent groups outlined above, having done an effective job in “softening up” and building an effective policy community, but it needed more time to develop specific action steps and solutions to the problem it had finally defined.

The ALN guiding principles (Appendix A) recognized that there needed to be institutional “buy-in” and an organizational infrastructure in place in order to move forward. The Task Force was housed under the RI Arts Alliance, a loose affiliation of arts educators under the umbrella of its Kennedy Center parent. Once the Executive Order expired, it had no official home or institutional structure to support it—financially, administratively, or otherwise. As both Brown and Latham were long-time staff members of their respective organizations—RISCA and RIDE—and Carriuolo was well positioned as deputy director at RIOHE, it was a natural extension to move the “entity” under the umbrella of these three state agencies. Now, Brown, Carriuolo, and Latham could work in their official capacities to ensure the transition would take place, further institutionalizing the infrastructure needed for policy change.

Policy Windows and the Task Force

“Predictable or unpredictable, open windows are small and scarce... The scarcity and the short duration of the opening of a policy window create a powerful magnet for problems and proposals.”¹⁷ Windows may close for a variety of reasons including ineffective action, no action taken, a change in actors, a passing of events which framed the window

¹⁷ Kingdon p. 204

originally, or the lack of viable, actionable policy alternatives. This is not to say that there is certainty in perceiving the opening and closing of windows. Indeed, there is often disagreement among actors, though healthy debate can often move the process forward. Perhaps for that reason, the Task Force was in no hurry to rush in developing proposals. They took a considerable amount of time to reflect and define the actual problems under consideration and, at the same time, they worked hard to create alliances with a wide range of stakeholders who they believed were needed if change was to occur.

Critics complained that the time, effort, mobilization and expenditure of political resources of which Kingdon speaks are not satisfied by the LIA and the transition team that followed. They addressed the volunteer status of the team with concerns that the new participants would approach the task with considerable less commitment and energy and worried that so much momentum had been lost since the publication of the report, significant effort must now be made just to put the issue back on the agenda. They concluded with the argument that this issue has fallen off or “drifted away” due largely to inaction and under-mobilization of resources. However, rather than “drifting away,” advocates for arts and education reform in Rhode Island would argue that the issue is now firmly anchored on the policy agenda of the three main state agencies involved, as well as the 27 state school districts, the arts community, and on the agenda of various legislators and policymakers (NOTE: This is a statewide initiative involving every school system, district, principle and student in Rhode Island).

The main criticism of the LIA report was that it suffered from a lack of problem definition. As Petracca puts it, “how an issue is defined or redefined, as the case may be, influences: 1) the type of politicking which will ensue around it; 2) its chances of reaching the agenda of a particular political institution; and 3) the probability of a policy outcome favorable to advocates of the issue.”¹⁸ Only when the Task Force provides the guiding principles used to formulate goals does a reader have some understanding of the problem

¹⁸ Petracca, M.P. “Issue Definitions, Agenda-building, and Policymaking.” *Policy Currents* 2:1, p. 4. As quoted in *The Politics of Problem Definition: Shaping the Policy Agenda*, David A. Rochefort & Roger W. Cobb, eds. 1994, pp. 8-9

to be addressed. However, critics felt these principles were numerous and not clearly unified around a central definitive problem.

When reading the principles and findings contained in the report, the obvious question arises, what is the problem being defined? Is this even the right place to look for the problem being addressed? As mentioned, the Task Force did not begin with a problem and set of solutions attached. It began with an issue (linking arts learning to school reform) and the task of creating a cohesive constituency for change among educators, artists and arts organizations, policymakers and parents, and members of the community. In keeping with Petracca's statement of what problem definition must consider, one may ask, can a politician/policymaker look at the principles in the LIA report as the problem statement and if so, is there a solution or policy alternative proposed in the goals and recommendations to follow? For most, the answer is no. That was not the intention of the framers and it may be too narrow a definition of what could be expected from this process. Thus the following question emerges, has the Task Force fulfilled its mandate of presenting "policy recommendations" related to the potential impact the arts can have on education? The answer is yes, but not in the initial document or planning phase. This was accomplished by the subsequent Transition Team.

This point is addressed directly in a quote by a member of the Task Force. She explained that the Task Force report contained no action plan intentionally. "It is simply a *framework* for action. Following Kingdon's advice, we [the Task Force] wanted the buy-in of 'second tier people, so we wanted to include them in creating the action plan.'"¹⁹ One might surmise that because the Task Force was so concerned with creating a policy model incorporating a mixture of bottom up and top down policymaking, they provided no specific course of action and thus provided an incomplete document. While some might question the wisdom of this in light of the gubernatorial mandate for policy recommendations, it is important to note the "lame-duck" status of the governor, and the long-term perspective of the LIA framers. Media expectations suggested that the aim of the Task Force was to allow Rhode

¹⁹ As quoted in Michelle Novello. *Rhode Island Arts Advocates Strive for Arts Education for All Children*. January 2002, p. 13

Island schools to interact with the state's many artists and resources, and that if it succeeded, Rhode Island would act as a model for incorporating the arts in education.²⁰ While critics felt this statement alone leads one to believe that the LIA report missed a significant opportunity to not only influence state educational policy as related to the arts, but also nationally, the LIA framers felt the media had been shortsighted in viewing their original intention. Moreover, framers believed they were on target in creating a Network that would tap artists and arts organizations, and that they were well underway in creating a strong statewide infrastructure and model for change.

There is no argument that the Rhode Island effort was largely a result of policy entrepreneurship. But the entrepreneurs involved never specifically advocated for one set of solutions before they began; they never opted to capture their "problem in a nutshell."²¹ While critics argue that the Task Force missed its opportunity by not clearly establishing a problem definition and policy alternatives to take advantage of an open window, the LIA framers would argue they played the "cards in their hand" the best they could, with a long-term strategy in mind. To that end, the LIA report can then perhaps be looked upon not as a policy document capable of moving initiatives through an open window of opportunity, but rather a "stick" propping the window open and thereby extending the life of the window itself in an effort to bring together the fragmented arts education policy community to forge viable policy alternatives. Essentially, the Task Force resisted the temptation to act as a de facto policy community in the short term in order to build a stable structural basis for future policy actions which arguably would have more long-term impact on arts education in Rhode Island. It was of vital importance then that the fragmentation of the policy community be meaningfully addressed if the long-term vision of the LIA framers was to succeed.

Since the publication of the LIA report, it has become fairly apparent that the strategy employed by the Task Force and the Transition Teams has proven successful in that arts

²⁰ Davis, Marion. "New Task Force wants artists to come to class." *The Providence Journal* (July 12, 1999): B1 &3.

²¹ Kingdon, p. 204

education has secured a place on multiple agency agendas as well as that of decision makers on a district and legislative level. In effect, where the Task Force was created to recommend specific policy recommendations, it instead recognized the environmental weaknesses of such a scenario and laid the groundwork for future courses of action. As part of this overall strategy, the Task Force began to mobilize and involve the arts and education communities in an effort to draw together a coalition of specialists in the form of a cohesive arts education policy community. If successful, policy alternative generation would then emerge and allow for coupling of the political or problem streams with the policy stream on the part of entrepreneurs within the community itself, rather than an outside body created in the absence of strong community input. Thus, where a window was indeed cracked in the form of the Task Force, the weaknesses of the policy stream did not allow for the necessary coupling of problem and solution, opportunity and action.

A Different Lens

Perhaps then an alternative interpretive policy lens better captures the Network's path. Interestingly, the stages process advocated by Jones and Anderson²² and often dismissed as inherently flawed by critics²³ may in fact be the most appropriate framework within this discussion, at least in terms of analytical utility. A policy process broken down into manageable and identifiable stages encompassing specific activities or functions allows for a deeper analytical understanding of what potentially may be seen as a disconcerting and seemingly disconnected "chain of activity."²⁴ As applied to the Network, we see that the extended approach discussed above is represented by the sequential yet complex nature of the stages, even when such stages may blend together at certain points. The LIA report served to place arts education upon the decision agenda which has led to policy formulation responsive to LIA stated goals, and ultimately adoption and implementation, either current or forthcoming. In essence, the framework for a window is being built by moving deliberately from one stage to the next, a course specifically dictated by the

²² See James Anderson, *Public Policymaking* 4th edition, 2000; Charles Jones, *An Introduction to the Study of Public Policy* 2nd Edition, 1977.

²³ See Paul A. Sabatier, *Theories of the Policy Process: Theoretical Lenses on Public Policy*, 1999.

²⁴ Ripley, Randall B. & Grace A. Franklin. *Congress, the Bureaucracy and Public Policy*. Chicago, Dorsey Press, 1987; p. 2.

framework put in place by the Task Force and the Transition Teams which followed. Therefore, though the stages model might lack the theoretical power of Kingdon's streams, in this instance it provides a meaningful and particularly appropriate lens through which to view the development of the Arts Learning Network, as well as the reasons for the decision by LIA framers to adopt a slower, long-term vision.

Just as seen in the streams model, the stages approach to the policy process places direct emphasis on the interactive nature of relationships and partnerships. Accordingly, in Rhode Island there now is a strong policy coalition of national and local arts advocates, education reformers and theorists, artists, arts and school administrators, parents and politicians that form a fairly unified arts education policy community. The statewide graduation requirement has been changed to reflect the goals of the LIA framers. Parents and funders are involved. The mantra of Home-School-Community is the basis of a wider perspective on where, when, and how, arts learning takes place. In addition, the infrastructure to support such a shift is rapidly expanding. There is talk of a "Year of the Arts" so that the state can celebrate the first classes graduating under the new structure.

According to Kingdon, policy making involves a set of processes, including at least (1) the setting of the agenda, (2) the specification of alternatives from which a choice is to be made, (3) an authoritative choice among these specified alternatives, as in a legislative vote or presidential decision, and (4) the implementation of the decision.²⁵ In fact, one could argue items one and two were slow in coming; that item three has not happened; and item four is well underway, with the ensuing changes in the statewide graduation requirement, the creation of the Network and its website and personnel, the on-line GIS resource mapping, the availability of funds for school districts and teacher training, and the on-going stability of the major players involved.²⁶ In addition, the University of Rhode Island has become involved in developing the website and the cultural resource mapping. Brown University is on board, not only with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, but the Northeast Regional Lab and the Arts Literacy Project that links with Trinity Rep and

²⁵ Kingdon, pp. 2-3.

²⁶ In 2003, Brown, Carriuolo, Galligan, Latham, McWalters, Rosenbaum and Simmons were all still actively

Rhode Island College. In the spirit of the Home-School-Community, Providence has been awarded a major grant by the Wallace Foundation to develop its after-school and community offerings (including arts programming).

“The dynamics by which problems get atop the agenda of action, and where alternatives are defined by and for policymakers, powerfully shape policy formation in any political system.”²⁷ Christopher Bosso’s quote is relevant in this discussion in that the Task Force report failed to meaningfully define the problem or actionable alternatives and thus, seemingly lost policy momentum in a favorable political climate. In truth there was very little that could realistically be considered implementable. Instead, it has been left to the three design teams, with the aid of a steering committee and oversight board consisting of the three main state agencies and most of the former Task Force members, to form an action plan. Again, critics might argue that only after such a plan has been formulated might there be anything implementable in a manner which may provide long-term impact. One is left to ask though, has the time already passed? Is the window shut? Or rather, has it yet to open?

Conclusion

Did the Task Force, operating under a state mandate to provide policy recommendations, fail to seize the moment? As we have seen, arguments may be made for both sides. Had the Task Force provided actionable recommendations, the political ball might have begun to roll and it might have forced opposing groups to rally their forces rather than the other way around, as the current state seems to be. To critics, inaction led to no action. However, this argument is problematic in that the findings of the Task Force allowed for the emergence of a fairly strong and unified arts education policy community which, if sustained, will arguably have a broader impact on policy generation in Rhode Island than the specific policy recommendations originally called for in the gubernatorial mandate. Thus, where there seems to be inaction, there is actually mobilization and the surfacing of a framework for substantive policy development and implementation beyond the immediate political

engaged, as well as many members of the original Task Force.

²⁷ Christopher J. Bosso, “The Practice and Study of Policy Formation.” In Stuart S. Nagel, ed., *Encyclopedia of Policy Studies*. New York: Marcel Dekker, Inc., 1994; p. 96

environment. Stakeholders in arts education initiatives have widened as a result thereby expanding the policy constituency base as well as political capital.

Critics of LIA operated on the belief that a policy window opened. The Task Force, the Arts Learning Network and its framers might counter that a window was cracking, but it was not truly open yet. Perhaps, what they recognized was a “foreshadowing” of the window they would like to see, but Kingdon’s three streams were never in alignment. As critics suggest, the problem stream was vague, initial solutions non-existent. The political stream was aligned in some places—major policy communities and some important actors such as Rosenbaum, McWalters and Carriuolo were aligning, yet the major political actors, such as the governor and the mayor of Rhode Island’s largest city were not in long-term position of strength. Rather than failing to take advantage of an existing window, this may be the story of arts advocates who partnered with school reformers, parents, teachers and the public to build the framework for a future window while they worked to ensure the vista on the “window’s other side.”

APPENDIX A:

ALN Guiding Principles

- Arts learning across home, school, and community is critical to the success of Rhode Island’s “All Kids to High Standards” education agenda.
- The arts provide children and youth with the variety of learning strategies to meet high standards in the arts and other subject areas.
- The arts are a basic form of literacy in the 21st century. The ability to understand and communicate is based on both verbal and non-verbal systems of symbols. The abilities to read music or a text, analyze a poem or painting, design a website, and create a dance or play are invaluable tools for communicating.
- Comprehensive learning in the arts can make a significant difference for all children and youth, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, helping them to achieve at higher levels than without the arts.
- The arts allow children and youth the opportunity to frame an understanding of their own cultures and of others, an important part of living in our increasingly diverse society.
- School-to-career opportunities in the arts provide students with skills and knowledge that lead to job-readiness for the expanding fields of communication-based and creative industries.
- The arts foster the multilevel literacy needed to thrive in a rapidly changing global economy, thereby providing students with the necessary skills of teamwork, problem solving, and creative thinking.
- The arts provide children and youth a vehicle for personal transformation by opening their minds and stimulating their imaginations to see possibilities for living full and meaningful lives.
- The arts have the potential to align the educational roles and resources of home, school, and community by providing children and youth with intellectual, social, and emotional support.
- The arts are essential for developing the whole person and can be a critical tool for positive youth development.