Development and Operation of the
New York State Art Teachers Association

Dr. Stanley Czurles

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SMJ: Dr. Stanley Czurles, Professor and former Director of the Art Division at the State University College of Buffalo, will talk about the development and operation of the NYS Art Teachers Association... Dr. Czurles.

CZURLES: Sister, I have been in many countries, and one of the most important things that I can bring out is that, in the United States, we are very fortunate that we have control of education that it is in the hands of each state, and not at nationals center. One of the most important things about it, is that it provides for a possible close working together of the teachers in the field and the directing state education department. This is not possible in those countries where everything is all centralized. In this way, teachers can, if they are organized, have a constant input, and the educational departments can in turn have a feed back as to what happened as to what is needed. When I entered the Art Education profession, this opportunity for
democratic change existed, but there was no structure for it. I was in my professional life privileged to play a major role, therefore, in planning and then evolving and since then continuing participating in the professional interchange between the teachers in the field and the governing groups in the state education department. My contacts with Albany (I refer to the State Education Department as Albany) ... started even before I was certified to teach. I was in one of the first degree program for art teachers at Syracuse. Mrs. Zara B. Kimmey, who was the supervisor of Drawing for the state of New York, was interested in what was going on at that place and she was a frequent visitor to Syracuse. We became acquainted. I learned how the state department was operating, and what the needs were. While I was still a student, I was attending some of the Eastern Arts Association meetings, where she (Zara) was also present. At that time, there was only one art education organization to which people could belong, and that was the Eastern Arts which encompassed the Northeastern United States. (In another tape I will talk about the inter-action of these various organizations.) The Eastern Arts Association was very good for professional people coming together, but it had no voice, no power to determine the policies of the operation in the state. It finally had to be left to the people within that state. When I came here to what was a Teacher's College in 1931, Mrs Kimmey continued her contracts because here we were starting a state supported teacher preparation program. She was very interested in what was going on here. She also wanted to
add some of her ideas, and in turn, she was interested in some of the ideas that were being developed here. From that point on, in 1931, I became an on-call consultant. Whenever they needed an opinion from the field, I was called to go to Albany on many occasions. In turn, I began to initiate some ideas with the State Education Department as to what were some of the things within the state program that needed development. In connection with Albany contracts, I was called in when they were planning elementary classroom programs, the industrial arts program, and long-standing syllabus for secondary education. I got into some real trouble at that time. They had asked a few other men and me to come in to judge the new syllabus on which a committee had worked for over a period of approximately six years. We had to be very critical of it, and rejected it. That made for very bad feelings. The reason was that the new proposal simply took the old procedures of teaching little individual units like drawing here, and color technique here, something else and something else... and they just added more courses to it. Our feeling was that the state needed a total restructuring of the syllabus. We started with how a human being conceives, creates, and how he then reaches for materials, and that the approaches toward art should not start with trying to do finished products, but building up a security in proposing ideas in creating. That caused quite an impasse, and I thought that they would be finished with me forever, but it turned out to be just the opposite. Eventually, another committee was called in, and they reached a compromise syllabus. It became increasingly clear to me,
that, although I was a consultant, I didn't have to be listened to. If I agreed with them... fine. If I didn't I was then a troublemaker. I also felt that there should be a system built by which there is more input from the teachers in the field. Although I was supervising student teaching, I was not teaching in the public schools. Increasingly, as they would accept my ideas or reject them, I began to think and talk and plan, as did other people, about establishing an organization of the teachers to whom these things referred to, not a particular consultant. Frankly this at first was not exactly opposed but...

SMJ: About how many teachers were involved?

CZURLES: The idea would be that every teacher became a member. I will explain that a little bit later on. Eventually Mrs. Kimmey began to find that she had opposition from higher ups that she could not support herself. She needed the support of the teachers. There came the time when it seemed right to organize the NYS Art Teachers Association. In 1949 there was a meeting that was called together, and everyone agreed "right off the bat" that something should be done. My professional responsibilities over the years have been to listen to people, to listen to a collection of ideas and to pull out the essence. First with short hand, then in long hand to develop that it is we are wishing. I always finish with how we should go about it. Some day I will find it. I did draw up the first proposal as to how in NYS Art Teachers Association could be organized and how it should operate.

SMJ: Excuse me, Dr. Czurles. Did you send out yourself the
notices to all the teachers in the city? Who did that?

CZURLES: No, we met in Syracuse. In the proposal for the constitution, I tried to make it so that it would be constantly democratic, and it would not suffer from what most organizations do of inbreeding of officers, who in most cases are college people. I admit that college people have more time, have a broader view, although I wrote into the constitution that no college person would be a president. My idea was that we are the people who feed the ideas, propose the structure, and if we take over we won't develop a democratic system. So right from the start it was determined...

SMJ: Did you have much opposition concerning that?

CZURLES: No! In fact just the opposite! Because that was the first time to quote "They could feel their oats." It is true of course that the teacher in the individual schools does not know the overall long range plans, proposals, problems, so forth. They can learn if they are given the chance to learn.

SMJ: They could also consult the college.

CZURLES: At the beginning the college people were very much welcomed as advisors, and then as the growth of all institutions, there came a time when they said you quote parents or administrators. We don't need you to operate our schedules. Actually, in the history of the organization there was a big slump, and they did not know what to do, or how to do it and what was going to happen. Administrators were brought back in, but never in a controlling position. The first convention was organized and the first president who was elected was a supervisor from the city of
Buffalo, Mr. Root (sp). This first convention was held in Buffalo in May of 1950. In the meantime we had been working in this area to establish what you might call a model of how the NYS Art Teachers Association is different from organizations that leave operations to elected officers. Our way would involve everyone. The overall picture was this. Let’s start with a small sub-groups who come together within the hour "cider and donuts." Those would be the little people. But the little people are the ones who are facing problems in the classroom. We did organize all of WNY section so it would be no more than about 20 people in a group who could meet, and it worked out beautifully. We felt or at least, I felt, I have to admit that some of these were my ideas,...

SMJ: How often did they meet?

CZURLES: Well, it depended upon the group itself, usually once a month.

SMJ: Alright.

CZURLES: Now the idea also was that you would meet at s different each time because art teachers needed to see art rooms. Art rooms went from the most miserable of conditions to the most plush. That would give all of the teachers in the group a change to see other art rooms, art programs, art exhibits. Politically, it would be nice to get the principal invited to act as a host. Then he/she would feel a positive attitude toward the group. He/she would want to feel pride in what he/she school was doing, etc. So, that was incorporated. These people would meet without a too structured program. When they are all around the table in a
small group, just think, everyone might actually talk!! When you go into a room with 100 people, and lots of questions are asked, only the daring can do it. But here was a chance for let's say "Ms. Tweedletoops" to come in all excited because she found out that if she hangs her wet brushes upside down they will dry faster! It may be just a minor idea, that two or three others will pick up, and it will be used. Of course, there was a chance to discuss the schedules, time allocation, cost of materials and supplies. There was a tremendous diversity in how programs were upgraded and how those programs would be run. This was a self-service, self educating process. It worked. The idea was that these teachers would meet and tell each other the little things (in terms of major issues) that would help each other. It would also give them ammunition for improving their program. As they discussed, there would be some things that they came upon which they could not control. Those ideas would fit to an executive committee which represented all of the units in WNY. This is now where some action may be taken which is still localized in WNY. Make recommendations to the schools, that what they could not handle, their representative would bring up at a State convention. So, the idea was that the state convention would be a mystery. Most conventions are!

SMJ: Were any of the officers at those local meetings?

CZURLES: Could be! They were always invited. Also any visiting teacher could also attend. The whole idea was self-education process. That is a very, very important thing I feel.
SMJ: Someone had to plan where those were going to be held?

CZURLES: The responsibility was with each group. The executive committee took main responsibility. Some did a lot, while others did very little. The Buffalo suburban schools had a very active group. The city itself was divided into ten units. In this way, issues and problems began to "float up". The idea was that each area in the state would also undertake to do something, some sort of a study toward one of these problems. Then the convention would be a convening of the people with proposals and possible solutions. See, I think you should have ideas, and I feel you should take action, and then begin to get a group action. The different sections, depending upon who was their leader, began to publish little information sheets. The exchange of information began. I can say this, because at that time, that was very much needed. The other point was that the State meeting would be held in different parts of the state and held in as small a community as possible. This id reverse of the norm. We tried to spread it out and around the state, and it did help a little. The third meeting was held in Elmira, NY those who were near by could attend. We did start with the people coming to a convention from the region with a report. We began to concentrate and isolate what are the major problems. Those first really became terrific to spur what our education could be.

SMJ: That was then? Would it have been in the late 1940's?

CZURLES: This was in 1950, the early '50's. The 1951 meeting was the first at which the various zones presented projects. As a
result of the projects, we began to further isolate what are the problems that should be handled by the State Education Department. Between the two meetings, our 1950 meeting had visitors from Pennsylvania to see how it worked. I was asked to write for a national publication called Related Arts Service, on Impending Education Through the State Art Associations. It was written in 1950 and is just as valuable today as it was back then. The structure of society especially with television coming in has made people less interested in travelling as they used to be. The actual improvements in the State System all have diminished. There still are regional, zoned projects which are being fed to the center. At the second meeting in 1951, two important things took place. Well, one important thing took place which resulted in other important things. We did draw up what some of our needs were, and by that time at the convention, everyone was hollering: "If only Albany... If only Albany... The State Education Department..." So I said, "Let's holler and cry in our beer. There is no use in hitting Albany indirectly." Let's go directly to them with our needs. The State Education Department was contracted and responded favorably. There was organized a committee of NYS Art Teachers Association to meet with the Commissioner and a lot of associates to lay our cards on the table. That started something and continued until today. It was positive realization that we have had every year!! We have come to understand why they can not do certain things. They have come to understand what our problems are. They have called upon members of
the organization many, many times when other related programs were brought up. One of the problems brought up is on my tape on the History of Art Education Division. In 1951 we still were the only department of the college where tuition had to be paid because we had a program that was affiliated with the Albright Art School. I fought that over the years and almost got kicked out many times. One of the things the organization now presented to the State Education Department is that this is not fair! There should be a non-tuition program for Art Teachers as there is for every other program. However, I was not at that meeting and there was a misinterpretation by one word. Because in the minutes it said that they stated there should be a tuition free secondary art program. The people in Albany thought that we only had an elementary program. So New Paltz was selected and a tuition free program for art teachers was established. Instead of coming to free our students of tuition, we got an organization that didn't even ask for it in the Eastern part of the state. It was a good location that was tuition free. Now, we do have two state supported programs for preparation of the teachers of art. That later served as a wedge when I was further pushing for release of our students from paying tuition. That meeting was so well accepted, that they set up what was called an experimental group. Now we were officially organized to what they called the Art Consultant Committee. We met in 1952 with a much more complete outline with what needed to be done and just how it should be done. Since this took place 25 years ago, Sister, I would like to read some of the
things that we proposed. I would like to read it, because some people will see that we are still proposing some of the same things we did 25 years ago! They will also recognize that there are others that we have been able to achieve since then. I will briefly outline some of the problems that were given consideration at that particular time:

1. The position in Albany was that of a supervisor of drawing under secondary education, which was a lowest possible position with no power. Our first problem was that art should have equality in the power in Albany. So we worked for it and ultimately the position was raised from the supervisor of drawing to the supervisor of art. Then we pushed it to a Bureau of Education directly responsible to the Commissioner.

SMJ: It is interesting, too, to see the evolution from the word drawing to ART. Drawing is not the only form of ART!! I can recall when I was in school that we had drawing lessons.

CZURLES: See, this was the other reason why the syllabus had to be changed, and why we opposed it.

2. As we went around the schools, some of the conditions for art teaching were worse than miserable. We pushed forth the idea of setting up building specifications. They told us that we already had one... it had been printed in 1913!! It said that an art room should be so planned that when it was not being used for art, you could move in typewriters for business or machinery, supplies for home economics. So there is a long story... but WNY pushed for it, ultimately I was elected to set up a committee. The
committee drew up new proposals and we had a book published on how to set up art rooms and how to take care of all the contemporary programs.

SMJ: I would think that without much study that the art room would have to be larger.

CZURLES: It would have to be larger because all they thought about was drawing on the desk. If anyone hears my tape, on planning the Fine Arts building at Upton Hall, he/she will realize that was the second thing that we asked for and achieved.

3. We had to refine the concepts of crafts. It is just as important in art as drawing and painting. In connection with that, I also wrote some articles. That also called for change in facilities so that you would have room for crafts.

4. We needed Mechanical Drawing to be revised. It was taught as a shop course: How to Plan Tin to Make Stove Pipes. We wanted Mechanical Drawing as a way by which you proposed, perceived and visualized any structure, whether it was closet construction or a piece of furniture, etc. We revised Mechanical Drawing.

SMJ: Is Mechanical Drawing art?

CZURLES: It is under art; however, I don’t believe it belongs there. When they first started art teachers they didn’t have enough arts, so it ended up there.

SMJ: Oh, I see.

CZURLES: No. 5 was that people didn’t understand art as a creative experience. They were only concerned with "making things." We proposed that booklets be written, materials be
prepared to publicize the importance of the person participating. This meant that we also had to propose that we thought elementary art education should be. Then we had to clarify what is the role of the art teacher who comes in, if there is one, what is the role of the elementary art teacher and that led to the question: "How do we get colleges to help the elementary teachers to understand something about art and about mathematics and science." No. 6 was with emphasis that what is most important is not the product on the wall, but that you open up the individual to be more perceptive, more understanding of quality and visuality quality when she/he sees it. No. 7 the next big problem that we faced and some of these still exist is that art was never recognized for college admission. We eliminated Regents so if you did very well in art courses it never counted in your college admissions score because it was not considered important. We fought that for many years, and even now some colleges don't...

SMJ: It was a rough year.

CZURLES: Neither music, nor art were represented as a science. So many people who were good in art were denied admission even to art programs because their highest grades were not counted in. Later, we developed a program where we did force many of the colleges to accept art. Then there was the Junior High School art be a program of itself, or should it be a preparation for Senior High School? I had written in a national publication that Junior High School art should be exploratory with the minimal penalty. I felt Senior High School art should be elective if he/she found that
he/she wanted to do it. This is something that we had to work out in actual publications. There was the idea that, after all, art can be integrated into aspects of Industrial Arts. When you do something in Industrial Arts not only should it be utilitarian, but it should also have a pleasant visual effect!! That was a brilliant creation in Home Economics where arranging things is important, everything from clothes to the home and so on. That was another thing that we brought up. Over the time, some of these were done. We pushed at that time also that an art teacher was needed in the kindergarten to the third grade. Some felt it was not. Yet, our feeling is, that the time period is when you build the concept of art creativity in children. At that time classroom members were still making paper chains, and other directed classroom activities. Also, at that time we were talking about more curriculum in education for living. These are some of the things that we have outlined every year and something has been done about some of it directly with Albany, Sponsored research and such. That is why this is one of the most successful organizations in education. Now, along with this, we conceived another idea as we went to much smaller communities. They (some of the children) never experienced art education or saw professional art. We conceived the idea of an Art Mobile! That originated with the Art Teacher's Association. Actually, all members put in an extra dollar plus a contribution so that we could start and operate the Art Mobile. Museums were willing to loan works. It wasn't their best, but they were original. We rented a large trailer and did
the finishing touches inside. This would go to a central school, all pre-scheduled and park in the yard. The children would come in and look at the art work. One man gave up his professional career to do this. We sought additional help which we could not get. In the meantime, other states saw this and started Art Mobiles, then galleries started mobiles. Here we have "Color on Wheels." The Art Mobile is an idea that originated here!! Speaking of the zones, I personally gained a lot by going to the zone meetings. One of the most powerful ones was the Long Island Association. Being in the rich New York community close to resources, they had programs there that were way beyond the national programs. SO I would go to all of these meetings, and that is also how I knew what was going on. It also was actually the finest recruitment thing possible. My being there, my talking and asking questions of the faculty and students was very helpful. Thousands of dollars of advertisement were spent. I had said that I proposed this organization so that we could train leaders. Even today 20 some years later, you look at the list of people who are in the most responsible positions in NYS, and they are teachers of the association. I would say that 70% have joined. In the last two years, under Jim Fatistoni, our students are becoming active again. Last year they were at the convention that was in Buffalo and they did a superb job so that we are coming back into that. There were a couple of the major things which happened, I think probably the outstanding one is discussed in some detail in my tape on: The Development of the Competency Assessment of Teacher Education.
Because among other things we had proposed that there be a symposium for which the state could get federal money to talk over all the problems of art education. I would like to stop here for a moment and just say one of the important things within this organization is the resolutions committee. Officers are often elected who are most willing but not knowledgeable of what is crucial to date, and needs to be done and just how it should be done. I have never been an officer in the organization; I have always stayed out of it. However, I have always been active, I am still on the resolutions committee because that is where people bring in the problems, and we have a little expertise to help set up resolutions. A while ago we gave up thanking the cook for dinner and so on. We take the needs of the organization home. We try to set them up in some hierarchy of need. We limit it, then we make a resolution that such and such should be done, spell out just who should do it, how they should do it, whom they are to contact, and when they are to report back. So, actually, the resolutions committee serves as the guide for actions, especially with the State Education Department. One of the problems that was met, or that we had, was the certification of the teachers of art after they got their birth certificate. With only us and New Paltz, Syracuse and New York City, people who lived away from centers would have to sacrifice a summer to go to one of the centers for a Masters. People around here could commute. That did not seem fair. That was one of the problems. We did ask for a symposium, and it finally was organized in 1967, November 9th and 10th of
1967. There still is a publication here for recruiting and training our teachers. What was important here, was there were over 150 people, not so much art teachers. When you look at the list, every major college had a representative here. Every museum was represented, all of the state education department people were there. In other words, any one who had anything to do connected with art was there. First of all the NYS Art Teachers Association, as one of their projects, undertook research as to what is the status of teachers: Where can they go? How far can they go? There was a tremendous amount of data. That data then was organized and published. At this meeting, the discussion was around how to handle this problem? Even though I am repeating, my job was to take what 150 people individually and group reported. Then I was to try and put it into one concise program. That is what resulted in a proposed new system of teacher’s certification in which an art person could gain confidence either by going to graduate school or by private study or by travel and so on.

SMJ: Did you write that up? Did you do that?

CZURLES: I did the summary, then a committee revised the summary. Miss Nelson who was Chairman of the Professional Training Committee wrote it up. However, the plan was the plan that I had proposed after putting together what all of these people had said. This has served as a guide for additional things which we are still working on. So, this is another place that we have pioneered. Since the organization and zone meetings kind of fade out, another need came up and so within this there is another structure. The
administrators of our programs became interested. They have problems a little bit different than that of the little teacher. When I say "little teacher", I don't mean in importance, you realize. We formed an organization of administrators which is very powerful right now. They are listened to by Albany even more. They are also in a position to defend our programs. Then, out of that also came the Teacher Preparation Programs. Now a consortium of colleges preparing art teachers is organizing. They are more concerned with how to prepare the teachers to meet the assessment proposition. So we have the major structure, less and less of local things. We still have zone meetings. There will be one in June up here when the art teachers will have an exhibit, and awards will be given. In addition to these, we started a publication: NYS Art Teacher's Association Bulletin. It is small but very professional. People are generally asked to write regarding some questions that exist. Several that I have written dealt with national programs, relationships with national art organizations, etc. I forgot to say, but it would be important later, that in 1952 I also presented to the organization a proposal for a national arts council. I am saying this because when it began, it was only Eastern Arts. Now, I felt the need for a state organization. As monies were appropriated for national projects, federal money was being cut up like sections of a pie, and we were not receiving what I felt should be our portion. Our organization went from being an eastern organization, to a state organization and we finally made it into the national organization. One other most important thing
that we have achieved is throughout here we were pointing out that art was not listed as a required subject in elementary school. Whenever there was a budget cut, a principal or a board of education would say we must provide the essentials, therefore art would often be cut. We worked and worked, and about 5 years ago the commissioner of education rewrote his regulations so that it now reads that in elementary schools the basic subjects are: Art, Science, Math and Music -- so they can not say those things can be cut out in a budget crunch. However, you can not have art without anyone trained!! I will finish by repeating again that I believe anyone in the United States who really wants to have a democratic way of constantly improving programs, must have a State Education Department that is well informed. Every effort possible should be put into the State Education Department. If you are going to go further, you go to the regional and then to the National Education Department. So that is our story, it is pleasing to me at this moment is that through some of the art education faculty a large number of students are once again being very involved in this and they will continue to make a difference.

SMJ: Thank you, Dr. Czurles.