

In the Room: A Tribute to Laura H. Chapman



Mary Ann Stankiewicz, Emerita Professor of Art Education, Pennsylvania State University
and Marilyn G. Stewart, Emerita Professor of Art Education, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

As the news of Laura Hill Chapman's passing on August 17, 2021, began to seep into the consciousness of the art education community, a steady flow of quiet and delicately composed responses emerged. In art education, we weren't stunned; we've been cherishing her continued presence these past few years, knowing that we could not expect her to live forever. This news, however, prompted many to share precious personal memories while also acclaiming her expansive legacy.

It's hard to imagine art education without Laura Chapman. Her presence has been felt as a force in our field for more than 6 decades. As a teacher, author, researcher, editor, consultant, lecturer, and mentor, Laura Chapman modeled for all of us what it means to consider our field close-up, addressing where we encounter day-to-day issues of practice, and, from a distance, providing a meta-view, seeing art education through lenses of policy and politics. Her work has advanced art education in curriculum theory and development, policy analysis, and establishment of a research culture in the field.



Chapman presenting at the 2017 NAEA National Convention with Diane Ravitch.
©Seth Freeman Photography.

National conferences over the years provided art educators with opportunities to see and hear from Chapman in person. Her sessions were packed. Even when not presenting, her presence was felt. We recall the buzz going through the audience in a room when she entered: "Laura is here." She could be seen in attendance at general and super session events but was just as likely to be in the room for smaller sessions, especially those having to do with the real-life experiences of art teachers.

Just as ideas and dispositions of an exceptionally fine teacher stay with us and guide us in our work, Laura Chapman's influence will long be felt. She is, essentially, "in the room" with us as we engage in curriculum theory and development, research, and policy analysis.

Intensely interested in curriculum, Chapman's ideas coalesced in the 1978 publication, *Approaches to Art in Education*. Emphasizing personal response and expression, knowledge of artistic heritage, and awareness of the role of art and visual forms in society, this text reinforced an expanded view of art curricular content, anticipated a later focus on visual culture, and provided the structure for her award-winning K–8 textbook programs authored with Davis Publications.

During her doctoral studies at Ohio State, Laura Chapman worked closely with Manuel Barkan, who promoted organized research. One of the emerging art educators attending the 1965 Penn State Seminar, she was at the center of a growing emphasis on systematic research that shaped art education for the next half century. As author of critical analyses of educational, art educational, and cultural policies, and as editor of NAEA's research journal, *Studies in Art Education*, Chapman gained international recognition for her integrity, intense thinking, and thorough inquiry.

Chapman began to write and speak on policy issues in the late 1970s. Her 1982 book, *Instant Art, Instant Culture*, became an instant classic for her thoughtful, wise analysis of perennial challenges to the field. In her late 70s, she became a blogger, writing cogent analyses of education reforms and policies posted on Diane Ravitch's blog. When the announcement of Chapman's death was posted, readers were shocked and saddened to lose her keen intellectual perspective on the social and civic implications of artistry in everyday life.

Being in the room during Laura's conference presentations, we could appreciate her dry sense of humor, see the twinkle in her eye and, at her 2017 dialogue with Diane Ravitch in New York, the bright pink scarf standing out against her dark blue suit, resonating with the pink knit hats from the Women's March a few weeks earlier. Laura Hill Chapman was a beacon—both illumination and inspiration—for art educators. She was a mentor and muse whose voice and presence will long be felt in the many rooms of art education. ■