Moving Rivers, Shifting Streams: Perspectives on the Existence of a Policy Window

ANN M. GALLIGAN and CHRIS N. BURGESS

This article 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 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: (1) the problem stream involving problem identification and recognition often based on indicators or focusing events; (2) the policy stream populated by disparate policy communities producing alternatives and proposals; and (3) the political stream incorporating shifts in public opinion, administration changes, and interest-group dynamics in the determining of actor receptivity of policy actors to varied changes. 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. (Policy entrepreneurs, within the Kingdon model, are those who expend personal resources—time, energy, money—in pursuit of particular policy objectives). On the merging of the streams, 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 eager to be involved in decision making and have a role in shaping 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 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 is favorable, it is vital that the policy stream produce viable alternatives. Otherwise, the risk of an item fading from the decision agenda is markedly increased.

Therefore, in light of the use of Kingdon's model as an analytical framework, some central questions remain: Did a policy window for arts education open in Rhode Island between 1999 and 2003? What changes actually took place and how so? Were the three separate streams that 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 ALN's formation, or does another framework emerge as more advantageous? Ultimately, the actions of the task force itself provide answers to the questions posed above.

History of the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network

In March 1999, Rhode Island Governor Lincoln A. Almond issued Executive Order 99-2 authorizing a governor's task force to study arts and education. The task force was organized as a joint effort of the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA) and charged with the responsibility of examining "the relationship between educa-

tion 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] On full 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 appointees from the arts, education, and business communities. Warren Simmons, executive director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, was the chair. One of us, Ann M. Galligan, codirector of Northeastern University's Cultural and Arts 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, set as questions, at the outset that guided its deliberations.[5] The questions were instrumental in framing the task force's inquiry and in developing the vision statement, key findings, and stated goals. These questions included the following:

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?

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 its inquiry to inform the vision statement and allow for the development of findings and goals that identified problems with arts learning in Rhode Island. It also laid the basic groundwork for how such issues might be further addressed, largely in terms of expectations. Moreover, the committee put forth a set of recommendations in the form of strategies rather than specific policy proposals for the fulfillment of these goals and created a transition team and three design groups charged with advancing the process that the task force had begun but would not see through to the end, at least as a formal policy entity. Coordination of the transition team was shared by RISCA, RIDE, and the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education (RIOHE), a new addition to the formal agency coalition. VSARI (Very Special Arts Rhode Island) had been a player from the start, as well, and held an ex officio role in the creation of the conceptualization and the final plan and its oversight.

The vision statement of the task force reads as follows:

> 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.[6]

The key findings of the task force include four major points (emphasis added):

1. Arts learning across home, school, and community is critical to the success of Rhode Island's "All Kids to High Standards" education agenda.
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.
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.
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.[7]

Finally, the task force outlined the following goals for K–12 schooling in Rhode Island:

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.[8]

Recommendations

The task force also proposed specific strategies for fulfillment of its goals under the categories of resources, policy, professional development, and public awareness. It 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 statement:

> 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 (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 included mapping resources, coordinating programs on the state and local level, increasing dialogue among community-based arts programs, emphasizing standards, and creating 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 a transition team "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] The transition team would have a twofold responsibility: (1) formulation of action plans, inclusive of measurable benchmarks, for the realization of the network's three goals; and (2) the establishment of the arts learning network that would then be responsible for implementing the action plan.

From one perspective, these steps might seem limited and an indication that the task force (whose term ended with the submittal of the final report) would not complete their charge. Those critical of the task force believed 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 seemingly not involved on a meaningful level.[11] Critics 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.

From another perspective, however, the opposite held true. The task force report could be seen as a device allowing all of the major principals to remain involved since primary responsibility for the transition team and design groups was maintained by the agency coalition involved with the task force. Furthermore, significant progress has been made in the matching of recommendations to concrete actions by a wide range of the original principal actors and newly invested partners.

Current Status of the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network

Where was the network in 2003, and had its goals been realized? For the most part, the network was alive and well, and its stated goals are moving towards realization. In the update of summer 2003, the network reported the following progress on its three goals.[12]

Goal One: 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 2003. Organizations and individuals testified at the Rhode Island Board of Regents hearings on high school graduation requirements. They addressed the lack of equity and access to the arts as exemplified with the existing half credit requirement only for college-bound students, 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 reads, "Each student exiting a Rhode Island high school with a diploma shall exhibit proficiency in a common academic core curriculum that includes the arts and technology."[13]

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 2004 to submit their plans for meeting proficiency and other new high school regulations to Commissioner Peter McWalters. Students entering high school in September 2004 were the first class operating under the new regulations.

The Rhode Island ALN 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 gave guidance to districts as they developed 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 Rhode Island ALN Web site (http://www.riartslearning.net/).

• Additionally, the Rhode Island Department of Education has formed a professional network called "Graduation by Proficiency," open to anyone interested in the issue. The Rhode Island Arts Learning Network was featured as a resource at the first meeting in June 2003. All of the arts proficiency team chairs attended.

• Lastly, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts offered grants to school districts to help with planning for the new arts graduation requirement. Funds are also being sought by the ALN to support proficiency implementation activities in the future. Although 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 one by the original target year of 2008."[14]

Future Goals

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

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

The ALN is now embarking on goals two and three. Meeting the first goal, proficiency, meant 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. Although proficiency will be assessed by school systems, and schools must provide what is needed for all students to achieve proficiency, family, and community contribu-

tions are still an integral part of the picture. The ALN plans for goals two and three will support this integrated vision.

There are two network infrastructure components—human and technological. In early winter 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 now mapping their information on a public database that will become an integral part of the Rhode Island ALN's Web site. 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, other players involved included the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education (one of the network's three state partners), colleges and universities, and community arts and educational organizations.

Professional development for arts learning providers (schools, arts organizations, social service agencies, individual artists, and so forth) will be ongoing. Funds are being sought for professional development that will address "best practices" in arts learning for children and 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 three design teams and feedback on information on various arts programs for children and youth for the network database and Web site. In addition, input on the design and content of professional development institutes and feedback on how the ALN system of access to information is work-

ing 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![15]

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. Nevertheless, 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 the definition of an issue in an effort to create their own opening and to begin building a broad-based political constituency to support the solutions that they would eventually prescribe? Rather than taking advantage of an existing window, were they pulling together the policy community forged across the arts and education fields to identify issues and articulate their preferred solutions? Were they building their own form or frame for an anticipated policy window at the same time that 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 real or 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.[16]

Indeed, it was at this time that RIDE Commissioner Peter 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."[17]

Other forces were also at work. Indeed, the actual genesis of the task force likely lies in an earlier American Assembly for the Arts gathering, exploring the issue of the arts and public purpose. The 1997 American Assembly had given advocates a way to approach policymakers with issues other than censorship and lack of funding. In fact, the work of one of us, Ann M. Galligan, was instrumental in the shift of policy focus at the follow-up meeting at Brown, from censorship issues to an exploration of the arts and the public purpose; this was 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 heavily involved, as well as McWalters and Richard Latham, RIDE education policy specialist.

Accordingly, these primary actors spent a considerable amount of time creating an appropriate forum for discussion of the issues surrounding arts and education. The Brown/*Providence Journal* conference featured evening speakers who presented the national perspective, some of whom were de facto ambassadors from the American Assembly, such as cochairs Alberta

Arthurs and Frank Hodsoll as well as research director Margaret Wyszomirski. The morning sessions explored local issues and concerns. In effect, what was happening in Rhode Island, and elsewhere, was a climate shift away from previous political animosity towards the arts and apathy toward the value of arts in education. Governor Almond was receptive to this climate shift, 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 president of the Council of 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, education reform. An opportunity seemed 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 an important role to the arts in education. An argument may be made at this point that an education window had been opened and the agenda reordered. The arts in this situation were seen as an answer to a perceived problem—that of inequitable schools and failing children—and political support might be secured. Thus, critics of the task force might argue that a window of opportunity had opened in the political stream and might easily be coupled with the problem stream, thereby allowing for substantial policy change through the generation of actionable pol-

icy alternatives, a situation not capitalized on 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. Defining an issue, however, 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, the increased diversity of the Rhode Island school population, and the need to better understand the nature of arts learning loomed large on the task force agenda. 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 saw another. Even the vocabulary that 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.

Nevertheless, the arts education/school reform alliance was a powerful one in Rhode Island, as it was increasingly across the nation. This situation is best exemplified in the three main "bedfellows" serving as task force chair and the two conveners. Warren Simmons, director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and chair of the task force, was passionate about school reform and positive youth development; he was, however, 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. Although 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, who became a major player), 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. The group, however, did not feel there was enough consensus on specific action steps to push their agenda.

Thus, the main challenge for those involved was not only how to define the problem in a way that resonated with all involved, but also how to move the third stream into place: developing and advocating a feasible solution. Rather than prescribing fast action steps that had not been fully vetted, 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. In effect, faced with the fragmented and formative nature of the arts education policy community in Rhode Island at the time, the task force was forced into a position of primary de facto policy community, a role that they were unprepared to take on. Given the time frame, the task force unanimously opted to turn creation of specific action steps over to another body, along with the guiding principles they had developed.[18] This decision, although vulnerable to criticism, served two primary purposes in retrospect: (1) policy alternative generation and debate was given time to take shape through the inclusion of a broader constituent base; and (2) this constituent base has taken more formal shape and is truly emerging as a maturing and cohesive arts education policy community.

Although some observers 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. This constituency could now create meaningful recommendations with realistic and measurable goals. Indeed, although there is no true problem statement framing the *LIA* report, there are definitive problems laid out in the findings: inequitable arts learning opportunities and an ineffective arts learning infrastructure on both a local and state level.

However, there is little question that the task force's *LIA* report falls short as a direct stimulus for policy making, at least through a short-term lens. No action plan is presented, only a call for a transition team to create such a plan. It seems to establish a policy framework rather than providing a policy document capable of stimulating change or motivating policymakers. Problems are presented, but actionable solutions are noticeably absent. So how can the view that the ALN is moving steadily forward be reconciled with the view that the *LIA* report is flawed? One might safely conclude that the *LIA* is not sufficient as a policy document since the primary problem to which it links itself, statewide arts learning deficiencies, is not resolved through the goals and recommendations. Moreover, critics felt the main players had abandoned the effort by relinquishing policy control to the transition team. Yet, in the eyes of the principals, the process was on track and they were firmly in control. In fact, they were largely responsible for determining that the original task force could not produce meaningful recommendations for action within the established timeframe. As a result, they had two options available: expand the timeframe for the original 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 task force felt it needed to give the existing administration a political "win," while avoiding specific recommendations and policy actions so the next administration could take ownership of the initiative. Second, they understood that the original task force could produce a meaningful plan for future action that had considerable approval from all constituent groups, having done an effective job in "softening up" the public as well as the opposition while also building an effective policy community, but that it needed more time to develop specific action steps and solutions to the problem that it had finally defined.

The ALN guiding principles (see sidebar) recognized that there needed to be institutional "buy-in" and an organizational infrastructure in place to move forward. The task force was housed ostensibly under the Rhode Island Arts Alliance, a loose affiliation of arts educators under the umbrella of its Kennedy Center parent. Once the executive order establishing the task force 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

As Kingdon observes, "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."[19] 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 origi-

nally, 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 might argue that the time, effort, mobilization, and expenditure of political resources that Kingdon stresses are not satisfied by the *LIA* and the transition team that followed. The volunteer status of the team would appear of particular concern since the new participants might approach the task with considerably less commitment and energy than that of the original task force membership, thereby losing the momentum gained since the publication of the report and precipitating a fall from prominence on the agenda—in effect "drifting away" due largely to inaction and undermobilization of resources. As a consequence, significant effort would have to be expended just to put the issue back on the agenda. However, rather than drifting away, advocates for arts and education reform in Rhode Island would argue that they had succeeded in anchoring the issue on the policy agenda of the three main state agencies involved, as well as the twenty-seven state school districts, the arts community, and various legislators and policymakers.

The main criticism of the *LIA* report seems primarily to be 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."[20] Only when the task force provides the guiding principles used to formulate goals does a reader have some understanding of the larger problem to be addressed. However, those critical of the task force felt these principles were numerous and not clearly unified around a central definitive problem.

When reading the *LIA* report, the obvious question becomes whether it is even the right place to look for the problem to be addressed. The task force did not begin with a problem and attach a set of solutions. Rather, it began with an issue (linking arts learning to school reform) and faced 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 defining a problem must involve, one may ask, Can a politician or policymaker look at the principles in the *LIA* report as the problem statement? 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 that 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 which used the strategies presented in the *LIA* report as a formative starting point for action.

This point is addressed directly in a quote by a staff 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."[21] 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, that they recommended no specific course of action and thus provided an incomplete document. Although 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 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.[22] Although it appears that that the *LIA* report missed a significant opportunity to influence not only state but also national arts educational policy, the *LIA* framers felt the media had been shortsighted in viewing their original intention. Moreover, framers believed that they were on target in creating a network that would tap artists and arts organizations and that they were well underway to building a strong statewide infrastructure and model for change.

Clearly, the Rhode Island effort was largely a result of policy entrepreneurship. These entrepreneurs, however, never specifically advocated for one set of solutions before they began; they never opted to capture their "problem in a nutshell."[23] Although some argue that the task force missed its opportunity by not clearly establishing a problem definition coupled with clear and definitive policy alternatives to take advantage of an open window, the *LIA* framers would argue that they played the "cards in their hand" the best that they could, with a long-term strategy in mind. To that end, the *LIA* report can then perhaps be looked on not as a policy document capable of moving initiatives through an open window of opportunity, but rather as a "stick" propping the window open, thereby extending the time span 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 to build a stable structural basis for future policy actions that 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 since arts education has secured

a place on multiple agency agendas as well as that of decisionmakers 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 separate 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, a generation of alternative policy would then emerge, allowing 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 opened 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 Anderson[24] and often dismissed as inherently flawed by critics[25] may in fact provide the most insight into this case. 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."[26] As manifested in the ALN, we see that the extended approach discussed above is represented by the sequential yet complex nature of its stages, even if stages blend together at certain points. The *LIA* report served to place arts education upon the decision agenda, which led to policy formulation responsive to *LIA* stated goals and ultimately their 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

framework put in place by the task force and the transition team that followed. Although 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 ALN, 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, Rhode Island now has a strong policy coalition of national and local arts advocates; education reformers and theorists; artists, arts and school administrators; and 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 Arts Education" in 2008 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.[27] In fact, as of 2003, one could argue items one and two were slow in coming; that item three had not happened; and item four was well underway, with the ensuing changes in the statewide graduation requirement, the creation of the ALN and its Web site and personnel, online GIS mapping of arts resources, the availability of funds for school districts and teacher training, and the ongoing stability of the major players involved.[28] In addition, the University of Rhode Island has become involved in developing the Web site and the cultural resource mapping. Brown University is

on board, not only with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, but also the Northeast Regional Lab and Providence with a major grant by the Wallace Foundation to develop its after-school and community offerings (including arts programming).

Conclusion

Just what did the task force, operating under a state mandate to provide policy recommendations, accomplish? Although the task force did not provide actionable recommendations, it did underwrite the emergence of a fairly strong and unified arts education policy community which, if sustained, will arguably have a broad and long-term impact on policy generation in Rhode Island. Thus, where the task force might appear ineffectual in terms of taking advantage of an open policy window, it actually prompted the mobilization and structuring of a framework for substantive policy development and implementation beyond the immediate political environment. Stakeholders in arts education initiatives have increased 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 ALN, and its framers might counter that a window was cracking, but it was not truly open yet. Perhaps what they saw was a foreshadowing of the window that they hoped to see and were thus inspired to begin building a political coalition capable of supporting action. Nevertheless, Kingdon's three streams were never truly in alignment. As critics suggest, the problem stream was vague, and alternatives in the policy stream virtually nonexistent. The political stream was aligned in some places, and major policy communities and some important actors such as Rosenbaum, McWalters and Carriuolo were involved and working together. The major political actors, however, such as the governor and the former mayor of Rhode Island's largest city, Providence, were not in long-term positions of strength.

Rather than failing to take advantage of an existing policy window, this may be the story of arts advocates who part-

nered 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."

Notes

1. Scott MacKay, "The New Rhode Island: Census 2000," *Providence Journal*, December 31, 2001. According to the 2000 census, 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. John Kingdon, 1995. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies,* 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1995), 203.

3. The Governor's Task Force, *Literacy in the Arts: A Framework for Action. Report to Governor Lincoln A. Almond* (Providence: Office of the Governor, 2001), 5. See also http://riartslearning.net/generalinfo/about.html, although the full report is not available there.

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

5. *Literacy in the Arts*, 7.

6. Ibid., 29. See also http://riartslearning.net/generalinfo/about.html, 1.

7. Ibid., 11, 17, 19, 23. See also http://riartslearning.net/generalinfo/about.html, 1.

8. Ibid., 30–31. See also http://riartslearning.net/generalinfo/about.html, 1.

9. Ibid., 31.

10. Ibid., 31.

11. See Michelle Novello, "Rhode Island Arts Advocates Strive for Arts Education for All Children" (master's thesis, Harvard University, January 2002).

12. *ALN Update*, August 2003. Unpublished report. The Rhode Island Arts Learning Network is a statewide partnership of organizations and individuals who are concerned about the quality and availability of arts learning for students K–12. It operates under the auspices of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, the Rhode Island Department of Education (K–12), and the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education. It was created as a follow-up to the 1999–2001 Rhode Island governor's *Literacy in the Arts* task force.

13. *Regulations of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education Regarding Public High Schools and Ensuring Literacy for Students Entering High School,* section 5.2, "Requirements for Proficiency-based graduation" (Providence, RI: Department of Education, 2003).

14. *ALN Update*, August 2003. Unpublished report.

15. Ibid.

16. *Literacy in the Arts*, 5.

17. Ibid., 5.

18. 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."

19. Kingdon, *Agendas*, 204.

20. M. P. Petracca, "Issue Definitions, Agenda-building, and Policymaking," *Policy Currents* 2 (1): 4, as quoted in *The Politics of Problem Definition: Shaping the Policy Agenda,* ed. David A. Rochefort and Roger W. Cobb, 8–9. (Topeka: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1994).

21. As quoted in Novello, "Rhode Island Arts Advocates," 13.

22. Marion Davis, "New Task Force Wants Artists to Come to Class," *Providence Journal,* July 12, 1999, B1.

23. Kingdon, *Agendas*, 204.

24. See James Anderson, *Public Policymaking,* 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977/2000); Charles Jones, ed., *An Introduction to the Study of Public Policy,* (North Scituate, MA: Duxbury, 2000).

25. See Paul A. Sabatier, ed., *Theories of the Policy Process: Theoretical Lenses on Public Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999).

26. Randall B. Ripley and Grace A. Franklin, *Congress, the Bureaucracy and Public Policy* (Chicago: Dorsey, 1987), 2.

27. Kingdon, 2–3.

28. In 2003, Brown, Carriuolo, Galligan, Latham, McWalters, Rosenbaum, and Simmons were all still actively engaged, as well as many members of the original task force.

Ann M. Galligan is an associate professor and codirector of the Culture and Arts Research Policy Institute at Northeastern University. She is also an executive editor of Heldref's *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society.* **Chris N. Burgess** is a Barnett Fellow at Ohio State University.