

Submission for the Hawaii International Conference on Education:

1. How Art Education Responds to a Constantly Changing World
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6. By reviewing the history of arts education in the United States, which is marked by a constant struggle for inclusion in general education, one learns of numerous and varied justifications that speak to why the arts are important. The justifications have changed over the years to respond to a changing nation. One of the only responsive disciplines, the arts has proven to be meaningful throughout different times in our history because, as this paper demonstrates, the arts have the potential to educate the whole person. As we face a challenging and difficult time in this country, it is even more important to teach understanding, compassion and communication in addition to rational and critical thinking. The arts are one of the few disciplines that encourage learning from the heart as well as the head and are therefore an effective tool to help children navigate our changing world.

How Art Education Responds to a Constantly Changing World

Art Education

Student Paper

The history of arts education in the U.S. demonstrates the responsive nature of the arts.

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To be or not to be is a question art educators have had to contend with for years. Should the arts be included in every child's general education? My overwhelming response to this question is yes, the arts are an essential element of education, and now more so than ever.

By reviewing the history of arts education in the United States, which is marked by a constant struggle for inclusion in general education, one learns of numerous and varied justifications that speak to why the arts are important. The justifications have changed over the years to respond to a changing nation. One of the only responsive disciplines, the arts has proven to be meaningful throughout different times in our history because, as I hope to demonstrate, the arts have the potential to educate the whole person. As we face a challenging and difficult time in this country, it is even more important to teach understanding, compassion and communication in addition to rational and critical thinking. The arts are one of the few disciplines that encourage learning from the heart as well as the head and are therefore an effective tool to help children navigate our changing world.

Before discussing the importance of arts education today, it is necessary to look to the past to gain an understanding of what role the arts have played in education. I will review the history of arts education by touching on the various implementations of arts curriculum over the years. However, since throughout history realizing arts curricula has been a struggle, I will

mostly focus my review on the justifications touting the relevance of the arts to education that inevitably preceded each initiative.

One of the first arts in education advocates was Benjamin Franklin (Eisner 1997), who in 1749 proposed the utilitarian value of the arts. Franklin encouraged the inclusion of arts in the classroom, to develop excellent craftsmanship in the United States (Eisner). William Bentley Fowle contributed to art education in the U.S., by introducing drawing to the Boston public schools (Eisner). By 1870, the arts became part of legislation in Massachusetts requiring drawing to be a subject in public schools (Kern, 1985). The first justification for including arts in the schools was utilitarian, focusing on the practical applications of art skills in order to further the quality of America's craft products rather than for decorative purposes (Kern, 1985; Eisner, 1997; Korzenik, 1987).

In the early 1900's the validation for arts education in schools shifted from vocational design skills to developing good taste and an appreciation of beauty (Eisner, 1997). Between 1900-1920, Colorado, Ohio, Utah and Vermont all cited development of taste and observational skills as a desired outcome for art classes (Kern, 1987). Diana Korzenik said in her article *Why the Government Cared* that Americans in the late 1800's and early 1900's "grasped at art as a way of making themselves become equal to Europeans"(p.64). The arts became a vehicle for developing the taste and sophistication that Americans were taught they were lacking and which the Europeans were believed to encompass.

The mid 1900's were marked by the desire to promote creativity in children and to encourage self-expression. The influence of the American transcendentalists and Freud's

psychology created a desire for art instruction to encourage expression and imagination (Siegesmund, 1998). Also, with the advent of modern art, the world began to acknowledge the naïveté of children as a cherished attribute, and teachers encouraged creative expression (Davis & Gardner, 1992; Eisner, 1997). Professional artists such as Picasso, Kandinsky and Klee studied the art of children in search of that naïveté (Fineberg, 1995; Davis & Gardener, 1992). In 1947, Lowenfield and Brittain wrote “in the area of artistic expression, however, the teacher neither knows or is looking for right answers...a teacher’s function becomes one of developing children’s self-discovery and stimulating depth of expression.” (p.55). Art was valued for its unique ability to develop individualism (Freedman, 1998) self-expression, risk taking and creativity and for being therapeutic (Kern, 1985).

By the mid-1950’s the cognitive revolution began (Davis & Gardner, 1992). Piaget posited the stages of cognitive development. Artistic expression, particularly in the visual arts, was deemed part of a cognitive process that developed a vocabulary of symbols ((Davis & Gardner). A shift from emotional outcomes such as self-expression and therapeutic release to cognitive outcomes such as critical thinking, developing schemas, understanding symbol systems and cultural context occurred (Davis & Gardener). Also very important to the evolution of arts education, was Howard Gardner’s model of different types of intelligence (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 2000), such as personal intelligences (Gardner, 1983). Gardner believes the arts are a unique vehicle for developing these intelligences and skills that concentrate on a person’s inner process (Siegesmund, 1998).

In the last twenty years two models of arts education have dominated the arts education scene. Both models, DBAE and ARTS PROPEL, focus on the visual arts, but can be applied to different art forms such as theater and dance as well. Discipline Based Arts Education, created by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts, responding to the cognitive approach (Davis & Gardner, 1992), focuses on four aspects of arts learning: art making, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics. By focusing on art history, art criticism and aesthetics as much as art making, DBAE made art education similar to how other subjects were taught (Zessoules, Wolf & Gardner, 1988) and therefore perhaps more accessible to school boards and principals who had a difficult time seeing how the arts were valuable. The Getty and DBAE responded to the needs of the time and “influenced visual arts curricula on both the state and national levels. Arts educators are indebted to the GCEA for placing arts education on the national agenda.”(Zessoules, Wolf & Gardner, 1988, p. 118) It appears that ARTS PROPEL then responded to DBAE and the anger many art specialists felt toward DBAE for downplaying their role, by concentrating on art production as an essential role in arts curricula.

The importance of interdisciplinary art education has also emerged as a valuable outcome of art instruction (Ulbricht, 1998). The arts are believed to teach many skills, such as spatial reasoning, critical thinking and cooperation that transfer to other subjects. Some advocates believed in this scenario, the arts became a “hand maiden for other disciplines”(Ulbricht 1998, p.13), yet claiming arts to be important to learning in other, perhaps more non-negotiable, subjects has become a favored justification (Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 2000).

The history of arts education offers rich and diverse validations for arts in education, all of which I could not possibly cover in my brief history review. One positive result of having to fight for the inclusion of arts in education is that art educators have come up with so many uses for the arts in education. Art educators, by having to justify the importance of the arts, have had to delve further into what the arts can do to promote learning. The explanations for the relevance of arts education range from functional/utilitarian reasons to intangible concepts such as “wide awakesness”(Greene, 1978, p.161) and joy.

Depending on what is taking place in the world, the justifications change, and one or the other rationale becomes the mantra for arts education advocates. Although this demonstrates enormous flexibility on the part of the arts, and certainly that is another argument supporting arts curricula, ultimately all the justifications combined will create the strongest argument.

If one believes any or all of the arguments mentioned above, the question becomes not why, but how do we incorporate arts in education. Should the arts be taught in school or after school? Should the arts be their own subject or used only to enhance other subjects? Which art form do we teach or do we teach all art forms? Should professional artists or art specialists teach arts courses or can a general educator be responsible for arts instruction? How these questions are answered will inform the quality of art instruction and consequently the effects of arts on education.

To begin, I strongly believe the arts should be included in school. Many children do not have access to the arts outside of school and will not pursue extracurricular activities in the arts unless they have been introduced to the arts in the first place. Ideally, arts are taught as their

own subject as well as infused in other subjects. Bearing in mind the many arguments for the inclusion of the arts, the arts need to be given equal time in the school day. Also, in addition to the many benefits of arts learning, there is always the art for arts sake argument. If the outcome of an algebra class is algebra then why not allow the outcome of a dance class to be dance? The arts cannot be explored to their fullest, if taught in conjunction with or in support of another subject. However, other subjects may benefit by infusing the arts in their curriculum as a way to encourage different types of learning. Students have many modes of learning and the arts may offer an alternative vehicle for learning for a child having a difficult time in class.

The visual arts seem to have secured a role in many K-5 classrooms, but what of the other art forms and what of continuing the arts through high school? Music, dance, drama, creative writing and poetry all offer different and equally important learning experiences. As I mentioned earlier, many children do not have access to these disciplines and if not introduced to them in school, they may never have a chance to realize their unique talents or predilections. For this reason, all art forms should be introduced to children at some point during their K-12 education.

There seems to be a decline of arts in education after eighth grade. By relegating the arts to after-school or extracurricular activities, schools are sending a very strong message to students that the arts are not as important as other subjects. This message is re-enforced by standardized testing that does not account for learning in the arts. Unless how schools measure learning dramatically changes, the arts will always remain distinct from other subjects. I feel it is necessary to interject at this point that perhaps in this situation this is not so horrible. Certainly, it

is better than trying to force the arts into the quantitative world of measurable outcomes as some researchers have attempted to do. When educators attempt to measure the effects of the arts by grades in other subjects, academic awards and standardized testing, they fall into the trap of valuing “logical-mathematical intelligences” over “personal intelligences” (Gardner, 1983, pp. 138 & 237). One upshot of the arts not being covered by standardized tests is that art educators are at least freed from the perils of developing curriculum to satisfy state mandated assessment tests and SAT’s.

One topic that has been debated throughout the history of art education is who should teach art courses. Is it necessary to hire a professional or specialist to teach arts? Lowenfield and Brittain in 1947 said no, “there is no suggestion that a painter would be the best teacher for elementary school children. Nor is there any suggestion that a painter should even help the classroom teacher guide the art experiences of grade school children.”(p.58). On the contrary, ARTS PROPEL elevated the role of the art professional stating that “if the production of works of art is to remain the heart of arts education, it follows the voice of the professional artist must also be vital and central.”(Zessoules, Wolf & Gardner, 1988, p. 124). I strongly agree with PROPEL that the unique voice of an artist can lend a deeper understanding of an artistic medium. Also, by hiring local artists, schools are supporting their community and demonstrating to children that art is also a career.

When quality arts instruction is implemented to its fullest, students may benefit from the many different skills the arts teach. Richard Siegesmund in his 1998 article, *Why do we teach art today* is concerned that “whatever current success art education has enjoyed is based more

on the politics of holding diverse conceptions of art together than on the strength of a clearly articulated, persuasive and enduring educational rationale”(p.198). He goes on to say “art education has not been well served by a cornucopia of justifications”(p.199). I disagree. I believe it is the unique ability of the arts to respond to the current political and social climate that has and will make the arts an enduring part of general education. Eisner stated in 1997, “the goals of art education should be based upon what is unique and valuable about art, goals always function for people and people live in contexts.”(p. 60). I agree with Eisner “that the goals, content and method of art education programs need to be developed in relation to a development cultural continuum.”(pp. 62-63) History has shown arts education has the capacity to respond to people and the context they live in.

For example, currently the United States faces terrorism and uncertainty. Burton, Horowitz and Abeles in 2000 state “engagement in art experiences has been found to relieve prejudice, hedge against violence, help children become better risk takers, become more sociable and enhance self-esteem”(p. 230). During these uncertain and violent times, such skills are necessary and vital for children to understand and cope with current events. Arthur Efland wrote “the case for the arts in education is not merely that it can encourage thinking but that it can permeate such thinking with feelings which help give rise to a moral sense” (1996, p.51). The arts are a rare discipline in that they cultivate emotional as well as rational thinking. In a world where we are inundated with media interpretations of events, the arts can also promote critical thinking. Greene commented, “thoughtfulness is needed if we are to resist the messages of the media in a serious fashion...to think in relation to what we are doing is to be conscious of

ourselves struggling to make meanings, to make critical sense of what authoritative others are offering as objectively, authoritatively ‘real’”(1995, p.126).

Instead of challenging other’s justifications for arts education, perhaps it is time to celebrate the diverse and numerous uses and implementations of the arts in schools. The future of arts education in the United States remains tenuous, mostly due to the lack of quantitative evidence that the arts provide all of the above-mentioned skills. However, once we stop looking to researchers to “prove” a measurable value of arts, we can begin the process of choosing what aspects and outcomes of the arts are most relevant and needed at a particular time, by a particular group of students. The arts provide so many tools to help children in both school and life, it is hard to imagine why the debate *to be or not to be* continues.

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