

No Child Left Behind Strikes the Arts: How can we Restore a Balance Among the Studies in the Arts, Sciences, and Humanities?

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Abstract

Most Americans actually understand the importance of an education rich in arts, science and humanities. But what they may not realize is that their children are not getting enough. Each day more and more of the arts and humanities are being drained from our nation's school curriculums.

Studies have shown that the arts play a stimulating role in creativity and developing vital communities. They also have a crucial impact on our economy and are an important catalyst for learning, discovery, and achievement in our country.

Our corporate and business leaders are stressing the need for recent graduates who are creative, innovative and have developed the capabilities for divergent thinking. They do not want to hire employees with a standardized mind. Top business executives believe that the arts education program can help repair weaknesses in American education and better prepare workers for the 21st century.

Introduction

In recent years Americans have experienced many changes that have virtually affected every important aspect of our lives including; economic, global, cross-cultural, environmental and civic issues. Our world is being dramatically reshaped by scientific and technological innovations, global interdependence, cross-cultural encounters, and changes in the balance of economic and political power. Balance in education is also being reshaped.

Educators as well as our corporate and business leaders are recommending that learning outcomes for all of our nation's students should be fostered across the entire educational curriculum as well as in the context of students' major fields. The educational impact of the arts, sciences and the humanities on learning is well known. Yet, there is an increasing trend toward narrowing studies in the in our nation's school curriculums. In an economy fueled by creativity, innovation and global encounters, the capabilities developed through studies in the arts, sciences and humanities are considered by many of our nation's corporate and business leaders as America's most valuable economic asset. Graduates with an education rich in the arts, sciences, and the humanities offer to our nation and our business community a creative mind and a broad cultural background with a high cognitive capacity for problem-solving and for perceiving profit-taking within the context of moral principles and social values.

The Problem

Report after report authenticates the arts education field's suspicions that the, No Child Left Behind Act, is narrowing our nation's school curricula, leaving the arts as a frill for privileged schools rather than a necessity in the education of all students. The threat to arts, humanities, and science education has now reached crisis proportions, and it is up to teachers, administrators, artists, parents, cultural organizations,

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and other advocates of liberal arts education, to make it known to policymakers that it is imperative to provide our youth with a well-rounded education that appeals to all students' intelligences.

One Saturday morning in February, 2007, an email went out to all members of the Arts Education Group in and around the New York City area. This email was titled: "Elimination of categorical funding for the arts." It appears that in New York City, the decision to move funds earmarked for the arts in education, over 60 million dollars, will be at the discretion of the school principals, in spite of grave concerns voiced by arts officials and others whose interest lies in providing arts instruction for all children. It very well could be that the City that calls itself 'The Cultural Capitol of the World' may no longer be teaching the arts to their children.

Despite renewed interest in arts education and a concerted effort on the part of many, the provision of quality arts in our schools continues to offer significant challenges. One of these is the degree to which these changes push towards accountability, through, No Child Left Behind, and statewide initiatives, will lead school systems to emphasize those core subjects that are subject to standardized testing at the expense of other important parts of the curriculum, including the arts and the humanities.

Why Arts and Humanities in Education?

Research has shown that those who study the arts improve their achievement in other subjects, including mathematics, reading, and writing. In Math, studies point to a direct connection between music and spatial reasoning and spatial temporal skills, which are important to understanding and using mathematical concepts? For high school students, course taking data collected by the College Board has indicated that students of the arts annually out perform their non-arts peers on the SAT. In 2004, students who studied music scored 40 points higher on the math portion of the test than students reporting no arts course work. Similarly, students who studied acting and play production outscored their non-arts peers on the verbal portion of the SAT by an average of 66 points.¹

- Advocates stress the importance of valuing arts education for its intrinsic value. Music, visual arts, dance and drama provide experiences that cannot be duplicated by other means. These art forms provide pleasure and meaning. Some argue that explorations, discoveries and insights from the arts on par with the sciences in giving sense and meaning to the world. Arts have consistently been a part of human society and history.

From major metropolitan areas to small rural towns, research shows that the nonprofit arts and culture industry is an economically sound investment. It attracts audiences, spurs business development, supports jobs, and generates government revenue. Locally as well as nationally, the arts mean business.

¹ Arts Education Partnership, "Eloquent Evidence: Arts at the Core of Learning". www.nasaa-arts.org/publications/eloquent.pdf

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Besides providing thousands of jobs, the arts generate billions in government and business revenues, and play an important role in the revitalization of our nation's cities.

The arts instill the habits of mind that last a lifetime: critical-analysis skills, the ability to deal with ambiguity and to solve problems, perseverance, and a drive for excellence.

We must bridge the gaps in education between the arts, humanities, sciences, reading and math? Arts Educators should work together with educators of other academic disciplines to make the connections that will enable the disciplines to support each other.

What our Nation's Corporation and Business Leaders are Saying

April 2005, "How Creativity, Education and the Arts Shape a Modern Economy,"² an article published in the Education Commission of the States Report. In this article, Sir Ken Robinson, a senior advisor for education policy at the Getty Foundation in Los Angeles, stated that when he speaks to corporate audiences they want the opposite of standardized employees. Given the real challenges they face in the global economies, they want people who can think for themselves, adapt and be creative. The arts and the humanities teach many of these skills, aptitudes and values that are at the heart of America's growing creative economy and beyond. In order to compete in a global economy we must have the creative mind.

Number nine on the *Harvard Business Review* list of 100 Breakthrough Ideas of the year in 2004 was, "The MFA is the new MBA". The Master of Fine Arts degree is becoming as important to business as the Master of Business Administration.³ "Businesses," according to the review, realizing that the only way to differentiate their goods and services in today's overstocked, materially abundant marketplace is to make their offerings transcendent, physically beautiful and emotionally compelling. Think of Target aisles full of Isaac Mizrahi women's wear. Or listen to auto industry legend Robert Lutz. When Lutz took over as chairman of General Motors North America, he was asked how his approach would differ from his predecessor's. He said, "Its more right brain...I see us as being in the art business. Art, entertainment, and mobile sculpture, which also happens to provide us with transportation." General Motors is in the art business.

Joyce Hergenhan, President, GE Fund, states in an article Titled, "Gaining the ARTS Advantage," published by the Arts Education Partnership. 'Tomorrow's workforce – and especially its leaders – will need broad abilities beyond technical skills. There will be a demand for people who can solve problems, communicate ideas, and be sensitive to the world around them.'⁴

²Sir Ken Robinson, "How Creativity, Education and the Arts Shape a Modern Society".Education Commission of the States Report. April 2005. www.ted.com/index/id66

³Daniel Pink, "The MFA is the new MBA".Volume 82 #2 The HBR List: Breakthrough Ideas of 2004.

⁴Joyce Hergenman, President GE Fund, "Gaining the Arts Advantage". www.aep-arts.org/files/publications/WhyYourChildNeedstheArts.pdf.

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How will today's children and tomorrow's leaders develop those broad abilities, which educators are now calling the 4C's: cognition, communication, culture, and creativity? Hands-on participation in the arts is a proven way to help develop these abilities. According to the GE Fund's President, "Children who receive an elementary foundation in the arts; ongoing comprehensive, sequential education in music, drama, dance, and the visual arts; who are afforded opportunities for higher levels of achievement – these are children who will step into tomorrow's world 'the arts advantage.' They will bring to it a quick mind, focus, discipline, imagination, judgment, personal drive, experience in teamwork, attention to detail, grasp of the big picture, and an essential urge to continue learning."

What can we do?

We can form a task force of artists, arts council members, civic leaders, colleagues, and interested citizens, encourage them to:

- Speak at school budget hearings on the value of arts and humanities in a child's education.
- Vote for local officials who support a vision for education that includes the arts and the humanities.
- Participate in your districts and community's concerts, plays, dance programs, and art exhibits.
- Invite the district arts coordinators to serve on your arts council boards and establish joint arts community – school district goals and integrated initiatives.
- Volunteer to share an artistic skill, such as accompanying on the piano or the guitar or talking about your graphic design work or your most recent exhibition.
- Offer to help write grant proposals or seek partners for district arts education initiatives.
- Monitor the district's progress in key "critical success" areas such as planning: providing an elementary foundation and advanced opportunities; and the use of arts assessment techniques to improve student, teacher, and administrator performance.

And in a statement by Hillary Rodham Clinton:

"The strongest single factor in determining whether a school district provides arts Education is the community's insistence, support, and participation in making it happen. So everyone who has a stake in our children's success should see arts Education as their cause."

We must teach leadership skills to our pre-service teachers.

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Undergraduate students can be asked to demonstrate leadership by speaking to a group of students in one of their practicum experiences in the schools or by volunteering to help hang a kid's art show in a bank lobby. They can volunteer to help in a Children's Saturday Morning Art Program, etc.

Graduate Students can be asked to write a letter to their state representative or to speak to their local PTA, write a grant, speak at a local arts council, or speak at a state Art Education conference.

Einstein cautioned us that imagination is more important than intelligence. Imaginative thinking is at the core of Art and Science—however, human beings are very efficient in learning by imitation and testing. Nothing has ever been invented by imitation.

The Wright Brothers were never tested on the principles of flight. They discovered these principles through divergent thinking that can imagine what has not yet existed—not imitation.

Norman R. Augustine, retired chairman and chief executive of Lockheed Martin Corporation, stated that “the curriculum needs to help students develop...leadership, teamwork, problem solving, time management, communication and analytical thinking.”⁵

Students will not be prepared for work in an economy that demands higher order skills if their schools focus exclusively on the basics and measure learning with multiple choice tests only. Students will not be prepared to create the culture of their time if they do not learn to create culture in their schools.

The arts are powerful tools for learning. As a nation we must develop children who are productive, happy, well-adjusted citizens, rather than kids who can just pass a test and get through school. Principles of excellence underscore the need to teach students how to integrate and apply their learning—across multiple levels of schooling and fields of study.

Howard Gardner, in his book, The Development and Education of the Mind, points out that to educate the unschooled mind we must start with all the classical academic disciplines, ranging from physics to poetry. He goes on to say that these disciplines offer well established means for understanding the world⁶.

Since Sir Herbert Read wrote, Education Through Art, an arts centered education has proven to hold great appeal to educators and to scholars in systematic ways to understand human experience and to explore new applications of the creative process to areas outside the arts. As an artist and an educator I find it intriguing how artistic inquiry is beginning to influence the larger ecology of knowledge and professional areas of education, business and our national and world economy.

⁵ Norman R. Augustine, AAC&U Part 2: From the American Century to the Global Century. P.16

⁶ Howard Gardner, The Development and Education of the Mind, Chapter 16 pp. 133-144.

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Today— corporate and business leaders are asking for education to take a more creative approach to action in the education of our young people. The mind transforms itself and grows more intelligent when new connections are made amongst disciplines and when we exercise faculties other than the perfunctory ones that have held too much sway over our definitions of knowledge. This expanded vision of research embraces mathematics and reading but it also recognizes the world of the liberal arts, science and the fine arts. The creative imagination can be defined as a realm where all of the faculties work together and where no one mode is superior to another.

Artful Thinking, as described in Project Zero—is distinctive in that it was developed to explicitly bringing out the connection between art and thinking. There are two reasons for this. The first has to do with how works of art make us think, and the second has to do with what the arts make us think about.⁷

In an economy fueled by innovation, the capabilities developed through a liberal arts education have become America’s most valuable economic asset.

Today virtually all occupational endeavors require a working appreciation of the historical, cultural, ethical, and global environments that surround the application of “skilled work.” (Roberts T. Jones, president Education Workforce Policy, LLC)

Conclusion

There is a widely held belief that the arts should be an integral part of education, both for its intrinsic value as well as for its impact on student achievement and the development of valuable skills. The arts and humanities are recognized as core components of a well-rounded education that will prepare students for the working world and for their roles and responsibilities as citizens, as they enter a life in an increasingly interdependent and culturally diverse world.

As the global economy becomes faster and more competitive, the qualities and the creative skills children develop through the arts will carry them towards new ideas, new experiences, and new challenges, not to mention personal satisfaction. The intrinsic value of the arts cannot be over estimated.

Business leaders see first-hand the critical role that the arts play in stimulating creativity and in developing vital communities. As this paper illustrates, the arts have a crucial impact on our economy and are an important catalyst for learning, discovery, and achievement in our country.

⁷ Blackwell, Zero-Based Arts Education, *Studies in Art Education*, 1989, 30 (2), 71-83.

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Relentless globalization has also changed the ways in which we innovate. Innovation is now a global, borderless process. To stay on top, U.S. and European companies must tap global networks of innovation. Business requirements are now firmly driving innovation in the global economy.

What we are doing in our K-12 level in many schools systems is still focused on math and reading with test scores as the primary focus of assessment. Looking ahead, it difficult to foresee with any certainty where the forces of globalization will take us. Now that we are truly living in a global village let us embrace the new rules that reward collaboration and let us reignite a passion for invention and innovation. And once again embrace studies in art, science, and the humanities in our nation's schools and institutions of higher learning.

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