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The Value of the Arts in Education

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THE VALUE OF THE ARTS IN EDUCATION

by

Thorin Teague

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
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THE VALUE OF THE ARTS IN EDUCATION

Thorin Teague, M.A.

Western Michigan University , 2016

Art is a subject that has no substitute, as the learning and production of art satisfies a uniquely human need to communicate and connect with other human beings. The marriage of art and society can (and should) be thought of as culture. This author intends to assert that the arts have a critical place in education and indeed human society itself, bringing ancillary benefits to bear on the subject without relying on them as the primary justification for the retention and even expansion of arts programs; education (which could in turn be thought of the dissemination of cultural knowledge) of art is its own merit and the arts themselves are the self-evident value and reward. Presented in this writing is an argument in defense of the presence of the arts in American K-12 and higher education curricula, advocacy for the expansion of such programs, and criticism of the contraction or removal of visual art programs from such curricula.

Keywords: art, education, arts, culture, humanities, aesthetics, tolerance, divergent thinking, creativity, uniqueness, differences, tolerance, humanity, expression

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This thesis is built upon the works of many prominent and authoritative authors who I feel compelled to thank for the groundwork they've laid in regards to this topic. They include, Dr. Jessica Hoffman Davis, Arthur D. Efland, Albert William Levi, Ralph A. Smith, and Elliot Eisner.

Thank *you* for reading this, and my hope is you find it educational and enlightening. This thesis does not include a call to action, but if you learn anything that compels you to act, then do so.

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Introduction

Of what value is the education of art? This is a question that we can infer needs addressing, if the visual arts community and arts education community are any indication.

Contemporary society is interested in loftier, more elusive goals whose attainment is difficult to measure. Students must not only know the facts, but understand them and be able to think in imaginative, complex and critical ways. The world today requires people who can think on their own, who can raise telling questions and solve puzzling problems. The world outside school is riddled with unpredictable contingencies—there are no certainties. These conditions have implications for what and how we teach because that has something to do with the kind of minds children in the future will be able to create. (Eisner, 1998, p.2).

What are we teaching our children (explicitly and implicitly), *why* are we teaching it, and *where* are do the deficiencies lie? What roles can the arts play in this education? These questions and more will be explored in depth throughout the course of this thesis.

Though politics are not central to the core concepts of this thesis, the No Child Left Behind Act nonetheless merits examination as it implicitly illustrates the urgent need to at last answer this question in a satisfying, resonant way that will take root in the nation's collective consciousness and become part of Western humanity's common sense:

“Published in 2010, Sabol’s study, *No Child Left Behind: A Study of Its Impact on Art Education*, compiled data from more than 3,400 instructors, from preschool teachers to museum educators. Sabol found that No Child Left Behind’s policies influenced arts education in a variety of ways, although the negative effects outweighed many of the positive ones” (Herwees, 2014, p.1). This disconnect between leadership and the human learning needs of students is pervasive and persistent. *We have not*, in the year 2016,

overcome the basic social attitudes that are retarding educators' ability and desire to teach art: the fixation on "bottom-line" or "destination-oriented" (e.g. standards-based) education vs. focusing on individual learners or the actual *journey* of learning; and, insufficient value placed on the art product itself.

The authors of a recent study, "Arts Education Matters: We Know, We Measured It," set out to study in what ways, and to what extent, exposure to the arts, culture, and aesthetics impacts the development of K-12 students. The methodology they used was to create a control group and a treatment group, a standard medical mode of operating, from a pool of nearly 11,000 students. Their findings on this exposure, which will be discussed in a later section of this thesis, were presented in Education Week with a high degree of confidence. This group of researchers feel they have successfully measured and quantified this exposure's effects on student empathy, critical thinking, and aesthetic sense (Greene, et al., 2014, p.2).

Somewhere in there, countless shop-talking hall conversations with colleagues and artists, fits. Feelings of uncertainty at the future and frustration for having to constantly justify one's program pervades these conversations. The tone these conversations is so often worrisome.

Indeed this topic has been addressed and continues to be rehashed, and likely will continue, until the arts community is satisfied that the arts are valued. Teachers of art, music, dance, theater, and literature remain under constant pressure to justify themselves and their programs, and theirs are often the first to be cut when an institution's budget is tight. "[Educators] are not asked to transfer something that has sufficient value in itself. And therein lies the rub. The arts are not valued in their own right in our schools"

(Hoffman-Davis, 2008, p.46).

If arts education does indeed transfer to other disciplines, such as math, reading, and science, than this author will pursue and vigorously assert the benefits of such transference. Economic data relating directly to the arts, cultural activities, art sales, and other related marketplace activities will be examined. The positive effects the arts have on the mind is another area of interest, both from a psychological and neurological perspective.

While such ancillary benefits of art education have value, and while this author has no intention of devaluing such benefits, the main focus shall be on the primary functions of art within society: to permanently record cultural narrative (even if the artwork is not necessarily documentary), and to express human thoughts, experiences, and emotion in a way that nothing else can.

Generally speaking, most of the works of these authors, and most of the tone of conversations with colleagues, were in agreement that art's own value should be enough to justify the existence of the arts, but there is always a sincere frustration that goes along with the idea of having to constantly justify the existence of the subject one teaches—which is not asked of teachers of any other discipline.

This feeling I believe has led to an overeagerness for an art educator to “sell” his or her program based on “transfer,” the notion that the skills provided by artistic endeavors will transfer to other skills, improving performance in math, reading, and science. The overeagerness for art educators to trumpet ancillary benefits of art may be beneficial in the short term, but is detrimental in the long run—especially if the efficacy is oversold or overstated. Instead, educators finding themselves forced to justify their program's

existence might consider reframing their arguments on the core attributes of art and what it can provide students that other subjects cannot.

A number of working titles for this work illuminate my evolution of thought on this topic: starting with “The Place of Art In American Education,” then “The Importance of Art In American Education.” I finally settled on “The Value of the Arts in Education,” as all research, reading, and talking with colleagues resonated with one unified tone: there is a critical conflict of social values in play in our world today. Values such as aesthetics, creativity, uniqueness, differences, tolerance, humanity, human expression are of key concern to this thesis. In the final arguments, this author intends to assert that art education is of value, because it fulfills a simple human need to express one’s self.

Literature Review

Advocacy

In *Why Our Schools Need the Arts*, Jessica Hoffman-Davis (2008) investigates the links between standardized testing and the decline of the arts in the classroom. She endeavors to arm educators and other advocates with an arsenal of language that will equip them to evangelize. She asserts that the arts in education can be the remedy to curricular and administrative malaise, as well as how the arts been proven to improve completion rates. She is also clearly appealing to society at large to place a higher value on art itself. This contrasts with the works of Efland and Levi and Smith to a degree. Its primary goal *is* advocacy, or, is an apologist viewpoint, and includes a call to action, whereas the others' are not necessarily apologist viewpoints and do not include calls to action.

She further asks the question why mistake-making needs to be so taboo in early education, pointing out that learning and growing occurs not only from success, but from failure as well. It is detrimental to young people's self-image when educators fixate on outcome-based testing, as it devalues the process of questioning, divergent thinking, and making meaning.

In *Art Education: A Critical Necessity* (Levi & Smith), the authors present a discipline-based approach to education, asserting that the arts should be taught as a humanity. The authors make the appeal that the value of high art in 18th century Europe was lost (or at least diminished) in the westward expansion of America. This book does not endeavor to *prove* that art promotes general welfare, rather, "...to indicate the way in which I think this promotion can best be accomplished and in so doing indirectly show

why the issue is of the clearest relevance to a program of discipline-based art education in our schools.” (Levi & Smith, 1991, 9-10)

Levi & Smith’s thesis revolves around the premise that we need fully functional communication to convey the human experience to one another, convey emotion and nuance, and these authors assert that these uniquely humanistic traits are examined, cultivated, and nurtured, exclusively within the realms of the arts. The arts can effectively promote these distinctly human values, whereas all other subjects fail to serve such humanistic values, or at least fail to serve them as effectively. (Levi & Smith, 1991, 1-244)

Elliot Eisner wrote an article in 1998 called “Does Experience in the Arts Boost Academic Achievement?” in which he lamented regarding the misguided attempts to prove transference between arts and “more important” subjects such as reading, mathematics, and science. He starts with an excellent quote, “Have they ever thought about asking how reading and math courses contribute to higher performance in the arts” (Eisner, 1998, p.1)?

Eisner’s article was researched by surveying 10 years worth of academic journals as well as research compendia. The link traced by neuroscience connecting the arts with higher academic achievement outside the arts (transfer) is actually examined, leading to the conclusion that the arts have demonstrable, measurable pay-offs in academic learning. But again Eisner views the primary goal as the restoration of arts-related objectives in education to preeminence.

History

A History of Art Education, by Arthur Efland, offers a rich historical backdrop that

will improve our understanding of today's educational landscape, putting current events into a wider context. "The ways the visual arts are taught today were conditioned by the beliefs and values regarding art held by those who advocated its teaching in the past. [...] To find out why the arts are vulnerable, even today, is one of the functions of this book" (Efland, 1990, p.1-2). This book examines the historical development of visual art education in relation to that of general education. It reaches all the way back to the Middle Ages, through the Renaissance, the printing press and the explosion of literacy, and into the 20th century.

To better understand the plight of the arts in education, one must take a look at its historical context. The original Puritan settlers enacted the first state-run, tax-sponsored education system in the new world colonies. Its sole purpose was expressly to enable all children to learn to read so they could learn the principles of the Christian Bible and the laws and regulations issued by the state. The law provided for levying of fines for those who failed to comply with this act.

Arguments for education in the visual arts as one part of a sound liberal education for all citizens of a democratic republic appeared several decades prior to the Civil War. In the years following that war, proponents of economic and industrial growth argued that art education should not be reserved for the wealthy, leisured class, but was a practical necessity in preparing working-class children for their roles as workers and preparing master workmen to supervise others. (Stankiewicz, 1996, p.50).

There appear to have been times when the ability to communicate visually is valued, and times when that ability is not. The reasons have varied throughout history. The high value placed on self-expression and humanism in general is a relatively new kid on the

block; its first mainstream appearance as romanticism was in the first half of the nineteenth century. Long before that, throughout Greek and Roman history, artists and art have had a high social value, but only inasmuch as they reflect and glorify religious ideals or accurately reproduce natural, observable reality. The need for the latter has certainly diminished in the 21st century with the digital camera becoming pervasive and ubiquitous throughout American culture: the ability to create a realistic snapshot of a moment of one's life is no longer reserved for the wealthy or the elite, and this no longer needs to be the prime function of the artist.

Returning to the dawn of the industrial revolution, there is an apparent blind faith in progress and laissez-faire economics. This led to a revival of a more industrial flavor of romanticism, for a time, as the belief that "all men are created equal" and that each has the right to the "pursuit of happiness," and the individual has the capacity to attain said happiness.

This climate led to a certain philosophy of educational reform, a kind of reshaping of American education. Here lies the birthplace of the American practice that education would be made available and free to all U.S. Citizens (indeed mandatory).

It is also the beginning of the time that we see modern ideas about art ownership emerge. The buying, selling, auctioning, and trading of paintings and sculptures was not unheard of before the industrial revolution, but the practice was not common among the working class. By the 1900's, art ownership was fairly common among the average person, and of course still is to this day.

It is from this foundation we become a nation and begin our westward expansion, which took place throughout the 1800s. Millions of square miles of land was acquired by

various means and methods ranging from the Louisiana Purchase to the War with Mexico in the 1840s, and anything else necessary. Native Americans and Mexicans were displaced by the millions. Land rushes and gold rushes dominated the conscience of many of these settlers.

What could be the attitude toward art and culture of the rancher, the cowboy, and the prospector for gold? In this second period of our national history, there is nothing of the cultivated aristocracy or urbanity of the first. [...] The aesthetic tragedy of America's westward expansion consists in the infinite distance that separates the social climate of the dust-blown western town and its rowdy saloon culture from the admirable elegance and taste of eighteenth century Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. (Levi & Smith, 1991, p.6-7).

During this time, the philosophy of "Manifest Destiny" conveniently took root in the collective conscious of the nation. As time marched on, reintroduction of art into school curricula was attempted, but at this point art, and the education of art, was seen as having less value than it once did. The desire to acquire wealth and property seem to have overtaken the desire to nurture a sensitive and wise culture around this era.

With the rise of universal literacy in the nineteenth century, the first tentative efforts to introduce music into public education began in spite of objections from segments of the public. The introduction of these arts was often described as educational reform, as a privilege bestowed by the school on the young as a part of a free public education; but having a privileged status exacts its social costs. It removed the arts from the realm of necessities. (Efland, 1990, 2, p.42-44).

For reasons that were primarily economical at the time, the Industrial Revolution gave rise to the art institutions, and art departments within universities, with which we are

familiar today. Factory work could be done untrained, but industrial designers who were able to communicate visually quickly became crucial to the economic success of a 19th century industrial society. These industrial art programs were not widely expanded into modern art programs until after World War 2, when the G.I. Bill brought flocks of new students to study, among other things, art.

Progressing through the 1960s, the “general belief [arose] that education is a force that can transform society. [...] Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s this stream surfaced as an arts-in-education movement that saw art as a tool to enliven the school climate by its vitality.” (Efland, 1990, 261) However, at the same time, as the nation progressed into what we would now call modern life, and America enjoys economic success,

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries embraced a conservative ideology that channeled the school curriculum [of all subjects of education] in directions favored by the businessman. [...] The discipline-oriented movement had a conservative impact in narrowing the styles of educational reform and applying that style to subjects for which it may have been inappropriate.
(Efland, 1990, p.261).

That brings us to today, though it merits mention that some genuinely new ideas in education, primarily through innovative use of modern technology, such as flipped classrooms, MOOCs, and student-driven Wikis of course content, are arising in the 21st century. The longterm fruit of these genuinely new ideas remains to be seen. Nonetheless, the century-and-a-half old driving beliefs that education has been conditioned to ascribe to still hold. Educators remain servants to their masters, the almighty free market.

Neuroscience

Art and Cognition, another Efland book (2002), explores the effect of learning the arts

on the brain. The brain can be thought of as being like a muscle, which, like all others, must be exercised to function at peak performance. The arts stimulate parts of the brain that no other discipline can. The arts exclusively stimulate the right hemisphere of the brain—in other words math, science, english, history, and sports are all incapable of working this region of the brain. This gives us a clear illustration of how a brain is made deficient through deprivation of creative thought. As such, without it, our education can be called deficient. Efland in this book (and many of his writings) builds the case that arts are not a frivolous expenditure of classroom time, they are a necessary human function. His thought process leads into the degree of academic rigor required to make meaningful sense of the arts, and how disciplined study of the arts facilitate one's ability to interconnect existing information with one's own ideas and, at last, construct social and personal meaning.

I think we can see one of Efland's primary departures from the older view of the mind as a "memory bank" or "repository" of information and symbols. Efland believes, as does this author, that the human mind is capable of synthesizing existing elements into their own meaning—and that activity is a necessity in a complete education. "I seek to nullify a long-standing tradition in art education of discussing artistic activity apart from cognition as a whole and favor the idea that such activities are an integral part of such discourse. [...] The time has come to undo the damage caused by the biases of the past, and to look at more recent understandings of the mind and the nature of human intelligence" (Efland, 2002, p.6, p.14).

Typically, most Western people think in terms of right brain *vs.* left brain, as though they were in competition. Contrast that with most Eastern philosophies, which believe

that both aspects are critical in human development. Rather than thinking of “Right Brained” people vs. “Left Brained” people, we could think of *brains becoming minds*, and exercise both sides. Ask a gym teacher what happens if you do only curls with no extensions. It didn’t take culture long to accept the research of kinesthesiologists, pointing us to a more holistic physical education. Why should arts education be so different when the research is clear? The answer to that questions is, simply, “values.”

Dovetailing with *Art and Cognition*, Elliot Eisner’s *Arts and the Creation of the Mind* discusses similar ideas. Where Efland was more inclined toward empirical and neurological data, Eisner approaches the problem from a more humanistic standpoint. What kind of educational environment are we cultivating that favors standardized outcomes *at the expense of* personal development? What will this do to our children’s sense of self-worth and ability to communicate and relate to other human beings?

It appears that we run up against the edge of what science understands when chasing down the topic of neuroscience as it relates to the creative process. Most scientific research on creativity halted rather suddenly by about the 1980’s—this is due to the fact that researchers had reached the limits of what science could discover about it (Cleese, 1991, p.1).

The actual act of processing visual aesthetics is something that has attained recent attention and scientists are now attempting to measure the scope and intensity of its effects. Neuroaesthetics is the study of the neuroscience of the aesthetic experience, and is a branch of science that came into being in 2002. Relying heavily on visual centers in the brain, signals are distributed to various specialized areas of the brain. The prefrontal cortex has been linked to the conscious aesthetic experience, the actual promotion of

stimuli into what the person considers a “signal.” It was found that subjects in a heightened emotional state had an amplified response in this region, too (Kawabata, Zeki, 2004, p.2). The study of the brain’s ability to recognize patterns is referred to as “Signal Detection Theory,” which quantifies and measures the brain’s ability to discern between information-bearing patterns and noise (Macmillan, 2002, p.1). The exact centers processing these stimuli were mapped by Semir Zeki and Hideaki Kawabata. It is believed that the part of the brain that judges whether something is beautiful or not has been isolated (Kawabata, Zeki, 2004, p.4).

I would be remiss not to state that many within the arts community (who are aware) are quick to damn the study of neuroscience as reductionist. Its inclusion is merely intended to provide a possible representation of what neurological effects the arts have on the brain. It should not be construed as a final authority, especially given the newness of this branch of science. As more is discovered about the effects of aesthetics on the brain, this information can be used as part of the ammunition for those endless tired arguments educators always seem to be engaged in: the arts exclusively are stimulating these regions of the brain.

Implications

Culturally we seem to be in agreement that schools are floundering if not failing. We know we are behind most of the developed world in science and math skills. Standardizing school outcomes *does* have a certain appeal. Homogeneity seems like an attractive option. But the cost will be great, argues Eisner.

Arts programs have historically been contracted or cut in similar cultural climates, and indeed many arts programs that continue to survive can still feel the effects of this

climate. Sometimes, school administrators are paying mere lip service to the arts. How do we change students' brains into minds in this climate? What kinds of life experiences and potential for meaning making are we providing students at this level? Literacy itself is so obsessively tied to the reading of *words*, but the actual making of meaning, a key component of a healthy mind, is often neglected or even entirely absent from students' learning experiences. This brings into question established thoughts about "hard" subjects like math, science... what application could art have to those subjects (Eisner, 2003, p.2)?

This idea is of critical importance. Looking at the widespread contraction of art programs that have pervaded the last decade-plus illustrates just how much of society has failed to usurp antiquated and largely debunked ideas of how the human mind functions. As a result, students skills involving such activities as thinking divergently, seeing from multiple perspectives, and the self-actualization and confidence that comes with expressing one's self, are crippled. To this day, it's common sense that everyone needs to learn how to read and write, but not draw or make mistakes (or even use their imagination in any way whatsoever, attempting to solve problems with more than one answer or no answer at all).

In my view, complex or ill-structured knowledge is not only found in fields like medicine and art criticism but is also applicable to fields like law, literary criticism, history, and philosophy, to name a few. In short, ill-structuredness is likely to be evident in most one-of-a-kind learning situations, that is, whenever judgements must be made in the absence of rules or generalizations that apply to numerous cases, and this includes most situations in life. The capacity for making effective judgements, given the ill-structured character of life itself, is a major intellectual accomplishment.
(Efland, 2002, p.84).

Through learning to draw, or work in any medium, students necessarily learn to cope with their mistakes. Through any subject that involves mistake-making as a regular part of the process, the act of learning becomes *a whole, contiguous experience*, rather than a mere goal or product *at the end* of that experience, which reduces or eliminates altogether the importance of the steps taken to get there.

Clearly, a change is coming in this mindset, the mindset that the human brain is a passive receiver of information.

There's hope that the Common Core State Standards might provide an opportunity for multidisciplinary collaboration that could strengthen all sectors of the educational system. Language arts instructors should be able to coordinate with their visual arts colleagues to find opportunities for visual arts teaching during literary instruction. Math teachers could also improve the instruction of visual learners through implementation of visual arts strategies. That change could fuel a creativity renaissance in our schools.

(Herwees, 2014)

Rote memorization is no longer seen as a necessity by society at large (it's been said that Google is our "collective memory"). What, then, should we do with our brains, if not stuff them with facts and information? What direction culture will go, what form this change will take, remains to be seen. We will probably eventually remove rote memorization from curricula and replace it with... *what, exactly?*

A preoccupation with outcome-based testing threatens a student's crucial conception of his or her own life as a work in progress. [...] A celebration of agreed-upon standards may negatively impact a student's incentive to explore personal educational values and goals. (Hoffman-Davis, 2008, p.84).

Methodology

In this thesis, I will use research by numerous sources including Albert William Levi, Ralph A. Smith, the NEA, Arthur Efland, Jessica Hoffman Davis, Elliot Eisner, and others. Weaving together established ideas published by authoritative authors on their subjects, I intend to present an apologist's assertion of the importance of the arts in education. The foundation of my assertions will be provided by the *intrinsic, self-evident value of art, the value of the activity of making art and meaning, **not** its fringe benefits.*

My primary mode of research was the procurement of information through Scholarly Books, Journals, and Web Sites. Some secondary sources, including articles and blogs, were used to illustrate key concepts in a clear and illuminating manner. Through these methods, I procured the necessary information that will validate my assertions.

Findings

The consensus overall seems to be that society at large does not place the value on the arts and education of the arts that educators and artists feel is appropriate or merited. The reasons for this are complex and nuanced, involving many different interested parties and groups of people from many different backgrounds, interests, and spheres of influence. Students, teachers, artists, curators, public servants, and buyers and sellers of art products all play a role in this climate.

The development of the human mind in the American student can justifiably be called deficient, as overemphasis is placed on left-brain activities and standards-based testing. This irrational fixation is cultivating deficient minds and moreover deficient human beings in today's society by devaluing other brain functions. The king of the hill at the moment is the businessman, and his philosophy currently prevails. It appears to be by no measurable merit beyond mere conditioning and complacency.

America tends to be a bottom line oriented society, which values amassing wealth above amassing knowledge or culture. In the opinion of Ken Busby, “‘The arts are under attack!’ We hear this cry on a consistent basis as state and local governments wrestle with priorities to balance budgets. The arts always seem to be the first on the chopping block” (Busby, 2014, p.1). There are those who believe that a skill that doesn't translate “School-to-Work” has no place in education—but then again, art skills *do*.

The issue of transfer is at the crux of my concern in regard to school-to-work transition. Virtually every report, article, or conference presentation asserts that knowledge, skills, and dispositions developed through arts education *will and do* transfer to the workplace. [...] While all of this research has critics, art educators should consider its implications for the role of the arts in school-to-work transition. After all, business has long

placed a greater premium on accountability than has education. If art education does not deliver as promised, we may find ourselves friendless again.”
(Stankiewicz, 1996, p.53).

To further that end, recent NEA findings show that “Teenagers and young adults of low socioeconomic status (SES) who have a history of in-depth arts involvement show better academic outcomes than do low-SES youth who have less arts involvement. They earn better grades and demonstrate higher rates of college enrollment and attainment” (Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012, p.12).

There is an economy to the arts, which naturally flows through and with the economy surrounding it. This is not often measured or examined closely—it is most often lumped in with Entertainment or Tourism, but isolating the economy of the fine arts can be illuminating and provide another rhetorical argument to justify art programs. Busby goes on to state that,

The arts ARE all about the economy. Cultural tourism is a \$400 billion industry in this country. Visitors travel to Detroit to visit the DIA—they stay in hotels, eat in restaurants, visit [museums] and other cultural attractions, purchase gifts, etc. All of this economic activity brings money into the Detroit economy—it creates jobs, both directly arts related and ancillary. Sales tax, and hotel and motel taxes are generated. These funds support the infrastructure of the city. Without this activity, there is no city. (Busby, 2014, p.1).

And indeed these same things could be said of the Heidelberg Project, Detroit Film Theater, Detroit’s vibrant music scene, and the city’s numerous festivals. In FY2010, financial and labor data from 346 creative and cultural organizations throughout Michigan was tracked. It was found that, through the arts exclusively, half a billion

dollars were generated in salaries, services, and materials, 22,335 jobs were created including 3,068 full time jobs and over 1,000 interns. In FY2011, over \$2 billion tourism dollars were generated *directly from the arts community*, accounting for 19% of Michigan's overall tourist revenue (Vartanian, 2013, p.1).

In 2010 nationally, the nonprofit arts and culture industry generated \$135bn, adding 4+ million jobs. What's more, these industries yielded \$22bn worth of yearly revenue to *the same federal, state, and local governments that are so often slashing their relatively paltry \$4bn* in government arts subsidies and provisions (Americans for the arts, 2011, p.1).

Financial justifications for the contraction or removal of arts education may be a fact of life, but examining the wider picture reveals a major collective delusion. The arts are clearly not a waste of money, they are in fact an investment with a measureable return. Nonetheless, leaders continue to cling to this superstition that the arts aren't worth the investment—a belief that is informed *solely* by conditioning which came about *only* because of the circumstances of the day. There is nothing special, sacred, or precious about these delusions, and there is no rational reason to continue to cling to them. The facts actually suggest the opposite, perhaps spending *more* money on the arts *at the expense of other budgetary concerns* might not be such a bad idea!

At the beginning, I mentioned a study carried out by a group of researchers entitled, "Arts Education Matters: We Know, We Measured It." The problem they were facing was that few or none had at least attempted to measure, in an empirical way, the exact nature and scope of impact the arts have on a student's development. Using a sample population of almost 11,000 students, with a "control" and a "treatment" group, they

achieved consistent results in their experiments and felt confident to make the following assertions.

Exposure to the arts improve students' cultural and artistic knowledge. Clearly, this can be called a self-evident benefit of an arts education.

Exposure to the arts improve students' empathy skills. Credit goes to the arts ability to present many cultural experiences from a plurality of viewpoints. This increases student awareness of and ability to engage with "otherness," from other cultures, other thought processes, and other ideas.

Exposure to the arts improves students' critical thinking skills. Stemming from its unique ability to free all students from the constraints of right and wrong answers gives peers an opportunity to start seeing problems from multiple angles, rather than just going from "point A" (the "problem") to point B (the "answer"). No other subject has a spectrum of possibility with the width and breadth of the arts. Most of the time (especially in early education), problems from non-arts subjects have only one correct answer.

Exposure to the arts improves students' attention to detail. Learning in the arts is unique in that once you attain "correctness" (whatever that may be) in your piece or performance, you're not necessarily done. Many times, refinement or practice is needed to actually perfect the work.

These improved outcomes may not boost scores on math and reading tests, but most parents, communities, and educators care about them. We don't just want our students to learn vocationally useful skills in math and reading. We also want them to be knowledgeable and frequent patrons of the arts. We want them to be tolerant and empathetic human beings. And we want them to be astute observers of their surroundings. Some of these

qualities may help students earn a living, but their importance has more to do with students' development into cultured and humane people. (Greene, et al., 2014, p.1).

The researches of this study conceded that more rigorous research is necessary, but it cannot happen until apologists can agree that there is a need for it. The causal effects must be isolated and irrefutably quantified. The skeptics of older model studies that just compare *any arts student* with *any non-arts student* will no longer be able to legitimately question whether the arts *attract* or *generate* excellent students.

One form of drawing has been redefined in recent years as an *empirical* activity which involves seeing, interpreting, and discovering appropriate marks to reproduce an observable phenomenon. Again, activities that cannot be reproduced in any other class. Efland offers us an historic perspective on this artistic idiom: "Plato's view of imitation is an extreme version of a realist theory of art, yet after a period of relative neglect during the Middle Ages, a variant of it was revived in the Italian Renaissance. The renewed emphasis on the imitative capacities of art was an effect of the period's intense interest in the study of nature and in scientific investigation" (Efland, 1990, 131).

In no way however should any of that be construed as a detraction from the finer "art for art's sake" type of approach some artists take. While many can accept the thought of working to accurately reproduce one's visual environment on paper or a three dimensional medium as having at least *some* value, somehow making that leap to accept the notion that the *activity* of making art bears its own merit, regardless of the final product or outcome, becomes difficult or impossible. "Studio learning is very much a discovery process, where students will begin work and revise it, edit, change it, based on

things they've learned" (Herwees, 2014, p.2).

The learning of art should be something that is pursued and desired by educators, by students, by parents, and by administrators, not because the skills transfer to other areas, but because self-expression and nonlinear thinking are necessary components of a complete education. That education's goal is to cultivate great and brilliant minds of all types, and to help each individual student attain their maximum potential. Assembly line style education, the approach we ascribe to now, all too often overlooks or at least downplays these aspects of education, merely because they are not valued factory floor worker characteristics.

Also, consider the appeal of Jessica Hoffman-Davis:

The notion of transfer looms heavy as a desperate and perhaps viable justification for arts learning. Don't worry if the children look like they're learning how to make and appreciate art; those abilities will transfer to the more important skills of reading words and counting numbers or thinking critically in any academic situation they may ever encounter. Why must we justify arts learning in terms of other disciplines?
(Hoffman-Davis, 2008, 46)

But what might happen if we reframed these questions in contexts such as, "What does art have to say about social issues that affect K-12 children, such as bullying, drugs, or even simple everyday life stuff?" Whether or not the arts make students better at other subjects is the wrong question to pursue or put any more energy into.

One cannot ask the question of why art education matters without asking why art itself is of any more value than so much flim flam. How do we value the art product, individually and collectively? There are interests at play in this market that have a deeply vested interest in the valuation of art.

The arts are not autonomous realms of activity, uninfluenced by the social context. They are supported by patronage, controlled by censorship, and disseminated by education; and the character of these systems reveals a great deal about the society of which they are a part.
(Efland, 1990, 4)

Consider that most high-end (\$10k+) “primary” art sales—art sales between the artist of a fresh, original work, and a buyer—occur through galleries. The lucky few artists that get market representation here are subject to the galleries. Galleries set tastes and manipulate prices in ways that would be illegal in any other billion+ dollar industry. High end galleries want to keep track of a work after its sale, too—coming back on the market outside of their control is not preferable. Sending “sock puppets” to auctions to drive up prices and other marketplace treachery is not unheard of (Schrager, 2013, p.1).

Clearly, there is a power structure at play, indeed a power *struggle* at play. The value of art goes beyond money. Art is a critical form of human communication which represents human thought in ways no other medium is capable of, enabling humanity to communicate more nuanced subtleties in a work—granting human beings the power to construct meaning about what reality is and is not, individually and collectively. The purpose of a work of art is not just to convey mere information. The arts have repeatedly and consistently demonstrated a unique ability to address social issues from an emotional, human point of view and in some cases to spur society to action. They “satisfy a vital human hunger, a hunger for personal meaning and identity [...] Art education is a critical necessity, then, because art is” (Smith, 1991, p.xvii). The economics matter but the real value of art goes so far beyond that—reaching all the way to future civilizations after our own is gone.

As time marches on, it becomes, and is becoming, progressively more difficult to affect change as generation after generation of art budget-slashing leaders comes and goes through America's governmental halls and learning institutions with arts programs implicitly or explicitly in their crosshairs. Increasingly, the leaders making these decisions are themselves products of a deficient arts education, feeling the pressure to cut already overstretched budgets. They take the easy way out and stick to the status quo. Underlying this behavior is the notion that the arts are for entertainment purposes only, and represent an ultimately frivolous expenditure of time and resources. Today, the power structure favors business.

As cognitive development theories became more inclusive, they should be able to account for the development of graphic ability as well, suggesting that graphic development is explained by cognitive development or, better yet, that it is evidence of such development! Unfortunately, this correlation was neither studied nor voiced by researchers.
(Efland, 2001, 48-51)

Necessarily, this established leadership pattern officially sidelines aesthetic and visual aspects of human communication, devalues the art product as pretentious, demotes the process of the activity to leisure or even waste, and relegates the education of art to optional. Aesthetic values, and the humanistic values that go along with the arts, have failed to take root in America, at least on the same level that they have in most other developed nations.

The situation we are in came to be through a history of conditioning, cultural strife, and economics. Education again becomes very much a double-edged sword in the wrong hands.

The greatest intruder on the messy, intertwined artist-like understandings

of very young children is that glistening bright doorway to their future as grown-ups: school. It is school that introduces the precise language of numbers and words—although educational media now does a very good job of that even before children go off to school. [...] The child hears clearly that [their artwork] on its own says nothing, even as it may represent something other than or beyond words. Spoken words are needed to clarify the image. (Hoffman-Davis, 2008, p.63-64).

This attitude persists into college, and equipping students with verbal language is of primary concern in the Design and Communication class I teach. All students are encouraged to talk about their art (and in the end give mandatory formal presentations), because they'll need these communication skills to work.

I submit for further consideration the phenomenon of the A- or better student who can't succeed in an art class. These students are a minority, but merit representation as they illustrate a spectacularly important concept that will further strengthen my core axiom: she or he is too innured in the convergent mode of linear thinking and has had no exposure to anything else. The muscle has atrophied. Her or his brain has rarely if ever been used in this way; the student has never been asked to solve a problem that doesn't have just one solution or has no solution at all, e.g. a problem that requires divergent thinking.

Conclusion

This deficiency in cognitive ability should be regarded as a form of illiteracy, and is a prime failure of the modern education system. Efland points out that the goals of the education system are deeply influenced by a “[...] serious lack of awareness of the substantive roles the arts can play in overall cognitive development.” That the tendency is to think of them as, “modes of entertainment, frivolous expenditures, and elective options—‘Nice’ culture experiences to have if time and resources permit” (Efland, 2002, 6-7), but certainly not core attributes of an educated, healthy, active mind.

Art’s encounters with mistake-making, with facing and building on what’s wrong, have tremendous implications for learning in other disciplines. But they are uniquely accessed in the safety of arts classrooms where risk-taking and failure fruitfully abound. Safe from the hard edges of right and wrong answers, safe from agendas that exclude multiple perspectives, safe from assessments that are sure of themselves, arts classrooms provide opportunities for students to explore the messy, uncertain realities that preoccupy their lived lives within and beyond the world of school. (Hoffman-Davis, 2008, p.82-83).

The process of making meaning can be so crucial to young people’s development and self-esteem, and this process is safely explored in depth through the study of the arts. When we are able to create a work of art in and share it with others, we find a whole new mode of thinking and of communication.

The final takeaway I believe is that art can be justifiably called undervalued in a student’s education, leading to the reality that American education as it stands now is demonstrably deficient, lacking in aesthetic values, judgement skills in unique or unpredictable situations, imagination, the ability to think critically, attention to detail, and

the ability to synthesize meaning.

What is at stake here is a critical conflict of values. What counts in an acquisitive society like our own are “prosperity” and “security”; what counts much less are moral and spiritual values, education for wisdom, and, of course, aesthetic perception and artistic taste. It is my contention that the entire problem of the subordination of aesthetic claims and the sorry plight of arts education in the United States today [...] is obvious from the flavor of our current political debate. In fact our politicians are almost hysterically obsessed with the issues of ‘economic growth’ and ‘national defense.’ But who among them is concerned with encouraging of our ‘cultural growth’ and the measures that are needed for the production of a cultivated society worth defending?
(Levi & Smith, 1991, p.7-8).

As the great juggernaut of culture pushes forward into the 21st Century, the arts retreat, leaving people with weak or useless right hemispheres. With underdeveloped brains, our cognitive and communication abilities are compromised. With compromised cognitive and communication abilities comes underdeveloped culture and insensitive or incorrect public policy. America appears to have been conditioned to devalue what is unmeasurable (or unmeasurable by any known method). This can be regarded as an educational failure.

This shift to preestablished instructional objectives changed the view of knowledge. Knowledge became something already known by the teacher rather than something that can be the result of the student’s own intellectual activity. Educational success was defined by how much of the teacher’s knowledge was passed on to the student, not by the insights, inventions, or discoveries of the student. [...] since the intellectual freedom of the learner is not trusted to achieve socially valued results.
(Efland, 1990, p.262).

Sound fiscal justifications exist to retain or expand arts programs in America’s

educational institutions. The arts, when isolated, represent a \$2bn dollar industry in Michigan alone, and a \$135bn nationwide. According to the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, arts, design, and media occupations are fields that will grow by 7% from 2012 to 2022.

Moreover, we must think of the legacy we are leaving behind, not only for future generations but *future civilizations*. The people of the future will not only want to know *what we did* but *who we were*. You can't convey things like character, integrity, emotions, humanity, and aesthetics with mere information.

Without the power to make meaning, we are expressionless, mere passive receivers of information. Without the power to apply critical thought to the unique situations of life, we are mere automatons. The primary justification for the expansion of the arts programs, then, need only be that we are not fully functional human beings without the arts.

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