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The Importance of Arts Education and Not Leaving a Child Behind

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THE IMPORTANCE OF ARTS EDUCATION AND NOT LEAVING A CHILD BEHIND

by

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B.A. Southern Illinois University, 2007

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Public Administration

Department of Political Science
in the Graduate School

RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

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TITLE: THE IMPORTANCE OF ARTS EDUCATION AND NOT LEAVING A CHILD BEHIND

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Dona Bachman

Despite the fact that the arts are regarded as a core curriculum classes in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), it is still regarded as a subject that is not as important as math or science in America's public schools. Upon extensive research, it is clear that this act has many issues. These issues tend to hover around whether or not arts education is important. Like many of the author's cited in this paper, this writer agrees that change needs to happen in policy on a national level. Because a direct route to policy change is a long-term goal, it is imperative to start at a local level. Community arts centers, museums, and other like-minded organizations can be the voice to a community or to the nation, to let everyone know that the arts are important. Before policy change can happen, people's ideas and small minded thinking needs to change about art. Small communities can set large examples.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Arts education is the learning and instruction of visual and tangible arts and a description of these arts include, but are not limited to: music, theater, drawing, painting, sculpture, design, jewelry, pottery, weaving, fabrics, photography, and cinema (U.S. Legal, Inc, 2012). Arts education can be beneficial for people of all ages; however, it is particularly important for children. This importance to children is discussed in Fran Smith's article, "Why Arts Education is Crucial, and Who's Doing It Best," "Involvement in the arts is associated with gains in math, reading, cognitive ability, critical thinking, and verbal skill. Arts learning can also improve motivation, concentration, confidence, and teamwork (Smith, 2005)." She cites a 2005 report by the Rand Corporation about the visual arts that argues that

"The intrinsic pleasures and stimulation of the art experience do more than sweeten an individual's life . . . they 'can connect people more deeply to the world and open them to new ways of seeing,' creating the foundation to forge social bonds and community cohesion. And, strong arts programming in schools helps close a gap that has left many a child behind . . . the children of affluent, aspiring parents generally get exposed to the arts whether or not public schools provide them. Low-income children, often, do not" (Smith, 2005, p. 1).

Eric Cooper, president and founder of the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education concurs: "Arts education enables those children from a financially challenged background to have a more level playing field with children who have had those enrichment experiences (Smith, 2005)."

The question, then, is if arts education is seen as a benefit not just in its own right, but as an assurer of success in other disciplines, why is it underfunded and often the first program to be cut when a school suffers economic shortfalls?

Among the stereotypes that affect the perceived need for arts education is the notion that the arts are only a “hobby” and math and science are subjects that are more important for a child’s future. This stereotype ignores the fact that art surrounds us in most everyday situations and is created by artists who are legitimately employed. These employed artists have created many of the items that the general-public may take advantage of or over-look, such as billboards, magazines or movies and commercials. Artists also have a hand in more than just the obvious; they design the equipment that we use every day from cars and medical equipment to computers and software. All man made objects are created by or with the assistance of an artist’s hand in one way or another. When one sees a farmer plowing a field with his machinery, an artist was a part of the creation of the tractor and plow, and even had a hand in designing the clothes that the farmer is wearing. The farmer could be a person who has been educated about the artistic theory of lines and perspective and he could be using this knowledge to plan and plot his crop in his fields. To recognize the arts in everyday life, one must also recognize the importance of arts education in children’s lives. As the Illinois Arts Alliance (2007) states, “Arts education rewards our children by helping them reach practical goals such as academic achievements and career success.”

In looking at the dismissive attitude that prevails in some education circles towards arts education and the ongoing curtailing of such programs in our primary and secondary school systems, the Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation (IAAF), notes that the state only mimics an unfortunate trend in the whole country (Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation, 2007). This paper will

examine the status of arts education in Illinois and make the recommendations a community can make to address the issues of dwindling arts education in their public schools.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

Several actions by the federal government have affected the education of the arts in America throughout its history. Up to the 1900s, art was a luxury enjoyed by the wealthy, and federal involvement was almost non-existent. If you were fortunate enough to enjoy art as “cultural enrichment,” you were wealthy (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010, p. 137). The authors of “From Dewey to No Child Left Behind: The Evolution and Devolution of Public Arts Education” (2010) state that in the 1920s, known as the Progressive Era, studio-based learning was first integrated into U.S. schools (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010). This type of education was based on the research of John Dewey and Dewey’s Laboratory School in Chicago, a major influence in this progressive education thinking (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010, p. 137). By the end of the 1920s, the arts were viewed as an important part of a child’s education and some local school districts, throughout the United States, supported the education of the arts, as well as funded them (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010, p. 137).

Even though the arts in education came to be viewed as important in the 1920s, they suffered a decline in support, as did many programs across education, because of America’s Great Depression (1929-1942) and World War II (1939-1945). During this time, people’s concentrations, efforts and whatever available funds were filtered towards the war to help America’s plight. In the 1950s, the U.S. economy had recovered from unstable economic conditions of the recent past, and education was on its way to obtaining the funds that were needed. However, other challenges faced the arts. The Cold War (1947-1991) was becoming an issue. Also, during this time the “Soviet Union launched Sputnik which caused the government

to proclaim an educational crisis and a new emphasis on science and mathematics pushed arts education into the background (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010, p. 138).”

Finally, in 1963, the United States Office of Education began to support research in the arts and through this research, it created a policy that would make art a curriculum based subject (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010, p. 138). In addition, in 1963, this policy was strengthened by a U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare report affirming that arts programs were important and necessary for school children (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010, p. 138).

In 1965, the creation of the federally funded granting agency the National Endowment for the Arts, added to the perception that art education was important and provided arts education funding on a national level (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010, p. 138). With public funding through NEA and financial support through foundations and individual donors, organizations that supported the arts grew to become locations for policymaking regarding the arts and arts education (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010, p. 138). To further the need for arts education, Congress signed the “Goals 2000: Educate America Act 1994.” This Act endorsed the importance of many subjects, including art, and challenged schools to demonstrate their students’ competency in their subjects, again including art (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010, p. 139).

Congress passed a major piece of federal legislation that has shaped U.S. education beginning in 2001. President George W. Bush instigated the legislation that would be known as the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB). This act was meant to improve education across the nation and to raise test scores in several areas of study. The NCLB act was created to help students in the American school system achieve better scores in their core classes, which included language arts, math, science, civics, government, economics, geography, history, and the arts (Chapman, 2007, p. 25).

It is important to include a study conducted in 2010 by F. Robert Sabol at Purdue University. Dr. Sabol's study found that "NCLB has created a number of negative affects on art education programs in the areas of scheduling, increased workload, and funding (Sabol, 2010). " This study consisted of 3,412 respondents. Thirty-four percent of these respondents were employed in the elementary level, 22% were employed in the middle school level, 32% were high school, 3% were supervisors and administration, and 2% were museum art educators. Dr. Sabol notes that 67% of those that were surveyed reported that art schedules have been affected by NCLB. It is important to note that 32% reported that their schedules have not been affected. Dr. Sabol has also noted art educators have a negative view of the NCLB and its affects on arts education. The data shows that 71% of those surveyed feel that NCLB has not had a positive effect on their arts programs and 70% feel that arts education has not been improved by the act. The positive affects that NCLB has had on arts educators is that, like other educators, have found that have become more reflective on their teachings and these reflections have assisted them in making improvements to their programs. On a more negative note, they find themselves focusing on test preparation more than actual studio time.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Laura H. Chapman (2007) discusses the No Child Left Behind act in detail in her article, “No Child Left Behind and National Trends in Education.” She lays out the overall purpose of the act and reviews the shortcomings of the act as well. Chapman notes that the NCLB act “is where schools enter a market and compete with other market driven schools (Chapman, 2007, p. 25).” “The target of NCLB is to have 95-100% of students in public schools to score proficient or above in reading, math, and science by 2014 (Chapman, 2007, p. 25).” Chapman, like many others, notes that arts education is dismissed from primary importance in the act’s enforcement.

In the article “From Dewey to No Child Left Behind: The Evolution and Devolution of Public Arts Education,” the history of arts education is outlined from as early as the 1900s to the implementation of NCLB (Beveridge, 2010). The authors have conducted a case study in Texas and compare the Texas House Bill and its effects on the testing and accountability of the state’s education system to the national picture. The focus of this article is specifically on arts education in Texas, but like many other authors, they suggest that there needs to be amendments to NCLB in order to improve arts education in Texas and across the country.

Anne C. Grey makes note of the unintended negative consequences for art education that are contained in the NCLB act; even though arts education is part of the core curriculum in the act, the act offers little support for making it intrinsically essential (Grey, 2010, p. 9). One of Grey’s major concerns is that because so little emphasis is given to including arts education in NCLB reporting, the schools have no direction nor reason to adequately develop arts education such as they do for other disciplines nor to integrate the arts into the curriculum

(Grey, 2010, p. 9). As a result of this inadequate integration, Grey sees art education reduced to activities viewed as recess, extracurricular or no part at all (Grey, 2010, p.9).

Grey refers to a study conducted in 2007 by the Center on Education Policy, a national, independent advocate for public education, which reported that 22% of school districts surveyed have reduced their instructional time for art and music (Grey, 2010, p. 10). The only positive impact that the author notes is that the NCLB does in fact list the arts as a core academic subject (Grey, 2010, p. 10). Grey states that this helps keep the door open for people to come in and study or research how to improve arts education.

Tina Beveridge in her article “No Child Left Behind and Fine Arts Classes (2010)” also notes the problems arts education faces as do many others writers on the act. The two most notable problems for arts education that Beveridge focuses on are the problem of funding and the problem of scheduling arts education in the schools. Many schools claim that their budget does not have flexibility to properly support arts classes. Beveridge notes that the NCLB act gives schools a reason for not funding arts education. The NCLB act’s overemphasis on test scores and the schools’ inability to properly test art related classes in a measurable manner, puts the focus and the funding on those classes that are easier to gauge progress through standardized testing (Beveridge, 2010, p. 5). Beveridge also focuses on the scheduling issues that are faced, or created, in the schools regarding arts classes. She points out that the schools use the “fun” classes, which are arts classes, to bribe students with art classes if they do well in the more testable subjects (Beveridge, 2010). If the student is doing poorly in one of these testable classes, the student is then pulled from the art class until they achieve satisfactory status in the other classes (Beveridge, 2010, p. 5).

To focus on the “why” when thinking about what is going wrong with arts education one must consult the people who are most often overlooked in the debate: the teachers. The article “Teacher Perspectives on NCLB and Arts Education: A Case Study (2008)” focuses on these important parts of arts education in schools. Teachers are important sources when it comes to this subject because they are the ones who endure most of the budget cuts and scheduling changes. They are on the front lines of the battle. They are the ones who end up explaining to parents why the children are not getting adequate education in the subject areas of art. They are the ones who need to be interviewed (Spohn, 2008, p. 5).

CHAPTER 4

ART EDUCATION IN ILLINOIS

Many citizens in the state of Illinois as well as others across the country have noticed the decline in arts education. They have sought to answer this decline by forming organizations and initiatives dedicated to addressing the problem. For example, the Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation (IAAF), an organization that has been advocating the arts in Illinois since 1982, launched the Illinois Creates in 2004. As a statewide coalition of over 150 educators, businessmen, civic and arts advocates, IAAF is an organization that is dedicated to promoting a comprehensive standard-based arts education program for Illinois public schools (Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation, 2007, p. 2). Standard-based documentation could provide a basis of evaluation that would parallel the standardized testing that is used in science and math evaluations.

The Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation and the Chicago Community Trust has gathered and presented some important research in arts education. For example, IAAF conducted a survey in 2005 to assess the status of art education in Illinois. The purpose of this 2005 survey was to understand the challenges of producing a solid educational background in art for Illinois public school students and to present the consequences if this were not available to students (Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation, 2007, p. 3). They surveyed over 900 superintendents and principals throughout Illinois to assess the status of arts education in (Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation, 2007, p. 3).

Survey results from the IAAF 2005 survey, found that 92% of the superintendents and 94% of the principals surveyed agree or strongly agree that arts education is an essential part of having a quality education (Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation, 2007, p. 9). The organization cites

the public support that endorses the necessity of arts education for an informed citizenry. Also, it notes that more than 3 out of every 4 of those educational administrators surveyed believe that bringing focus back to arts education is what is needed to fill an obvious void that has grown throughout the years in public schools in the United States (Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation, 2007, p. 2). Yet, even with these obvious and encouraging statistics, arts education continues to be downsized or eliminated from the curriculum in America's public schools.

There is often an assumption when dealing with Illinois' education statistics that Chicago statistics control the numbers; however, in reality, the 2005 Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation survey has shown a gaping hole in the rural regions of Illinois regarding arts education. Principals in rural regions may affirm that arts education is important, but they also admit that arts education is the first to be cut when there is budgetary constraint. These same principals have stated that they believe that arts education is a key factor in achieving greater success in other areas of a child's academic career. Therefore, in short, practicing art in public schools creates a child who is more successful in the rest of the "important subjects." Regarding the NCLB act, this would mean that the child is more likely to achieve higher scores on standardized tests if arts education was more prominent in its importance in schools.

The contradiction of praising the power of arts education to better prepare a student for his/her studies, while cutting the very program continues to hurt Illinois schools and schools across the country. What then can be done to help with this need for better and more accessible arts education?

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

The question to ask is how can the public counteract the decline of arts education in our schools? How can we change the fact, according to Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation and a study done by the National Center for Education Statistics in 1999, that “Illinois is lower than the national average when it comes to the availability to arts education (Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation, 2007)?” “A June 2005 Harris Poll released by the Americans for the Arts revealed that 93% of Americans agree that the arts are vital to providing a well rounded education for children (Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation, 2007, p. 9).” So, a better question is why is the public knowingly letting arts education decline?

Policy change on a national level is necessary for arts education. This policy change could include a clearer description of arts education being part of the core curriculum and the necessity to treat it as such. The vague representation of the arts in NCLB and the stronger focus on other subjects may have caused school administrators to take the path of least resistance. The administrators continue to put focus on the easier, measurable classes and tend to let the focus of education in the arts decline. It would be ideal if schools had more strict requirements requiring art to be a strong part of the curriculum, not an afterthought. The arts need to be a respected part of the curriculum, and until the measures, according to the Illinois State Board of Education’s learning standards, are better acknowledged, art and arts programs will continue to be sacrificed.

One possible example of a way to appropriately assess the arts has been created by the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association’s (CCSESA) Arts Initiative. Using traditional and alternative assessments for the arts, this organization launched its Arts Education Initiative in 2006 that urges schools to “weave the arts into the fabric of the

curriculum providing all students with a comprehensive education, kindergarten through high school (Anderberg, 2005).” Before policy change can happen, however, arts education proponents need to focus on local activism to bring about change and to make the case for a stronger commitment for the arts. The CCSESA also offers free tools for communities to use in regards of Arts Advocacy. Moreover, even as arts education proponents work on changing the NCLB act or finding ways that arts education teachers can justify their necessity, they must help address the decline in arts education, particularly in rural regions of the state.

Community members need to become arts education proponents and become more involved in how their children are educated. When the community becomes active in their schools and community arts education programs, they can make arts education awareness in their community stronger. As the great anthropologist Margaret Mead put it, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does.”

Community arts centers can become centers of arts activism in a community because of the shared views of its members as to the importance of the arts to society. As a group, art center members have a strong voice for advocating their position. If the arts organization does not already use its voice to advocate, the community can seek them out and lobby them to become the voice of their community. If the arts organization is the voice, but lacks the community involvement, it can lobby to the community to become more involved and less apathetic towards the current situation in arts education. As arts activists they can keep art in the public's view by offering a number of community awareness programs and school programs. The possible impact of this activism and growing community involvement could help persuade administrators and local government to notice that the community views art as an important part of their children's

education. Once the administrators and government take notice of the public's view, this could persuade new conversations about arts education in schools.

It is also important to note that these organizations may have the best intentions to become the advocates regarding this subject, but they may not have the education or resources to become this voice. It is recommended that if this type of advocacy is decided upon, that the organizations seek out help from larger organizations such as the Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation to come into the area and educate the people on how to make their voices heard on a state and national level. And if organizations like IAAF does not have this type of offerings, it could be recommended that IAAF undertake this type of education to communities, specifically to places that are not Chicago, where this type of information may not be readily available or easily accessed.

There is federal, state, and local grants dedicated to arts education. At the federal level, competitive grants are available through the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). According to their website, the NEA is "an independent agency of the federal government. To date, the NEA has awarded more than \$4 billion to support artistic excellence, creativity, and innovation for the benefit of individuals and communities. The NEA extends its work through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector" (www.nea.gov). There are also state organizations that provide funds for arts education, including the Illinois Arts Council. In its own words, their mission is dedicated to "Building a strong, creative, and connected Illinois through the engagement of all Illinoisans in the pursuit of, participation in, and enjoyment of the arts" (Illinois, 2012). There are even local organizations that offer arts grants such as Carbondale Community Arts (Carbondale Community Arts, 2012). These grant opportunities are available to public schools. The available money

could possibly counteract the budget constraints when it comes to offering adequate arts education.

Certainly, not all communities have organizations solely dedicated to the arts. The Southern Illinois University Carbondale's University Museum is a good example of an institution that has many functions, but still finds time, staff and funds to help public schools access arts education. Every year, for the past 26 years, the museum has hosted an arts festival that invites K-5 students from schools located in the bottom third of Illinois to participate in a daylong immersion into the arts. This program allows southern Illinois children, who may otherwise have little access to the arts, to participate in many art activities. It is important to remember that even a day of art education is better than none at all.

A different approach to bringing arts education back into public schools is requiring the teachers of the other subjects, such as math, science, and history, to incorporate and transform their curriculum by bringing in arts education. Because art is in everything that we do, it is important that children and adults understand how art is involved in other areas of study. It could be as simple as explaining why certain colors are used in a graph or as complex as adding art history into history courses. The teachers would need to start teaching the students about Stravinsky and Picasso, on top of their education of the World Wars. These additions would make a world of difference in the way children experience art in their lives. It is important for children and adults to understand that art is more than just painting and singing. There are, of course, many limitations to these recommendations. It might well be difficult to require teachers in other disciplines to teach art within their own, but some cross-disciplinary thinking might benefit all.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Arts education is more than just finger paints and construction paper. It is more than recorders and playtime. It is a responsibility of citizenship. Every person in America has the right to a proper education that includes arts education to prepare him or her for a well-rounded and successful future.

It is a necessary responsibility of Americans to become advocates of education.

The decline of arts education is recognized all over the country. The faculty and administration of schools in Illinois have statistically noted that there is a great decline of this type of education. They have also noted the strong importance of the subject to children's well-rounded education. The implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act has inadvertently caused many of the problems surrounding arts education. With the need of higher test scores on standardized tests given to all children in America's public, subjects in art have been ignored in preparing the children for these tests. The most common of excuses why arts education is dwindling is because of diminishing school budgets and teacher's time.

Policy change in the way art is defined on a national level is an important step in eradicating this trend in education. To do this, it is necessary for the U.S. government to create policy that will aid schools in providing the necessary curriculum to our nation's children. While the slow wheels of the government churn away at possible revisions of the NCLB to better define the arts, it is necessary for local activism to become more involved in community programs. Communities need to learn that there is power in numbers and an organized voice. Their involvement in and with organizations such as the Anna Arts Center, Carbondale Community Arts and the Illinois Arts Alliance could be matched by like-minded people who can create a

stronger force to lobby schools and local, state, and federal government. They need to push for what is right for their children. Community arts centers have a great resource; they are a meeting place for all and can provide services that are otherwise unavailable to the public. The community and these arts centers can work together to become the children's voice. The limitation to this is that not all communities have arts organizations near their geographic location. But, organizations such as Carbondale Community Arts does recognize this type of limitation and attempts to seek these areas out and offer their assistance the best way they can.

The communities that do not have the resource of community arts centers or programs, they can also push to have the curriculum changed in other subjects to incorporate art in subjects that are testable, such as teaching art history in history courses or teaching the components of lines and perspectives in mathematic courses. No matter what outlet a community uses to incorporate the ever-dwindling subject of art back into the lives of their children, it is important to maintain a respect for the arts and to prove it's importance in the core curriculum in education. When the respect for the arts is strong, arts education will become an integral part of our school's curriculum once again.

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VITA

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THE IMPORTANCE OF ARTS EDUCATION AND NOT LEAVING A CHILD BEHIND

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