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### Education for the Whole Child: A Place for Art Education?

With so much emphasis today in education on academics and high stakes testing on the "core subjects" some schools have neglected to educate the whole child by squeezing the arts out of the curriculum (Ebner, 2006, 26). Elliot Eisner says, "To neglect the contribution of the arts in education, either through inadequate time, resources, or poorly trained teachers is to deny children access to one of the most stunning aspects of their culture and one of the most potent means for developing their minds" (Eisner as in D'Agrosa, 2004). Can the arts have a place in education and be what is needed to educate the whole child? What does it mean to educate the "whole child" and what have we been leaving out of education? How do the arts fit in to the picture of educating the whole child? What would the benefits be to future generations if the whole child is educated through the arts?

I. In order to educate the whole child the U.S. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's website for "The Whole Child Education" acknowledges five areas beyond shelter, food, water, and oxygen that are needed before children can reach their full potential. Emphasis is placed on the student being healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged and once these needs are met, the students have the potential to learn, dream, and achieve (The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2009).

As schools set their focus on test scores an article reporting on the ASCD Commission on the Whole Child states "the definition of a successful student has to change from one whose achievement is measured solely on the basis of test scores to one who is healthy, emotionally and physically inspired, engaged in the arts, and prepared for employment in a global economy" (Honawar, 2007). Judy Seltz, the deputy executive director of the Alexandria, Virginia-based ASCD, affirms, "We need to rethink what education of the whole child means and make sure every student has access to a rich and challenging curriculum that pays attention to other aspects" (Honawar, 2007).

In the article, "Back to Whole" by Elliot Eisner, an inside view of what it looks like to educate the whole child is given. When educators focus on the whole child it would mean not only putting significance on academics, but also placing importance on the emotional, social, and physical aspects as well (Eisner, 2005, 18). To care for the whole child it would first mean that educators "try to recognize the distinctive talents that individual children possess and create an environment that actualizes those potentialities" (Eisner, 2005, 18). As the English philosopher and poet Sir Herbert Read once said, "Two principles can guide education: helping children become who they are and helping children become who they are not" (Eisner, 2005, 18). As those in education strive to educate the whole child they must help children discover their talents and potential.

Eisner goes on to say, "Second, teachers need to take into consideration the various ways in which students respond to what teachers plan. The aim is not simply to focus on the narrowly cognitive, but to see how students respond emotionally, imaginatively, and socially to the plans that they and their teacher formulate" (Eisner, 2005, 18). Together, the students and teachers should discover individual strengths and intelligences and ways they learn best.

Eisner also believes that the way growth in students is measured is an important aspect of educating the whole child when he states his next point: "Third, the assessment should try to provide a more complete picture of the developing child. We need to be concerned about more than the measurable. Not everything that matters is measurable, and not everything that is measurable matters. We need forms of assessment that help us better understand how to nourish the children we teach" (Eisner, 2005, 18). The high stakes tests at the year give only a small snapshot of the growth of a child academically and leave out social and emotional growth altogether.

Eisner's last point focusing on the priorities: "Fourth, the social and emotional life of the child needs to be as much a priority as measured academic achievement – perhaps an even greater priority. No test score is an adequate indicator of quality education. In fact, an increase in test scores can signal a decrease in the quality of education. It depends on the price paid for the increase" (Eisner, 2005, 18). One of the costs of more emphasis on the test

scores is often the cutting of the arts and other resources that help develop the whole child (Eisner, 2005, 18).

As students enter schools, they are not divided into separate compartments, "all parts are interconnected" (Eisner, 2005, 18). As Eisner insists in his article, "We need to recognize those connections when we teach, when we design educational environments, when we provide incentives, and when we grade students" (Eisner, 2005, 18). So many aspects go into educating the whole child, the needs of a student and focusing not only on academics, but also incorporating the social, emotional, and physical aspects into education as well, so that the whole child is woven together to become a more overall well rounded student.

II. The arts just might be the medium needed to form the connection of the whole child in education. Ester D'Agrosa is right on target as she asserts, "Arts education is the core of teaching the whole child and the value of teaching the whole child has been established, therefore, the arts affirm that all learning is connected, thus teaching the whole child" (D'Agrosa, 2004). In the article "Beyond the Three Rs: Student Achievement Through the Arts," the author speaks about the views of Ramon Cortines, who has worked his way through education from teacher to the Chancellor of the Board of Education for New York City. "Cortines credits arts education as a key ingredient in student achievement today" and describes "The Arts" as the "Fourth R" (Beyond the Three Rs, 1995). Cortines discusses how the arts have the inherent quality of

being “hands-on” and “challenge students to move from the concrete to the abstract” (Beyond the three Rs, 1995). In his article, “Arts Education and The Whole Child,” Hal Nelson affirms, “I believe it is important to provide multiple pathways to success in our schools” (Nelson, 2009, 16). The arts do just that. As Cortines points out, “they appeal to a broad range of learners and are seen by many as key to connecting what children learn in one subject with what they discover in another and they provide this as no other subject can” (Beyond the three Rs, 1995, 3).

Cortines gives an example of the connections that are made through the arts when he visited a middle school and saw what was going on in the classrooms. “Students were involved in the wonderful integrated theme unit that sprung from the art of Joseph Stella, centered on the Brooklyn Bridge. I never saw so much math, science, physics, history, reading, writing, listening, speaking, researching, comparing, contrasting, predicting, and presenting going on in a classroom, all through the prism of the arts” (Beyond the three Rs, 1995, 3). Madeleine Kunin, the former Vermont Governor and Deputy Secretary of Education sees successful schools where arts are part of the core curriculum and the achievement of students is evident through “power of the arts” (Beyond the Three Rs, 1995, 3).

In her article, “Arts Education: Teaching the Whole Child,” past president of the Iowa Alliance for Art Education, Esther D’Agrosa speaks about arts education reaching the whole child through the active learning that is involved

in practicing and improving what students learn from their instructors (D'Agrosa, 2004). She also speaks about the arts giving students a way to problem solve and think for themselves. "Once a student has acquired a specific artistic skill, he/she can begin to explore changes and students grasp quickly that in the arts there are multiple solutions to the same problem" (D'Agrosa, 2004).

The arts can be the spring board and motivator that lead educators and students into a variety of subject matter and connections. In Donovan Walling's article, "Art and Ideas Across the Curriculum," he proclaims, "Through the centuries, connections between art and ideas have been ever present" (Walling, 2006, 18). Administrator and advocate for the arts in education, Avira Ebner, also talks about integrating art across the curriculum in her article "Making Connections through Visual Arts:" "A painting could be a starting point for an intense discussion on a historical issue or literary theme" (Ebner, 2006, 26). She gives several other examples of how schools can use the visual arts to develop the whole child. One example is in the way student learning is measured: "Offer alternative assessments in lieu of typical tests, such as creating an illustrated photo-journal of a historical period" (Ebner, 2006, 26). Another suggestion is for making connections in the science lab: "Incorporate drawing techniques into science lab work, including sketching what students actually see through the microscope (not what they think they see)" (Ebner, 2006, 26).

Similar to the example Cortines saw in the middle school, and Ebner's suggestions for art connections in the classroom, D'Agrosa offers another

illustration of how the arts can be used tie everything together. D'Agrosa proposes that by "studying the Picasso painting, *Guernica*, students and instructors may begin a dialogue about war and its effects while simultaneously students read and discuss the Gunther Grasse novel, *The Tin Drum*, and his recent revelation about being part of the Third Reich, while choral students perform Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* and the theatre department performs *Antigone*. Students may create their own war paintings, music and theatre all which could add depth to a debate about the current wars and conflicts in the Middle East" (D'Agrosa, 2004).

By striving to educate the whole child the arts do have a place in education. Cortines explains "I would guess that everyone has seen the life of at least one child changed by the power of a brush stroke, the discipline of a dance step, the expressive opportunities of music, and the searing courage and vitality of the theater. We know that to live full lives, all children, indeed all people, need opportunities to experience, appreciate, create, and reflect upon art" (Beyond the Three Rs, 1995, 3). Educating the whole child does not happen by just squeezing the arts into the extra time or left overtime of the day, but can occur by letting the arts become a central focal point in which all other learning grows. An ASCD report states that the "academic achievement cannot happen without significant emphasis on student engagement, personalized learning, and skilled and caring teachers" (Honawar, 2007). The arts provide that challenge and personalized learning that will create the academic

success. This cannot happen without the support of schools and communities working together to insure that each child is challenged in their own way in an environment that is supportive (Honawar, 2007). It will also take the support of the principals who can, as Hal Nelson recommends, "make the arts core by recognizing their tremendous potential as centerpieces in educating the whole child" (Nelson, 2009, 17).

III. The benefits and rewards to educating the whole child through the arts are exponential. As Eisner states, "the prime value of the arts in education lies...in the unique contribution it makes to the individual's experience with and understanding of the world" (Gibson 2003, 112). In Robyn Gibson's article, "Learning to be an Art Educator," she not only states, "Art should be the basis of education," but also gives reasons for the "significant benefits art makes to children's overall development" (Gibson, 2003, 112). Gibson asserts that children benefit, "Not just in terms of creativity and individual expression but also less apparent gains such as critical thinking, creative problem-solving and cross-cultural communication" (Gibson, 2003, 112). She continues that "In art children learn ways of experiencing, developing, representing and understanding ideas, emotions, values and cultural beliefs and learn to take risks, be imaginative, explore alternative solutions, engage in art criticism, develop, practice and refine techniques, share opinions and challenge definitions of art" (Gibson, 2003, 112). She believes that much of what students learn in art can only be learned through art (Gibson, 2003, 112).



D'Agrosa also gives examples of the skills students learn through an arts education. She believes that an arts education is essential for students from Pre-Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade because of the "development of creativity, innovation, risk taking, critical thinking, problem solving, and imagination" (D'Agrosa, 2004). She notes that students must learn to make decisions in their artwork on their own and therefore become "self-directed," "self-reliant" and improve their "self-discipline" (D'Agrosa, 2004). She goes on to point out that students learn to problem-solve and work as teams through art projects and productions as well as look for multiple solutions through the arts (D'Agrosa, 2004). In her article, she shares the data from Shirley Brice Heath from Stanford University, who is not a researcher for the arts, but surprisingly found some interesting results when researching all kinds of after school programs. She found that, "the arts students dramatically outperformed their non-arts connected peers in significant ways" (Cameron as in D'Agrosa, 2004). Heath observed students from a variety of backgrounds and social classes and found that, "the arts students are four times more likely to win academic awards, four times as likely to participate in math and science fairs and show a significant reduction in these areas without art experiences" (Cameron as in D'Agrosa, 2004). Her research was backed up by studies done at Harvard University on students learning about Shakespeare where they found, "work that promotes greater complexity in thinking, greater verbal acuity, tolerance of ambiguity, interpretive

skills and increased sense of self-discipline and self-esteem (Cameron as in D'Agrosa, 2004).

In Dick Downing's article, "Saving a Place for the Arts?," he also lists some of the many benefits of an arts education in addition to the benefits already mentioned, such as: "Enhancing links with the community through performances or art displays, improving students' behavior and motivation encouraging better attendance, inspiring students learning in other subjects, as well as boosting students' self-esteem by fostering a sense of achievement" (Downing, 2003, 29). Former Vermont Governor, Kunin also speaks out about what the arts provide, "The arts have been an inseparable part of the human journey. They provide us with pleasure, spark our creativity, and frame reality in fresh perspectives...and we believe knowing and practicing them is fundamental to the healthy development of our children's minds and spirits" (Beyond the Three Rs, 1995, 3).

Nelson speaks about the emotional benefits to an arts education in his article when he talks about the "emotional well-being that comes from feeling empowered when students know that they have access to things that matter most to them and they feel empowered when their talents are accommodated and when they feel recognized as being just as capable as their peers" (Nelson, 2009, 17). He believes that the arts should be a basic part of the curriculum because of the endless opportunities that are offered to a wide variety of students (Nelson, 2009, 17).

Not only do the arts help students achieve more while in school, they also benefit students once they are out of school by giving them an edge over others seeking jobs in the workforce. The author of "Beyond the Three Rs" makes a great point that shows the importance of the arts beyond the classroom as he confirms, "One need only look to the increased demand by business and government leaders for a more creative work force, one that can think originally, operate collectively, and is better trained to solve complex problems" (Beyond the Three Rs, 1995, 3). As Jean Piaget so wisely states, "The principle goal of education in the schools should be creating men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done" (Eisner, 2005, 16). The people doing the hiring today are not looking for the same old thing. They want creative and unique individuals who can think for themselves. D'Agrosa mentions Thomas Friedman's book *The World is Flat* where he declares "flexibility, adaptability, and creativity are essential qualities for workforce success and that corporate executives are hiring arts consultants to train their employees to become imaginative problem solvers and collaborative creative thinkers (Friedman as in D'Agrosa, 2004). With an arts education and by focusing on the whole child, students are equipped with the tools they need to be successful today and in their future.

"The visual arts are not the domain of the privileged or talented, but belong to everyone," as stated by Smutny (Smutny as in Nelson, 2009, 17). The arts are essential to educating the whole child and the benefits of an arts

education are endless. Nelson states in his article that he is “a strong advocate of the arts in educating the whole child, the benefits with regard to emotional well-being are most important to me” (Nelson, 2009, 17). It is time in education to focus not just on the test scores, but to focus on all aspects of the child; not just on the academics, but on the social, emotional and physical qualities of the child as well. If the centerpiece of education is on the arts, the achievement will spread far beyond the limits of a test. An ASCD report defends, “when you educate the whole child, you can count on academic growth as well, even if that’s not the primary intent” (Honowar, 2007).

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