

Parent & Community Network News

July 2010



*Creativity is allowing yourself to
make mistakes. Art is knowing
which ones to keep.*
~Scott Adams



Focus on The Arts

Editor's Notes

As a child, I did not have much exposure to the arts. We had a few record albums--those now collectable vinyls. I had some minor exposure to music and art in school, but nothing of significance. I unsuccessfully attempted to play the clarinet in 6th grade and was asked not to sing aloud in the church choir while in high school. But I did *enjoy* music, theatre, and movies. I didn't visit an art museum until after I was out of high school.

For all that I lacked growing up, as a parent (now grandparent) and as an educator, I have encouraged children to participate in the arts as a natural part of growing up. I have seen the arts impact children positively so many times that I can't count them.

It doesn't seem to matter whether it is music, visual art, theatre, dance or computer graphics. The chil-

dren learn perseverance, are more accepted for their gifts, take risks, express themselves in a safe environment and realize that hard work leads to success.

The included article in the issue is on the value of the arts in education. Please take the time to read it and ponder all the possibilities for the children you love. Then ponder the effects of *not* having exposure to the arts.

If it has not already happened in your schools, the time may soon be here when a proposal will be made to cut band or elementary art classes. Arm yourself with information and put on your advocacy hat. Then head to the next school board meeting to keep arts in our schools.

Take time to expose your child to something artsy: a concert, art class, stage play or

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Capturing the Moment

(Editor's note: This column is for short articles on experiences you have had with your children. Unfortunately I did not receive any this month. To keep this section from being blank next month (or from hearing my stories) please send me a short piece about when you were Capturing the Moment. I am re-running last month's submission.)

Recently, my son and I attended a workshop on watersheds and how to build a rain barrel. My son has been interested in the environment since he was quite young. As many kids like him, he is quite skilled at multi-tasking. Although he took in most of the information about how to build a rain barrel, he spent most of the time watching the birds which were flying around right outside the open door. As we left the workshop, he stopped to stalk a swallow perched on a bluebird box, so that he could get some great photos of it. This led to a discussion with a couple other workshop attendees, who also happened to be serious birders. They admired my son's photography skills with the swallow. As we talked, they realized that he is quite the amateur birder and we ended up birding with them for about an hour.

During that hour, my son learned more about birds than he learned about science topics all year in school. He also had the opportunity to share his enthusiasm for a subject and his knowledge with people who were just as enthused as he was. This is not something which routinely happens at school, where his friends complain of his "obsession" with birds and his teachers ask him to

show his math work on his paper, instead of his intricate drawings of everything ornithological. He enthusiastically shared his knowledge of birds and received some wonderful mentoring in that hour which passed too quickly. Equally as important, his love of birds had the right audience and was well-received. He was, in educational terms, spending time with "intellectual peers."

Opportunities are where you find them. Parents can do a lot towards fostering these opportunities, which can be more valuable learning experiences than the most highly-touted summer camps for gifted kids. A walk in the woods becomes a lesson about insect taxonomy. A hike in the mountains becomes a lesson in angle of ascent or how to read topographical maps. A trip to learn how to build a rain barrel becomes moments of sheer joy as my child is enraptured by the diving, spinning nighthawks grabbing insects on the wing, right above his head on a clear spring evening; surrounded by people who just like him are not even bothering to wave the insects away from their faces as they gaze skyward and smile.

Gigi Gerben, MS-Ed. is an educator and writer who spends time gleefully grabbing the opportunities which abound in Western PA.

National Parenting Gifted Children Week

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) for the third time is celebrating parenting gifted children week, July 18-24. For more information and ways you

can make an impact in your community visit:

http://sengifted.org/national_parenting_gifted_week.pdf

The Value of an Arts Education

(Originally published in Parenting for High Potential, June 1998. It is available in Mile Marker #3 of NAGC's Mile Marker Series.)

The 21st century is soon upon us, bringing with it many social changes. Education is changing as well, undergoing reform in order to prepare children to lead productive lives in the new millennium. As we struggle to renovate our aging schoolhouses, it becomes increasingly clear that the arts are basic to a complete education. Far from being merely an adornment, arts education is, in fact, an essential part of the structure.

In classrooms across the nation, experience has repeatedly demonstrated that when arts are taught in a comprehensive program, they are also a medium for developing cognitive skills that carryover into other areas. These include the abilities to see clearly, analyze, reflect, make judgments, and link information from diverse sources to generate new ideas — in other words, to think holistically. These are the same qualities embodied in the broader goals of educational reform, and they are exactly the attributes that children will need to succeed in the 21st century.

Literacy in the Arts Strengthens Other Subjects

Literacy in the arts can open doorways to understanding

other subjects, not only because of the thinking skills they engender, but because of the metaphors they can provide as links to other areas of learning. Educators have been quick to recognize this advantage. Consequently, the arts are becoming a valuable curricular focal point or core, particularly in classrooms where a range of subject matters and disciplines commonly competes for attention and resources. One way to harness this competition to more productive ends is through inter- or cross-disciplinary learning. This approach uses the knowledge and methods of several disciplines in combination to explore a central theme, object, or issue as a framework for building student competence.

In this kind of educational setting, the special language of the arts can act as a kind of unifying force. In an integrated history-driven curriculum, for example, art images bring a particular era to life. The paintings of Romare Bearden or a Faith Ringgold quilt, together with jazz and blues of the period, make vivid a period of African American social history to young students. In mathematics, a Calder mobile may provide a revealing visual analogy for algebraic equations, opening the door to comprehension and learning for millions who are aided by visual interpretations of information.

At the same time, this kind of education fosters the visual literacy required for success in the information age. Popular culture and the flood of media images it has generated occupy a whole new universe of nonverbal forms of communication. Students must learn to interpret images, symbols, and icons in order to understand the subtexts and implicit messages, know the excellent from the inferior, and create effective images and messages of their own. The study of the arts, through a quality arts education program, provides

an indispensable base for solid communication skills.

Skills Developed Through Arts Education

As we reform our schools to meet the challenges of the information age, we cannot afford to ignore the arts. We cannot afford to give privilege to the traditional (languagebased) approach to learning over the visual — particularly when it is the visual that may make learning more accessible. In vital areas — workplace preparations, interdisciplinary studies, cross-cultural learning, technology skills and understanding, and assessment — comprehensive arts programs are proving that they can provide a strong footing for the kind of education that will prepare our children to reach their full potential in the rapidly changing times ahead. Following are some specific skills that business values, success in the future requires, and an arts education builds and strengthens.

1. An education in the arts encourages high achievement. Arts instruction pushes students to perform — and to produce — by offering models of excellence and by clearly defining the paths for achieving it. Schools that incorporate music, art, dance, drama, and creative writing into their curricula discover that they can make a significant impact on overall school success. Students who take arts courses in high school, for example, outperform students who do not on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), according to the College Entrance Examination Board. In 1995, SAT scores for students who studied the arts for four years scored 59 points higher on the verbal portion and 44 points higher on the mathematics portion than students with no arts coursework.

2. Study of the arts encourages a suppleness of mind, a tolerance for ambiguity, a taste for nuance, and the ability to make

trade-offs among alternative courses of action. The truth that there are many ways of seeing the world and interpreting it is fundamental to an education in the arts.

The vision of van Gogh is not the vision of Jasper Johns. Young people who create a dance to express the “meaning of independence” learn that there is no “right” way to present that idea, only movements that are faithful to the idea itself. Says former ARCO president and CEO William F. Kieschnick, “those at home with the ambiguities of art forms’ nuances are far more likely to persist in the quest to resolve ambiguity in the practical world.” Knowing how to shift intellectual gears beats rigid thinking every time.

3. Study of the arts helps students to think and work across traditional disciplines. They learn both to integrate knowledge and to “think outside the boxes.” With some exceptions, the tendency in American public education is to pay scant attention to the integration of learning. Today’s school curricula still mirror the 19th-century German-university system of academic “disciplines.” Forty-five minute class periods are parceled out to English, physics, and civics with the result that students seldom see their studies as a whole. They are not taught how to breach subject-area lines to enhance learning in more than one discipline, or how to create contexts for new knowledge that do not necessarily fit into the traditional disciplinary boxes.

Arts education affords excellent opportunities for breaking down such barriers. At New Dorp High School on Staten Island, for example, the art history and aesthetic components of required arts classes tie into the cultures explored in the school’s Global Studies curriculum. Art teachers construct their own curriculum units, which use economic, historical, geographic, and political factors as they

Dates to Remember:

Webinars on
Wednesdays
(WOW)

Next WOW Series
launches Wednesday,
August 18

More info coming soon

January 2010-June 2010
WOW sessions can be
found on the NAGC Live
Learning Center

November 11-14
NAGC Convention
Atlanta, GA

Parent Day is
Saturday, November 13

Register at www.nagc.org

Painting is poetry
that is seen rather
than felt, and poetry
is painting that is
felt rather than seen.

~Leonardo da Vinci

relate to the art of each culture, country, and continent.

Similarly, leading-edge companies, which now spend millions annually to spark imagination throughout their organizations, find that the most creative ideas come from people who are not bound by conventional modes of thinking. Says A. Thomas Young, former executive vice-president of Lockheed Martin, “many great ideas come from people poking around unfamiliar disciplines — often the arts — who apply what they find to their own field.” Knute Rockne, he points out, patterned backfield formations for Notre Dame’s famed “Four Horsemen” after watching a dance performance, and military designers borrowed Picasso’s cubist art to create more effective camouflage patterns.

4. An education in the arts teaches students how to work cooperatively and how to work out conflicting points of view. Both skills are critical in the workplace. Playing in a school orchestra, singing in a choir, and putting on a dramatic production are all cooperative activities; they require and create well-developed communication and interpersonal skills.

5. An education in the arts builds an understanding of diversity and the multicultural dimensions of our world. Every art object (play, composition, painting, sculpture, dance, poem) invites the student who encounters it to see the world from someone else’s vantage point. All the arts naturally draw on other cultures — their tales, songs, histories, myths, and values — to create meanings. Sometime before 2050 the United States will become a “majority-minority” nation. [The total combined population of all minority of groups will exceed the majority population]. Those demographics make these capabilities crucial to education and the future of our children. An arts education can lay the foundation for a deeper

understanding of the global marketplace as well.

6. An arts education insists on the value of content, which helps students understand “quality” as a key value. Real arts education goes well beyond mere “appreciation” for the arts. It also includes performance, creating products, and the mastery of the knowledge, skills, and persistence required to do both. The idea of quality also enters arts education as students strive to make their next work better than the last.

Arts-education students also experience the strong connection between personal (or group) effort and quality of result. They also come to understand and value what makes a work of art “good” and what it means to work to a standard. That kind of education is not just education about art, it is education about life.

Not incidentally, this engagement with content, quality, and standards is why “exposure programs” (e.g., periodic trips to the art museum or visits by a string quartet from the local symphony) are insufficient compared to a basic education in the arts. The arts are not a kind of cultural vaccine a student can take with a simple injection. Real engagement with content in the arts takes hard work — practice, study, and repeated assessment — just as learning English composition and French take hard work. Without rigor, students never get to quality;





may give them quick access to working tools, the work is hard. When they find out how difficult it is, some naturally fall by the wayside. But it turns others around. Animation arts have introduced them to why they need a broad and content-rich education.” Of course, no one can predict what the future will hold. Obviously the 21st century will present great challenges as well as dazzling opportunities for education. It is reassuring to reflect that arts education is finally taking its rightful place in classrooms and in the lives of students and teachers. The study of the arts, with their potential to communicate ideas, emotions, and values, will continue to be the key to understanding the world’s cultures and civilizations’ legacies. And the arts will always be the lens that enables us to see a rapidly evolving world with a clear and critical eye.

This article has been compiled from excerpts from the Getty Education Institute for the Arts’ publications “Arts Education for Life and Work” and “Educating for the Workplace through the Arts.” “Arts Education for Life and Work” originally appeared in the November 1997 issue of Educational Leadership. “Educating for the Workplace through the Arts” originally appeared in the October 28, 1996, issue of BusinessWeek. The Getty Education Institute for the Arts is one of five institutes that, together with a museum and a grant program, make up the J. Paul Getty Trust. In the belief that the arts are fundamental to every child’s development, the Getty Education Institute promotes innovation and excellence in arts education and provides leadership to establish the essential role of arts education in improving the nation’s schools. To receive additional information about the Getty Education Institute or to subscribe to the Institute’s free newsletter ArtsEdNet Offline, write to: The Getty Education Institute for the Arts, 1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 600, Los Angeles, CA 90049-1683. Visit them at <http://www.artsednet.getty.edu>.

When words leave off,
music begins.
~Heinrich Heine

Parent Day in Atlanta

Saturday, November 13, 2010
Georgia World Congress Center,
Atlanta, GA

Held in conjunction with the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Annual Convention, and produced in conjunction with the Georgia Association for Gifted Children (GAGC), NAGC’s Parent Day is a one-day event that gives parents tools and networking opportunities to help you support your child’s optimal development and ensure their continued growth.

This all day event will include state and national experts in the gifted field. One of the highlights of the day will be lunch time small round table discussions that parents will get to have with experts. This is a special chance to hear from those great authors and speakers in the field that we so admire. Plus there will be many sessions to choose from on all kinds of topics relevant to parenting gifted children.

For more information:
<http://www.nagc.org/2010parentday.aspx>

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in an arts education, they get rigor. 7. An arts education contributes to technological competence. Technology has always been integral to the arts, from ancient times when sculptors in marble used metallurgy to hone their chisels to the studios of today, where metals are shaped using acetylene torches. Similarly, the dramatists of ancient Greek theater had a profound knowledge of acoustics, while their modern counterparts are masters of such technologies as electronic sound, lighting, film, and television. In all the arts disciplines, a wide variety of

technologies offer students ways to accomplish artistic, scholarly, production, and performance goals. New technologies also make it possible for students to try out a vast array of solutions to artistic problems. Well used, interactive media — which are a combination of artistic and technological resources — spark creative thinking skills, as any parent can testify whose 10-year-old has reprogrammed the VCR!

Used appropriately, technology extends the reach of the learner. Not only can interesting and innovative technologies attract students to the arts, the arts also attract students to technology and encourage technological competence. Employing computers to create media animations calls on the same competencies business needs to strengthen the workforce.

Sharon Morgan, executive director of the Oregon Coastal Council for the Arts, insists that arts-in-technology programs impart a special kind of academic discipline. She reports “the kids in our Animation Project find that while the software