

Some Starter Thoughts on Fine Arts for ALL

A Blue-Sky Paper about Becoming Fine Artists

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How often have we been inspired by keynote speakers such as Sir Ken Robinson or Elliott Eisner at conferences? On a macro level, we leave the ballrooms convinced of the value of the arts in education, yet when it comes to acting on these ideas, educators often face a ‘canyon’ of challenges.

On the one hand, we are convinced that the arts provide a powerful medium for expression and creativity; on the other hand, schools are more and more hand-cuffed to drivers that are focused on increasing standardized test scores. While Fine Arts should not be a placeholder for creativity on its own, it can open more parameters for expressing understandings, beyond traditional ways such as standardized testing and prose writing.

While many will argue that arts should be required experiences in schools because Music, Dance, Visual Arts and Dance are the contexts for creativity, I would argue that these subjects do not corner the creative market, nor should they. There has been increasing attention paid to the arts, particularly when some schools have embraced the inclusion of A in STEAM (Science – Technology –Engineering – ARTS – Mathematics). The idea that adding the A to STEM will solve the problem of lack of creativity in schools, is a grand assumption. Building a solid bank of creative skills and experience, must happen in all school subjects. Even though Fine Arts provides a powerful medium for expression, it cannot be the only medium for creative growth.

Sprinkling arts classes here and there in a curriculum just doesn’t cut it. While arts experiences, no doubt help students understand mediums of inquiry beyond words, we cannot short-change students from thinking creatively in all disciplines, integrated or not... The capacity to promote creativity and imagination at all levels of education is influenced by how much autonomy schools are granted by state, provincial, or national regulations (Smith, in press, 2019).

Fine Arts programs should offer multiple opportunities that include more traditional courses, such as Music, Visual Arts, Dramatic Arts, and Dance, but also new art forms such as digital and graphic arts, and arts, yet to be discovered.

Arts are part of all cultures, and not confined within the walls of schools. Cervený (2001) summarized a collaborative experience that happened during the *Summer Music and Art Institute for Teachers* in Cleveland, Ohio. Experts from Cleveland State University, Young Audiences of Cleveland, Cleveland Opera, the Cleveland Orchestra, and ICARE (the *Initiative for Cultural Arts in Education*), brought 200 teachers together to bring “art and culture back into the mainstream curriculum of the Cleveland Public Schools” Not only should the focus on arts be within schools, we can also look outside of school

settings, where many students can learn expert skills and understandings, particularly in the field of Dance and Music. School systems, however, rarely recognize such accomplishments in the form of credits, probably because they are not accessible to all students. At one time in Canada, students who had passed their eighth-grade Royal Conservatory Exam for piano, were granted an additional high school credit. Finding ways to tap into local arts talent would be a positive way to move forward.

As well as linking to community resources, schools should also provide valuable contexts for learning Fine Arts. As it stands, most students may experience the arts in several ways:

1. In elementary school Music and Visual Arts may be scheduled once or twice a week.
2. In many high schools, students usually choose one arts course, which tends to be mandatory in ninth grade. Most other arts classes (Music, Visual Arts, Drama and Dance) are considered electives in tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades.
3. Dance tends to be included as part of some Physical Education Programs.
4. There are some specialized arts schools that offer more concentrated arts coursework with significant increases in time dedicated to multiple arts classes.
5. The arts are often integrated in inquiry, project or problem-based learning activities, that are usually more common in elementary school settings.

The status of different arts classes can vary. The status of Music, for instance, has had increased attention as an art form, particularly when Grammy artists use the stage to promote Music education, and now provide awards for Music educators. Such a platform for shining a light on this art form increases its popularity. As well, research into links between musical capacity and math achievement, has also brought Music to the forefront. Some Music programs can be quite costly. In *How Much Does a Great School Cost?* I addressed funding considerations for Music education:

Many elementary schools feature choral Music, but some also include instrumental Music beginning as early as third grade. Recorder, guitar or drum programs are popular, and often the costs of instruments are subsidized by families renting from local music stores. Middle or high schools that feature access to full orchestral instruments can be costly, especially when schools need to maintain a full range of instruments such as base clarinets and French horns. Even if schools need to budget for renting instruments for their Music students, it might be more cost effective. Quality Music programs need stereo systems, access to music, sheet music and technology equipment for recording music generated by and performed by the students (Smith, in press, 2019).

Visual Arts programming in schools often depends on the quality of the artist teacher. While many visual artists have preferred mediums to work with, they are ultimately responsible for exposing students to many ways of artistic expression. Local museums and art studios can be incredible community resources for school programming. Progressive Visual Arts classes also teach about graphic and digital arts. Other media art forms such as photography, film, and television, are not very accessible for all students. Such courses may be offered as electives, but they seem slow to be part of

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mainstream education. Arts curricula can help equip students with the skills and understandings to create videos, films, and websites to convey ideas, solid skill sets required in many careers.

Some communities have access to local theatre talent. Dramatic Arts, or Theatre Arts programs are not as common in elementary schools, but when schools opt to support their own musicals, there can be enhanced attention dedicated to the Dramatic and Theatrical Arts.

Being exposed to the genre of playwrights should be more than a traditional nod and trudging through Shakespeare. Shorter scripts and plays can invite reading and interactive participation and the learning of what actions, beyond words, can add to a story (Smith, in press, 2019).

When I was a school leader of an arts school, our students were bused to local theatre productions, as well as worked with a highly talented teacher whose classes emulated being in the *Actor's Studio*. The opportunity to speak in the context of drama can be an incredibly authentic learning experience. Dramatic Arts also links with English Language Arts in terms of learning how to read and write scripts, it still has a fundamental base of skills that requires dedicated time for learning. English Language Arts (ELA) and Fine Arts fall together naturally for integrative project purposes, and “while they are often linked in project-based learning activities, there are fundamental aspects of each discipline that can benefit from concentrated study” (Smith, in press, 2019).

Schools that offer Dance programs give students a chance to express themselves through movement. The independence of Dance and Music also makes for powerful integrated study within the arts. “Dance can add much to a dramatic or musical production, live or in other media forms” (Smith, 2018, in press). In elementary Physical Education (PE) classrooms, the Dance portion of the curriculum tends to focus on folk, novelty and sometimes ballroom Dance. Depending on the teacher experience, some PE classes might also include jazz, square dancing or hip hop. Expressing understanding and making connections with ideas through Dance, can be a rich opportunity for learning beyond words, in focused Dance classrooms and, also within integrated project work.

Many researchers have grounded solid reasons for supporting arts education in schools. Eisner (2005) pointed out that the arts “develop dispositions and habits of mind that reveal to the individual a world he or she may not have noticed but that is there to be seen if only one knew how to look” (p. 12). In an increasingly global world, we need to cultivate learning contexts that help us see alternative perspectives. Greene (2001) noted that aesthetic education is “part of the human effort (so often forgotten today) to seek a greater coherence in the world” (p. 7). And Kindler (1987) suggested that “Aesthetic education, including students’ involvement in visual arts, music, drama, and dance activities, has been recognized as an important factor contributing to students’ development” (p. 52). So how can we coordinate time with opportunities for students to explore as many arts as possible? It can be helpful to see the possibilities of Fine Arts programming by viewing expectations within more mastery-based school reports. The following examples (Figures 1,2,3, & 4) of Fine Arts reports were

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designed for multi-grade classrooms to give students more time to achieve multiple skill sets and understandings.

Figure 1: Example of Music School Report (PK/JK – Eighth Grade)

Example of Music School Report (PK/JK – Eighth Grade)	
A – Exceptional; B – Excellent; NY – Yet to be mastered	
Kinder (JK/PK &-SK)	
Examine patterns in nature/outdoor songs	
Use rhythm to shape song and percussion sounds	
Primary (Grades 1 & 2)	
Display solfège with sound and hand symbols	
Explore music from various cultures and traditions	
Junior (Grades 3, 4 & 5)	
make music with Orff instruments as a part of an ensemble	
Use meter phrase, dynamics, and pitch to shape music	
Read and notate music (base and treble clef) and play simple tune on piano	
Middle School (Grades 6.7 & 8)	
distinguish different kinds of music	
Use phrase shaping, articulation and intonation to enhance music	
Play basic guitar music	

Figure 2: Example of Visual Arts School Report (PK/JK – Eighth Grade)

Example of Fine Arts School Report (PK/JK – Eighth Grade)	
A – Exceptional; B – Excellent; NY – Yet to be mastered	
PK/JK & SK	
Use drawings to share ideas	
Use of recycled materials for 3D art work	
Grades 1 & 2	
Understand the basics of the color wheel	
Examine Asian characters as art forms	
Compare art & architecture from museums around the world from local museums	
Grades 3,4 & 5	
Draw with detail and shading to show depth	
examine calligraphy, illuminated letters and cursive writing as art form	
use of focal point for drawing	
Explain and use complementary and tertiary colors	
Use of materials from nature to create masks and 3D art work	
Grades 6,7 & 8	
create carefully crafted water color paintings	
draw with shading to show contour, depth to demonstrate proportion and perspective	
develop 3D sculptures using clay with an emphasis on texture and patterns)	

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Figure 3: Example of Dramatic Arts School Report (PK/JK – Eighth Grade)

Example of Dramatic Arts School Report (PK/JK – Eighth Grade)	
A – Exceptional; B – Excellent; NY – Yet to be mastered	
Kinder (PK/JK & SK)	
Ask questions and respond with good volume with and without media	
Listen and respond to others in class talks and during role play	
Primary (Grade 1 & 2)	
During skits, look with an <i>interested body look</i> at person who is speaking	
During dramatic play, listen to words & interpret gestures to make predictions	
Junior (Grades 3,4 & 5)	
Form & ask hypothetical questions during drama improve	
Develop an audio text for highlighting character sketches using tableaux technique	
Videotape & present an original humorous skit or play	
Middle School (Grades 6,7 & 8)	
Develop and present an oral story (storytelling)	
Present sustained speech with confidence (campaign speech)	
Demonstrate mastery of formal debating skills by addressing pros and cons of an argument	

Figure 4: Example of Dance School Report (PK/JK – Eighth Grade)

Example of Dance School Report (PK/JK – Eighth Grade)	
A – Exceptional; B – Excellent; NY – Yet to be mastered	
Kinder (PK/JK & SK)	
Locomoting – moves in different directions, using different body parts	
Rotating - Rotate self in three planes	
Primary (Grade 1 & 2)	
Holding - Balances at low, medium, and high levels	
Springing – Jumps, leaps and hops for height and control	
Junior (Grades 3,4 & 5)	
Landing – Lands from height with safety and control	
Swinging – Swings body with accuracy and control	
Sending - Sends self or objects in space	
Middle School (Grade 6,7 & 8)	
Receiving - Use proper form when receiving and retaining objects	
Following – follows others and follows through on individual actions	
Evading - Moves in formations to avoid contact with others	

As much as having the arts on a weekly basis in elementary schools for an academic year seems like a good idea, it can often become a splintered experience, especially when schools organize around numbered day schedules (Day 1 to Day 7, Day 8...). It could be argued that students who experience the same art form every day for a semester, would be able to work more, like experts, picking up where they left off the day before. By featuring a daily arts class, students could switch from Music in

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one semester, to Visual Arts in the next, followed by a more integrated 'musical theatre and dance' option in the final semester. The competition for time in the school schedule has often made it difficult for students to explore multiple arts. The position that Music, for instance, must be practiced every day for the full school year, has also made it difficult for schools to offer a blend of arts experiences. Nevertheless, if schools can integrate more Music into other learning experiences, within inquiry-based course work or within extra-curricular times, it can be possible to build musical capacity and appreciation.

For Discussion

As the school principal of a PK to Grade 8 arts school in DC, I had a unique opportunity to work with a talented team of arts educators. In addition to partnering with guest arts experts from the *National Philharmonic*, the *Shakespeare Theatre Company* and the *Kirov Ballet*, we had an impressive group of in-house arts teachers, who contributed a great deal to the positive arts culture in the school. "What resonated for me was the quality of instruction and student performances that integrated powerful stories of inspiring role models" (Smith, in press, 2019). Based on my ongoing review of current educational research and my personal experience as an arts advocate, I was committed to including a daily 'Arts Hour', in my next DaVinci-inspired school in Virginia:

we organized Music and Visual Arts within an 'Arts Hour' each day...Deliberate attention to the arts was also part of each inquiry project for students in third through eighth grade. Students were required to demonstrate mastery of a specific media art (PowerPoint, iMovie and web design); they also presented their findings using Visual Arts, Music, or Drama. The arts, therefore, lived within each integrated project (Smith, 2019, in press).

Ideally, the arts would be taught by a specialist, someone who is passionate about their field, but often funds are not readily available to staff schools with Music, Visual Arts, Dramatic Arts, Dance or Graphic/Digital Arts experts. Teachers may place some of the arts on their weekly schedules, but may be less inclined to rigorously plan for, and in some cases, follow through on the arts time. Based on feedback from non-expert arts pre-service teachers, Lemon & Garvis (2013) noted that we may need to rethink "the role of arts education within teacher education programs" (p. 7). They added: "Valuing what an arts educator has to do revealed some tension points in relation to roles of the arts in primary schools, timetabling of the arts in primary school, and devotion of time to arts" (Lemon & Garvis, 2013, p. 6). Building a positive culture that supports the arts begins with the establishment of a cycle, whereby all students have a healthy serving of all the arts in school, so that those who enter teacher education, and eventually the profession, can be confident teachers of the arts, as specialists or within integrated study. They in turn would support students in a constructive cycle furthering the possibilities of arts education.

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