

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 454 102

SO 032 050

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TITLE Schooling through the Arts.
INSTITUTION Australian Inst. of Art Education, Melbourne.
PUB DATE 1999-09-00
NOTE 5p.; Paper presented at the Annual World Congress of the International Society for Education through Art (InSEA) (30th, Brisbane, Australia, September 21-26, 1999). This paper has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australian Council for the Arts, its art funding and advisory body.

AVAILABLE FROM Australian Institute of Art Education, C/Suite 125, 283 Glenhuntley Road, Eisternwick, VIC 3185, Australia.

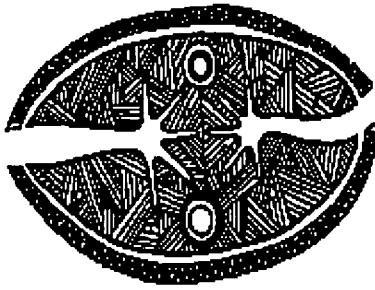
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Art Education; Citizenship Responsibility; Critical Thinking; *Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Futures (of Society); Lifelong Learning; Problem Solving; *Student Needs

IDENTIFIERS *Arts Curriculum; *Australia (South Australia); Self Direction

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to answer two questions: What are the trends in schooling today? and How can the arts help translate these trends into practice? It is said that the successful curriculum of the future will be one that helps students collaboratively perceive, analyze, interpret, and discover a whole new range of meanings. The paper focuses on curriculum, identifying the intellectual tools that will be required in the future: problem solving, critical thinking, motivation for lifelong learning, civic responsibility, and self direction. The paper describes each tool. It then discusses the arts curriculum, citing the worldwide trend to include strands or organizers, which address creating, making, and presenting; arts criticism and aesthetics; and past and present contexts. The paper concludes with some relevant quotes concerning the arts from Garth Boomer of South Australia, cited as an "extraordinarily visionary educational leader." (BT)



“Schooling Through the Arts”

by

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Proceedings from the InSEA 30th World Congress “Cultures and Transitions”

**21-26 September 1999
Brisbane Australia**

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Schooling through The Arts

This paper was presented by Philomena Stapleton at the InSEA World Congress in Brisbane on September 22nd 1999.

I hope this paper will answer the questions 'What are the trends in schooling today?' and 'How can The Arts help translate these trends into practice?'

I would like in the first instance to focus on curriculum. It is said that the successful curriculum of the future will be one that helps students collaboratively perceive, analyse, interpret and discover a whole new range of meanings. It will prepare students for a rapidly changing world which will be crying out for people to redefine themselves, in a world which will require them to retrain in their work perhaps many, many times as new technologies are developed.

We are preparing children for work that is not only not yet invented, it's not even imagined. (President Clinton)

We do not know what information will be crucial for the future so it makes sense to concentrate on the intellectual tools or they could be called dispositions that we KNOW will be required. These are:

**PROBLEM SOLVING
CRITICAL THINKING**

MOTIVATION FOR LIFE LONG LEARNING

SELF DIRECTION

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

Problem Solving

Every arts task is a problem solving activity. When we require students to use their own ideas to create and make a work of art we are placing them in a problem solving situation. We require them to think creatively. It is wonderful to walk into a school and see evidence of students' ideas expressed visually everywhere. I am immediately impressed. I have walked into schools where there is NO such evidence. Giving students opportunities to solve problems creatively is indeed empowering them for the future.

Critical Thinking

A principle of good education is to foster people's capacity for doing new things not simply repeating what other generations have done.

Another major goal is to form minds which can be critical, can verify and not accept everything they are offered.

Critical thinking requires students to go beyond basic thinking and operate at a more complex level. It involves skills and abilities to formulate ideas, analyse thoughts, reason, judge ideas and information.

The strand organiser of our arts curriculum 'arts criticism and aesthetics' or 'arts response' as it may now be called and which may have other titles in the curricula of other states and countries, directs students to use the higher level thinking skills to interpret, analyse, describe and evaluate art works.

Students need solid content to think about - something that is visual and is vital is most appropriate. The Arts bring content and skills together in ways that stimulate learning and help students to make sense of their world.

Reflection

The Arts have a power beyond aesthetics. They can help us to reflect on our environment and our future. The Arts provide spatial, kinaesthetic and aesthetic skills and understandings that are the foundation of what it means to be an educated person. For all aspects of schooling reflection should play a major role. As well as discussion and debate it could be said that The Arts stimulate reflection. The Arts have power beyond aesthetics. They can inspire us to

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reflect on our environment, our future and our attitudes. Think of the impact protest works have had on us as human beings in this society.

Motivation for Life Long Learning

Students love The Arts. Other curriculum areas can be mutually reinforced through The Arts and this linkage can stimulate life long learning. I have seen a school transformed through The Arts. A complex school where more than 50% of students lived in poverty and where 46% of the students were second phase English learners, altered dramatically when rigorous, very serious arts programs were introduced. Students became enthusiastic about their learning. The time out room where students who have committed relatively serious misdemeanours are sent from the classroom and which was frequently crowded was rarely used. Yard behaviour improved. Graffiti disappeared. The media actually ran stories on this remarkable transformation.

Children who are given the opportunity for fresh, novel, stimulating experiences have a powerful incentive for learning.

(New Designs for Teaching and Learning)

Using The Arts as methodologies without losing the rigour of the Arts forms causes learning to be exciting. Other learning areas can be mutually reinforced through The Arts. It is so easy to link The Arts with other curriculum areas. And methodologies such as multiple intelligences uses intelligences such as bodily/kinaesthetic, visual/spatial, interpersonal and rhythmic/music which are certainly arts based, to enhance learning in all curriculum areas.

Self Direction

The fact that self-confidence and self-esteem are enhanced through The Arts has been well documented. Self-direction requires confidence and a sense of well being and optimism. The Arts involves using the imagination to make decisions and risk taking is involved. It has been said the most effective learning takes place when we take risks.

OUR STRANDS/STRAND ORGANISERS???

The question marks are present as our Arts curriculum at present is in a state of flux. It is undergoing refinement. It is certainly a worldwide trend to include strands or organisers, which address:

- creating, making and presenting
- arts criticism and aesthetics
- past and present contexts

Creating, making and presenting is the process strand or organisers. In all our learning areas with all their strand organisers this learning area is the only one where this magical process of CREATING is mentioned. Creativity, which at one point was one of our essential learnings in South Australia was dispensed with and appears as a minor dot point under 'thinking' in the essential learnings, which are to be embedded in our new frameworks. What role does the imagination now play in our teaching and learning programs? I would assert that from the earliest age our children must be encouraged to use their imaginations to design and plan in all learning areas.

MAKING is significant for primary teachers as the teaching of arts skills and techniques is emphasised and so importantly the language of the art form is used, learnt and understood by the students. Professional development in all the 5 art forms has been vital for primary teachers who have no arts background. They have needed to learn the skills and language.

PRESENTING, of course is essential for The Arts as it values the students' works. Presentation can take many different forms but whatever form - make sure it looks good. Take time over displays and exhibitions. The Arts exist to impress and have impact.

Arts Criticism and Aesthetics promotes critical thinking and higher level thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, interpretation. Students are required to describe art works, to critically analyse them, to answer questions like What messages are being conveyed? How is the sense of mood/atmosphere being conveyed? How does the composition/the elements of the art form establish the focal point? What different interpretations could be given of this work? The language of the art form is used to describe, analyse etc. the art form.

Past and Present Contexts Art works are placed in a social, cultural and /or historical context. Links can very easily be made with SOSE (Studies of Society and the Environment), LOTE

(Languages other than English). In Australia we value the cultural heritage of our diverse groups. Multiculturalism is alive and well in our schools. We celebrate diversity through The Arts and in particular this strand. I ask the question : How can we expect our students to succeed academically, improve on literacy and numeracy levels without first feeling valued and safe in their learning environment? The understanding and appreciation of cultural backgrounds is critical to the building of relationships. Consider our indigenous people and this quote from 'Foundation for the Future'

Children's services and schools do not have the capacity to change the structural and systemic inequalities of society without support. What they do have is the capacity to educate for more informed citizens who understand and respect Aboriginal traditional and contemporary cultures, Aboriginal history and Aboriginal people's contribution to the Australian identity.

And finally we were privileged in our state of South Australia to have an extraordinarily visionary educational leader, namely Garth Boomer. He is no longer with us as he passed away prematurely some years ago. Here are a couple of quotes of his concerning The Arts.

Without art civilisation would soon go down into a despond, a numbing, pedestrian literalness. Intelligence would shrivel and communication would degenerate to grunting.

When we are at economic war, we tend to follow the biblical injunction and 'put away childish things', that is art, in the belief that art is really playing, pleasureable playing but indulgent in times of crisis. Ironically, the more we turn from such 'play', the quicker our imaginations will waste away; the sooner we will become the international MR. PLOD.

(Garth Boomer, 1990)

I feel economic rationalism is the enemy of arts education. The Arts are in danger of becoming marginalised. Millions are being spent on literacy, numeracy and technology without spending a cent on setting up environments where quality teaching and learning can take place.

Garth Boomer also said and I paraphrase here: that the nation with the richest artistic reserves will in the long run prevail. By this he meant that a nation which through education and general cultural orientation, practises and uses arts in its ordinary, daily living to understand and influence the way the world works. This means that people in making things, even the most functional of ordinary things, do it with eyes to pleasing form, elegance and completeness. He went on to say that "Australian made" would say something special to the world. So that the greatest value added would be the value of making something that not only works but works beautifully. To achieve this we need schools who from the earliest years have arts working across the curriculum where creative thinking and the imagination rule and are practised in all learning areas.

I have an A3 sheet for you with responses from classroom teachers concerned with what they valued in The Arts. You could use it as a poster.

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EFF-089 (3/2000)