FEATURE

By Bradley J. Hull

Parallels in Arts Education and CTE: Some Guiding Reflections

FOR DECADES, THE VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS HAVE FOUGHT A HUGE BATTLE TO DEFINE THEMSELVES AND REESTABLISH A PROMINENT PLACE IN THE MINDS OF EDUCATORS, ADMINISTRATORS, PARENTS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. **A BRIEF UNDERSTANDING OF THIS STRUGGLE MAY PROVIDE VALUABLE DISCUSSION POINTS FOR CTE.**

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MANY FORCES SHAPE THE CURRENT NATIONAL CONVERSATION regarding career and technical education (CTE). Perkins IV guides the discussion through concepts such as challenging academic and technical standards; high skill, high wage, or high demand occupations; and programs of study. High school reform models abound; CTE plays a major role in many of them—highlighting its capacity to bring relevance to abstract academic concepts, to motivate all youths, especially those identified as at risk, and to raise the aspirations of all students as they empower themselves to achieve their life goals.

Workforce development and training, the economic recession, unemployment rates, the Workforce Investment Act and Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorizations, and globalization and outsourcing provide other strong undercurrents to the national CTE discourse. Amidst all of these currents, CTE struggles to find its identity. For decades, the visual and performing arts have fought a huge battle to define themselves and reestablish a prominent place in the minds of educators, administrators, parents and government officials. A brief understanding of this struggle may provide valuable discussion points for CTE.

The Many Roles of the Arts in Education

Throughout the history of Western culture, the performing and visual arts have held many roles. Sometimes the arts have occupied a role at the center of education. For example, Plato spoke of music as a definer of character wherein each class in society must listen to different types of music to prepare them for their roles; the ancient Greek culture established music as a vital part of the curriculum alongside geometry, astronomy and arithmetic, collectively called the quadrivium. In the modern era, the Cold War brought about a heyday in the arts as Western culture associated classical music with the trumping of capitalism over communism. In 1958, at the first Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow, Van Cliburn, a Texan, won first prize with all Soviet judges; he was granted the only ticker tape parade in New York City ever given for a musician.

Holding a central role in the curriculum, all students were served by the arts. Everyone had a foundational knowledge of the importance of the arts but it took time and cost money. During periods when both came into short supply, the arts were unable to maintain their central role.

The arts were also at times included in the curriculum as a trade. The Renaissance guilds and their corresponding apprenticeships included those of musicians, painters and sculptors as well as brick masons, bankers and woodworkers. Seventeenth century musicians were trained from childhood to fulfill roles as court musicians; in the nineteenth century, Felix Mendelssohn established the first music conservatory specifically to train students for musical occupations. People served by this model included only those of self- or family-identified occupational choice. On the positive side, this was specific, high quality training for a select few and it raised the level of excellence in the

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discipline. However a separatist mentality persisted and the arts were seen as something for special populations only.

The arts have also served as an elective. As part of a liberal arts philosophy, the educational goal is well-rounded individuals and that includes the arts as a possible avenue of exploration. Liberal arts curricula always included courses in music history and arts appreciation as part of the optional menu. This role dominated the mid-20th century high school landscape where students were often identified as "band kids," "thespians," "geeks," or "jocks." Those who found motivation or belonging in the arts were served well therein, but the vast majority of the entire student population lacked an understanding of the arts' importance to their lives.

As interdisciplinary "glue," the arts are used to develop cohesion and connectedness between the parts of the curriculum. By their very nature, they connect with many other disciplines. In so doing, curricula have sprung up utilizing the arts as a common thematic linchpin. For instance, in studying Rembrandt's *Dr. Tulps Anatomy Lesson*, a student learns about religious perspectives on human dissection, on chemistry and the mixing of paint, on medical practices today and in the past, and on education methods through the centuries. Although students across the spectrum gain exposure to the arts, the arts disciplines may lose their unique identities—their excellence, watered down—by being subsumed into other disciplines.

Thus, the arts have found existence at various times in a central role in education, in occupational training, as an elective, and as a thematic device for academic studies. The parallels to CTE are clear. As a central role in education, old style industrial arts and home economics were courses wherein all students interacted with the trades but in minimal capacity. As part of occupational training, the traditional vocational education model was utilized to teach select students, often those at-risk and those tracked as "low academic achievers." These students would often earn an industry-recognized credential and gain employment immediately after high school graduation. As an elective, the comprehensive high school model utilizes CTE courses for students wishing to explore a specific career area within the context of an academic high school program. As interdisciplinary "glue," the current high school reform model utilizing career academies, serve students who best learn by real-world, career-relevant application of academic learning. Each of these models has similar pitfalls as in the arts, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this article.

How the Arts Stayed Relevant in Challenging Times

In today's climate, one of the main challenges to CTE and the arts is the narrowing of the curriculum. Emphasis on reading, writing and math, raising

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standardized test scores, and making Adequate Yearly Progress has undermined students' opportunities to engage in CTE—as it has in the arts. How have the arts attempted to maintain their existence in education within this climate?

Well-Roundedness: The arts in education have argued that they contribute to a well-educated, well-rounded citizenry, that this is essential to a strong society.

Workplace Skills: The arts have successfully proven their value in teaching workplace skills. Business and industry need workers who are independent, self-reflective, creative and adaptable. Here the arts have claimed themselves powerful contributors of these qualities to the workforce.

Integration: The arts have integrated themselves into the academic curriculum by making interdisciplinary studies a core component to education reform discussions.

Pedagogy: The arts have developed a pedagogy based on multiple intelligence theory, that only through the incorporation of the arts into the curriculum can true differentiated instruction based on learning styles become a reality.

Economic Impact: The arts have partially founded their existence in education on their economic impact. Researchers have conducted large scale studies that demonstrate positive job outlook and document a substantial percentage of the gross national product attributable to the arts.

Assessment/Accountability: The arts have blazed the trail regarding assessment of artistic product through intense efforts in common national standards and in reliable, valid assessments mainly through rubric creation and norming.

Thinking Skills: The arts have founded themselves as great teachers of thinking skills. Critical thinking, creativity, innovation, "thinking outside the box," synthesis and evaluation are all essential components to the arts' argument for their curricular prominence.

The Parallels in CTE: Lessons that Can be Learned

The arguments also ring familiar to CTE with varying degrees of emphasis and success. Here they are paralleled to the above:

Well-Roundedness: CTE's curriculum is based on occupations and since virtually everyone needs a career, CTE is vital to every well-educated individual.

Workplace Skills: CTE teaches general workplace skills such as self-presentation, job interviewing, inter- and intrapersonal skills, and career advancement/decision making.

Integration: CTE forms the linchpin of career academies, an extremely successful high school reform model.

Pedagogy: CTE, by its very nature, is about problem- and scenario-based learning, an already developed and respected pedagogy.

Economic Impact: CTE is aligning with economic growth priorities, and readjusting its curriculum to high skill,

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high wage and high demand or emerging occupations.

Assessment/Accountability: CTE is continuing to link its programs with national industry- recognized certifications and assessments.

Thinking Skills: CTE, by its very nature, is an expert method to teach problem solving, questioning and brainstorming.

Challenges in Rural Areas

Finally, concurrent with the narrowing of the curriculum, another factor that affects the arts and CTE alike is the challenges they face in rural areas. The arts have need of specialized equipment such as tubas, recording studios, and pianos; unique locations such as band rooms and concert halls; and intensive individualized instruction on numerous instruments often by specialized experts. These resources are often scant or nonexistent in rural areas. In the same way, although the diversity of student needs in CTE remains the same as in an urban environment (e.g. motivation, academic connections, hands-on learning, relevance to the real world, raising aspirations), the resources are scant. With limited resources, how does education in non-urban areas provide a foundational cluster knowledge to some students, a focused career training program for others, an exit point of immediate post-high school employment with industry-recognized credentials for others? With limited resources, how can CTE serve *all* secondary students in non-urban areas given 16 career clusters and 79 pathways? With limited resources, how can programs of study be specific enough to create exit points to certain occupations and yet maintain the broadest possible options for the future?

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Moving Forward

This article's intent is to shed light on CTE's place in education by examining several aspects of arts education and its struggle to find identity within the curriculum. Yet to be examined are 1) the points of excellence with which the arts succeed in their work as applicable to CTE, 2) methods by which CTE could raise their level of success in each of the above points based on the precedents set by arts education, and 3) the pitfalls the arts have encountered which CTE would do well to avoid. An ongoing discussion of how CTE can more fully establish its unique character in education, and how it can thrive and enliven secondary and postsecondary education in urban as well as non-urban areas, must be a priority in the coming months and years. T

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