

Arts in Education — Beyond Rhetoric

Carol Fineberg



Across the country, the arts are blending into other parts of the curriculum as well as being valued on their own, with help from government, foundations, corporations, and community art enthusiasts.

For over a decade, starting in fact with the use of the term in the U.S. Office of Education's Arts and Humanities Division, the phrase "arts in education" has been used to encourage school systems, teacher preparation institutions, curriculum developers, and arts organizations to develop a more comprehensive program that would provide for children and young people the following:

- a strong, ordered, sequential education in each of the arts
- an educational program that integrates the arts into the basic curriculum
- regular opportunities to relate to living artists as performers, theoreticians, demonstrators, and quasi-instructors.

In pursuit of these goals, education has taken upon itself a new set of terms: the interrelated arts, integrated arts, arts for living, arts for basic skills, artists in school,

artists in residence, adjunct artists. Key figures have emerged as advocates for the arts in education: Kathryn Bloom, Harry Broudy, Laura Chapman, David Ecker, Stanley Madeja, Junius Eddy, Jane Remer, David Rockefeller, Jr., the late John D. Rockefeller, 3rd, Jerrold Ross, Ralph Smith, Robert Stake.

Each figure, depending upon the institution of sponsorship, has carved out special territory for development: Broudy, Smith, and Madeja: Aesthetic Education; Chapman and Ecker: curriculum and teacher preparation; Ross: developing a new generation of arts in education scholars and practitioners; Bloom and Remer: establishment of rationales and pilot programs; the Rockefellers: encouragement of public and private agency support.

The government, major foundations and corporations have provided money for the develop-

ment of various pieces of the arts in education puzzle. For instance, the JDR 3rd Fund, the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, the New York Community Trust, the Noble Foundation, Joint Foundation Support, Exxon, Mobil, Equitable, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the National Institute of Education, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the U.S. Office of Education are but a few of the major supporters of the venture.

With what result? School systems throughout the country have found funds to support comprehensive arts education programs (over 200 applied to the Alliance for Arts Education/Office of Education for funds under PL 93-380 in 1978); arts organizations have requested funds specially earmarked to support partnerships with schools; universities and colleges have established new courses

and sequences of training for both arts specialists and classroom generalists. A new army of consultants has emerged, capable of helping school systems plan, teachers teach, and artists make art within an educational setting.

A cautionary note should be sounded, however. Not all universities are preparing arts specialists and classroom teachers adept at teaching the arts much less integrating them with the other pieces of the curricular pie. Not all school districts see the wisdom of strengthening and expanding the arts portion of the curriculum, and not all superintendents and chief state school officers see the advantage of delegating personnel to support the arts in education. Nonetheless, there has been a distinct movement in this direction, and the results are encouraging.

Emerging Educational Reforms

What educational reforms are emerging from Arts in Education projects, programs, and stances? First, there are the reforms that stem from a rearrangement of central or district services to individual schools. This rearrangement, which calls for the establishment of school development networks serviced by a hub, can best be found in Seattle and Louisville where personnel from the central office are assigned to provide technical support to schools experimenting with different modes of staff and curriculum development using the arts as the principle of organization.

Second, there are the reforms that have enabled school districts to concentrate on the methodical and intensive use of community cultural resources to service the schools on a regular, paid, and bilaterally-planned scale. Oklahoma City, Little Rock, Hartford, and Minneapolis have developed programs that make new use of the traditional sites for outside learn-

ing: museums, theaters, galleries, and opera houses.

Third, there are the reforms which stem from the establishment of arts organizations specifically designed to meet educational goals, working during and after school hours in tandem with schools and districts, providing direct service to both elementary and secondary students. New York's Touchstone and Children's Art Carnival, the Performing Tree in Los Angeles, the nationally known Teachers and Writers Collaboratives are a few examples of local artists getting together to put kids in touch with the act of creation in a nontraditional setting.

Fourth, there are those school districts which have seen the arts as a vehicle for learning the basic skills or for desegregation. They have mounted "magnet" programs using the arts to attract enrollment; revising the curriculum to include the arts on a regular, integrated basis—a field for applying the basic skills; or as a means of regularizing reference to the many cultural strains that are part of the American heritage.

As school districts have explored the potential of using the arts to improve the total educational program of children and young people, the arts in education approach has been particularly useful in illuminating and then improving current practices in teaching and learning without casting an evil eye upon what *is*.

The Network for the Arts in Education

While networking in itself is as old as bonding, the principle of networking as it applies to the Arts in Education is rather specific. It relies upon several "givens":

1. The network members are peers—principals of elementary and secondary schools philosophically committed to an Arts in Edu-

cation rationale for their educational programs.

2. The network is serviced by an administrative "hub" composed of professional educators equally adept at discerning school development needs as well as securing community and district resources to meet those needs.

3. Leadership from the chief school administrator reflects a commitment to the importance of this course of action. Leadership requires both ceremonial and substantive obligations: the chief must make his or her presence felt from time to time at network meetings; moreover, some "soft money" from the budget must be set aside for either training, materials development, or attendance at particular arts events during the school year. Public statements supporting the arts in education must be made by the chief, who should have on staff a person of high status whose function it is to smooth the bureaucratic path between schools and cultural resources. Above all, the concept of the arts in education must be understood and explained convincingly to school board members, community leaders, advocates for improved education, and critics. Too often, when a superintendent views the Arts in Education program as an arts program alone, he or she puts it on a competitive level with driver education, the sports program, career education, or any other fragments which comprise special programs in most schools. This can only endanger the program, its concepts, and its power to encourage schools to be better places for children.

Deeds which ensure the strength of the network include regular meetings of principals where the educational issues implicit in a school development program through the arts are discussed, where advice is both sought and given, and where exemplary

Pay-offs From the Arts in Education

Arts in Education, which started out as a small idea in a few people's heads, has blossomed into a national trend:

- In New Rochelle, a suburb of New York City, the school system has designated an elementary school as "magnet"—an inner-city school whose strong arts-related curricula should attract majority students from other parts of town to the school in an effort to balance the racial mix. The performing, visual, and environmental arts are taught using the resources of arts specialists, community artists, a redesigned curriculum, and a leadership program for the principals.

- In Teaneck, New Jersey, a similar concept is in operation but on the high school level. Here students enroll in ARTS Magnet School classes in addition to their work in the main high school program. The aim: greater interracial cooperation through the arts.

- In Louisville, Kentucky, the school district has established a network of Arts in Education schools coordinated by a Jefferson County Cultural Resources Director, aided and stimulated by a community organization, pARTners, which includes representatives from the school system, arts organizations, and the Junior League. Teachers are trained to integrate various art forms into the basic elementary school curriculum and attend a variety of arts events with and without their students as a means to that end.

- In California, teachers and administrators assigned to develop school improvement plans spent three days in Los Angeles designing specific ways to include the arts into the program to achieve better schools.

- In Arizona, Washington, Virginia, New Jersey, Florida, New York, South Carolina, Mississippi, and North Carolina, educators at the state level are working on ways to support the arts in education as a strategy for school improvement through the use of funds earmarked for the disadvantaged, the gifted and talented, the learning disabled, and the mainstream youngster who has no differentiating label at all.

- In Michigan, the State Education Department set aside Title IV-C funds to stimulate the development of pilot sites for the Arts in Education. Detroit, Lansing, Flint, and other cities are now part of a network coordinated by the State Education Department that is finding its own solutions to the issue of staff development, curriculum revision, use of community cultural resources, and university assistance.

- In Pennsylvania, the professionals in charge of General Education have revised their state plan for the Arts in Education, focusing on a new delivery system of state services to districts and intermediate units.

- Winston-Salem, North Carolina, one of the members of the League of Cities for the Arts in Education, attracts visitors from across the nation to see the results of its Arts in Education program.

- In Washington, D.C., the Alliance for Arts Education held a meeting where the subject was the Arts in Education; almost half the chiefs of state education agencies turned out to talk with arts advocates and curriculum specialists.

programs can be observed and commented upon in a noncompetitive, nonpunitive environment.

Use of Cultural Resources

Traditionally, cultural resources have been available to school systems on a special event basis. The teacher would contact the museum to provide a special tour of a particular exhibit or collection or would purchase tickets (paid for out of the school system field trip budget or by students themselves) for a particular performance that was either geared for a particular age group or that happened to be the only offering available to school audiences. Occasionally, if a city were fortunate enough, an organization such as Young Audiences would provide in-school concerts and provide time for students to ask questions of the performers.

With the introduction of the Artist in Schools program of the National Endowment, the notion of in-school residencies for community artists was strengthened and it is fair to say that the notion of an artist or group of artists working with kids in a school setting is neither controversial nor unusual in many parts of the country today. Oklahoma City with its Opening Doors program, Seattle with its Arts in Basic Education program, and Minneapolis with its Urban Arts program have paved the way for a more methodical, coordinated curriculum-oriented approach to contracting with these "outsiders" to provide special experiences in the arts for students and teachers.

The involvement of the cultural resources illuminates the need for more structured, sequential experiences in each of the art forms so that youngsters can take advantage of the special presence of the artists in their midst. The role of in-school arts specialists and their relationship to the "outside"

artists has been re-examined, forcing many school systems to redefine the role and tasks of arts specialists, treating them, in fact, with the same respect and demands made of specialists in science, math, and social studies.

Establishment of New Arts Organizations

The third set of reforms stems from a development of the late 60s: the neighborhood arts organization whose mission it was to provide special services to kids both during and after the school



Photo: Robert Dadds

Student at a potter's wheel

day. The stronger programs survived the parlous 70s and still flourish today. They have become part of the long tradition first started by the settlement houses and carried through by the more contemporary community centers. Funded in part by school districts, foundations, corporations, and by income-producing projects of the organization itself, they have in many cases been a haven for in-service experience for teachers as well as a place where youngsters could develop their creativity muscles. These organizations will never make their directors rich, but they

seem to thrive within a fiscally restrained context. They also provide an alternative site of employment for the dedicated art and music teachers who cannot find positions within school districts but refuse to get out of the field.

These organizations have been instrumental in identifying gifted and talented children particularly in schools where the arts programs have been eliminated due to budget cuts and other exigencies. They have provided a model of instruction that many schools have been willing to pick up as school budgets have eased. They have also been helpful, because of their strong community ties, in advocating a more rigorous, comprehensive approach to the arts within the school and as such have helped strengthen arts programs within the school building.

The Arts as a Vehicle for Learning

The fourth major reform that has strengthened the arts in education has been an emphasis on the arts as a vehicle for achievement of other goals. The use of desegregation funds (ESAA) in Massachusetts, for example, to bring together students from racially isolated groups using arts experiences as the catalyst, has proven to be quite successful according to documents on file with the Office of Civil Rights. The Arts Magnet School, developed in such disparate communities as Cincinnati, Washington, D.C., New York City, and Teaneck, by providing a curriculum rich in arts instruction and participation, has attracted a multi-ethnic, multiracial population to racially isolated schools. Their curriculum both in the arts and other areas reflects a commitment to racial diversity in the readings, discussions, and other activities conducted in the classroom and on field trips.

It is interesting to note that where school systems use the arts

in a comprehensive approach, it is generally because of their commitment to school development or improvement, not because of their commitment to the arts. This often disconcerts arts educators who feel, understandably, that schools should have the arts because the arts are good unto themselves. But school administrators cannot afford the luxury of such a pure position (even if they believe it) because parents are rightfully concerned about academic achievement and job-related skill development.

Arts advocates must keep in mind, also, the unfortunate fact that not all principals and parents have had the best in arts education themselves. Many of them were told early on that they couldn't draw (*ergo*, they were untalented) or should just move their lips (because they couldn't carry a tune), or they could raise the curtain (because they could not perform adequately on stage). Resentments incurred during childhood often come back to haunt us, and school people are no exception. This sad condition has been ameliorated to a great degree by those school systems that have encouraged principals and teachers alike to get involved in arts related inservice activities such as a seminar on opera for novices, a course on the history of civilization as seen through works of art, or participating in an all-school chorus or dramatic production.

If this writer's mail is any indication, more and more schools, school districts, and state education departments are concerned with the role of the arts in education and are exploring ways and means to achieve a better educational climate through the arts. While some may mark the arts in education as but another fad, comparable to Open Education, the Activity-Centered Classroom, or Progressive Education a la John Dewey, others see it as a substan-



Carol Fineberg, a consultant in educational planning, curriculum development, training and evaluation, is on the faculty at Brooklyn College, New York.

tive, clear-sighted and comprehensive approach to school development, dealing with every facet of a school's organization, leadership, staff training, and curriculum. In my view, it is a joy to visit schools and districts sharing this belief.

Those who act on this belief provide schools that are colorful environments in which to learn, decorated with children's work from top to bottom. They see that classroom lessons in history and geography are liberally peppered with references to creative energies in art, music, dance, drama, and literature. Artists and arts educators work easily with large and small groups of children; making art, examining art, developing their senses and their sensibilities. They see the basic skills taught in a rigorous, sequential manner and then they see them applied to problems of construction, imitation, and abstraction. From kindergarten to twelfth grade, students will have active experiences in creating art, responding to it, learning the technical skills associated with various art forms, learning the cultural as well as individual styles of art works, learning the historical place of works of art, and understanding the relationship between the arts and physics, chemistry, mathematics, the social sciences, and technology.

What school could deliver more?

A Word About Evaluation

Until recently most evaluation of Arts in Education programs has been rather "soft," concentrating on attitude surveys (more children like art after exposure to the arts than did before) or teacher training pre- and post-treatment questionnaires (more teachers like art and use it than did before training). Very little has been done nationally on the growth of skills, knowledge, and problem-solving capabilities as a result of a comprehensive arts in education program. A brave band of evaluators is now beginning to struggle with the issue of evaluation, not as cold measures of test results, but as learned, albeit biased, advocates of the Arts in Education.

P.S. 312 in Brooklyn's District 22, for example, has embarked on an extensive inquiry into the problem-solving capacities of its students after ten years' emphasis on the arts in education. The evaluators are supplying information, perceptions, and test results to the program participants on a regular basis. They are active in the development of the program as well as measuring its results.

This group tries to help clients appraise their own efforts with the hard eyes of a demanding parent and the informed spirit of a creative artist. It is not an easy task, for a truly excellent Arts in Education program takes years to build and a lifetime to maintain. This is no quick and easy panacea to all of education's ills, but it is one path that is proving effective. To paraphrase the Talmud, if you don't know where you are going, all roads lead there. The advocates of Arts in Education have established a pathway and a destination that is commensurate with the best that American public education has to offer. It is now up to the local schools and districts to build their own modes of transportation. *ET*

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