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Analyzing ART Program in a Hartford Elementary School

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Professor Jack Dougherty
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“The arts have been around longer than the sciences; cultures are judged on the basis of their arts; and most cultures and most historical eras have not doubted the importance of studying the arts.”

- Harvard Project Zero, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* (2001).¹

An Historical Perspective at a Glance:

In the early 1900's to 1940's, the arts (which included art and music) were taught in the public school curriculum primarily by specialists. Also, community organizations such as museums, galleries or symphony orchestras sponsored arts programs for children. In the 1950's, there was a greater shift to bring the arts to students. Performing arts centers and other such organizations came to in- school assemblies to perform and educate students. In the sixties, there was a move to strengthen the arts even more into schools. Individual artists or groups of artists took their work into the classroom to give a closer look at the arts. These developed for the first time throughout the country into workshops and residencies, that people termed 'artists in schools programs'. At this time, dance and theater were added in addition to visual arts and music.

In the early seventies, Federal education and Arts Endowments are granted with the focus on the arts in education. Programs such as the J. F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund Arts in Education Program launch national education programs. However, in the second half of the 1970's, due to political changes and economic decline, there is a reversal in support for the arts in public schools. Funds are gradually removed and art specialists within the school system are released.² In the eighties, the arts were first to be cut out of the curriculum as budgets tightened.

Academic subjects such as mathematics and science took the forefront. This trend was

¹ “The Arts and Academic Improvement: What the Evidence Shows.” *Translations*, p.3. The National Art Education Association.

² Jane Remer, *Beyond Enrichment: Building Effective Arts Partnership with Schools and Your Community* (New York: ACA Books, 1996), p. 111-112; 513-514.

solidified in 1989 when “President Bush and the nation’s governors instituted the National Education Goals at the historic summit in Charlottesville.³” The arts were not mentioned. This prompted research studies into the benefits of arts education (such studies are still being carried out today). In 1994, President Clinton included the arts to the National Education Goals and the National Arts Education Standards were published⁴. However, at the same time, the Department of Education gives few funds for the arts and the Arts Endowment is cut down, which in part, along with political dissatisfaction, creates a shift further away from support for the arts in education.⁵

As illustrated by this brief overview of events surrounding the arts in education, maintenance of the arts in schools has been a struggle. Today, there are some local and state initiatives that truly show the importance of arts education. One such initiative is the ART⁶ program. I have chosen this particular program as my primary research. This program is a residency that brings Trinity College students into a specific Hartford Elementary school “to integrate movement into the classroom experience and to allow children to have an alternative form of expression, and to transfer/ integrate this into other things they’re learning at school.⁷” Even with National Standards for Arts Education, and programs such as the ART program adhering to and clearly asserting these standards, the “overall place of arts in the curriculum remains uncertain.⁸”

³ “Arts Education.” *Policy Update*, p.1. National Association of State Boards of Education. <http://www.naea-reston.org/NASBE.pdf> (Retrieved 3 December 2001)

⁴ “Arts Education.” *Policy Update*, p.1. National Association of State Boards of Education. <http://www.naea-reston.org/NASBE.pdf> (Retrieved 3 December 2001)

⁵ Jane Remer, *Beyond Enrichment: Building Effective Arts Partnership with Schools and Your Community* p. 514.

⁶ ART program is the acronym that will be used to stand for the name of the creative movement arts program in order to protect confidentiality of all parties involved.

⁷ Trinity Faculty # 1, Conference on ART program, verbatim minutes, 19 October 2001.

⁸ “Arts Education.” *Policy Update*, p.1. National Association of State Boards of Education. <http://www.naea-reston.org/NASBE.pdf> (Retrieved 3 December 2001)

I find it necessary to begin by addressing the traditional educators' need to directly link arts implementation programs with academic achievement. Without doing so, there is great danger for miscommunication and misunderstanding of the purpose of my research. Even I, while performing my research, fell into the trap of wanting to substantiate a place for the arts in the curriculum by justifying the arts on non- arts outcomes. A closer look at my research questions will prove that this is not what I am in fact trying to do. Moreover, if the arts are only looked at and valued as important because they help to improve academic achievement, then the arts will surely lose their validity if academic improvement does not occur. Although it is essential to note that I do believe there is value in the search for such links, the next challenge for educators such as myself, is to stake a claim for the intrinsic worth of the arts in education. Through my research, I have answered the request of Harvard Project Zero when they called for "researchers to look for, try out, and specify whether- and if so, how- the arts can serve as vehicles for transfer."⁹

Using the analyzation of this specific ART program and its implementation into a Hartford Elementary school as my primary source of study, the overall purpose of my research is twofold. First, I will provide evidence that for a representative sample of the students, participation in the ART program corresponded with a positive increase in writing scores based on CMT¹⁰ standards. The link between participation in the ART

⁹ "The Arts and Academic Improvement: What the Evidence Shows." *Translations*, p.3. The National Art Education Association.

<http://www.naea-reston.org/HarvardT.pdf> (Retrieved 3 December 2001)

¹⁰ CMT (Connecticut Mastery Test) provides information regarding the mastery of important skills in mathematics, reading, and writing. The CMT is administered each fall to measure the academic performance of approximately 120,000 students in grades 4, 6, and 8. This definition was taken from "The CMT Press Release." *Connecticut Department of Education: News*, p. 2-3. Connecticut Department of Education.

<http://www.state.ct.us> (Retrieved 1 December 2001)

program and improvement in writing scores based on CMT standards is not being used to justify a reason for arts in education, rather it is being used to show *how* the arts can *serve as a vehicle for transfer*. This is an important distinction. Even when we prove this relationship, there still needs to be justification for the inherent merit of the ART program. This leads me to my second purpose of research- to provide evidence that shows adult participants of this ART program share common understandings of its purpose, namely, that the “arts offer a way of thinking unavailable in other disciplines.”¹¹ This information, when looked at together, will lead us in the right direction for addressing the justification of arts in the curriculum.

Making Connections- A Look at CMT:

Again, traditional educators who question the importance of arts implementation often question its validity in the classroom based on its’ connection to academic achievement. For example, at the October 19th conference of the implementation of the ART program into the curriculum, one educator asked, “What are the specific academic benefits of the ART program?” One Trinity faculty member responded, that as part of the ART program there is a writing component. The purpose of the writing component is to integrate the ART program into the language arts program. During an interview with Trinity Faculty member 2, I asked her views on improved student writing of those students participating in the course. She responded, “Ideally, what they’re learning through the ART program should transfer, but I don’t know.”¹² Both faculty members and the principal said they were unable to provide concrete data of individual test scores

¹¹ “The Arts and Academic Improvement: What the Evidence Shows.” *Translations*, p.3. The National Art Education Association.

<http://www.naea-reston.org/HarvardT.pdf> (Retrieved 3 December 2001)

¹² Trinity Faculty # 2, Interview, verbatim minutes, 6 November 2001.

improving because no one has analyzed the data in that way. Educators want to have concrete answers to questions such as, Have CMT scores improved?

This leads me to my first research question: Does the writing of students participating in the ART program improve over the course of the semester based on CMT standards? Through the course of the arts program, Trinity faculty assign what are called writing prompts. These writing prompts are intended to connect what is happening in the ART program to what students are learning in the classroom. Trinity faculty 1 says, “We work with teachers (at the school) on creating a writing prompt, so that what we’re doing becomes a part of the language arts program because I feel very strongly that kids learn to write in a very different way when they’re writing from their own experience.¹³” Thus, ideally, the experiences of the ART program are being transferred into student writing through writing prompts. Each writing prompt is graded by the elementary school teacher based on CMT criteria. It is my belief that the ART program is associated with improved student writing. Furthermore, I plan to prove that for a representative sample of the students, participation in the ART program corresponded with a positive increase in writing scores based on CMT standards.

Methodology:

After being given a large pack of writing prompts from one Trinity faculty member, I began to search through the materials to decide which pieces of text would be appropriate for my study. The pieces of text I have included in my research were chosen through a very selective process. All writing prompts were taken from one fourth grade classroom. In addition, all pieces of writing included the name of the student, the date it was written, and the CMT score they received from their teacher. It is also important to

¹³ Trinity Faculty # 1, Conference on ART program, verbatim minutes, 19 October 2001.

note that these are not the students' actual CMT scores, but graded writing prompts evaluated by CMT standards. There are two standards that make up the writing component of the CMT: Direct Assessment of Writing, and Editing and Revising. The first, Direct Assessment of Writing, measures how well students are able to communicate through their writing. The second, Editing and Revising, measures the students' ability to edit a piece of writing and make appropriate grammatical edits.¹⁴ These are what the ART program writing prompt scores are based on.

The dates of the two prompts are February 3 and March 8 of the same year. These dates were chosen because the usable writing prompts were taken from these dates. Also, both times, the prompt is related to the ART program, and was written by students who participated in the ART program. Twelve students from this class met all these standards. No other classes met these particular criteria. Some had only one dated writing prompt, others were missing CMT scores, and so on. This is why data is only taken from one class.

Interpretation and Analysis:

Of the twelve students, I have analyzed two sets of writing prompts for each student- one from February 3rd (the beginning of the program), and one from March 8th (towards the end of the program) to examine if the writing of students participating in the arts program improves over the course of the program based on CMT standards. CMT standards are based on a scale of 1-4, 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest. In order

¹⁴ "The CMT Press Release." *Connecticut Department of Education : News*, p. 3. Connecticut Department of Education.
<http://www.state.ct.us> (Retrieved 3 December 2001)

to present data, I have converted these numbers to decimals. This study assumes that a CMT score of 2+ = 2.33, a CMT score of 3+ = 3.33, and a CMT score of 3-4 = 3.5.

After carefully analyzing the data, I found that out of 12 students, 7 showed an increase in their writing prompt scores, while 3 out of the 12 students showed a decrease in their writing prompt scores; 2 of the 12 students' writing prompt scores remained the same. To give a better picture of an increase in score, and what that actually means, in terms of student writing, I have taken an excerpt from both writing prompts of Student I and Student L. The question for writing prompt # 1 is, "What have we forgotten?" The question for writing prompt # 2 is, "What would you do as a butterfly messenger to spread a positive message to your community?"

STUDENT I:

Writing prompt #1, February 3rd, CMT score= 2 (typed exactly as written by Student I)

We have forgotten many things. First we forgot how valuable people are. Animals are family because they are a very important. Now that we have guns there is not peace in the world.

Writing prompt #2, March 3rd, CMT score= 3 (typed exactly as written by Student I)

I'm the butterfly in the cocoon. When I come out, I will tell my community to give poor people a place to sleep. Homeless people need shelter. We should help poor people. If everyone helped each other, there would be no problems.

STUDENT L:

Writing prompt #1, February 3rd, CMT score= 2 (typed exactly as written by Student L)

Why did the world change.

Some people forgo that they are important. When los of people come in the world they forgo that animals are family. They even forgo to except what was given to them. They do not even except the babby they kill them. Start excepting what is given.

Writing prompt #2, March 3rd, CMT score= 3 (typed exactly as written by Student L)

I am the butterfly in the cocoon and this is what I will tell my community help people and animals in need. Stop harming ourselves and the environment. To get along with each other and stop fiting. Apreshiate what is given and stop taking other lives because you are mad at each other. I will tell them that because I do not want to see one more people die unless God want them to.

Again, the students are being judged on their ability to communicate their ideas, and in the second prompt, to revise and improve grammatical structures. Students are given the opportunity to convey their feelings and ideas in both writing prompts. Although spelling is still a problem in the second writing prompts, thoughts seem to be more cohesive and developed in the latter. Also, even though there are still grammar mistakes, the overall sentence structure is better. One Trinity student remarked, “Their writing does improve in the ART program. I read their papers, some of them, and their creativity and imagination definitely improved... What we taught was seen in the writing, like they would put things like *the animals moved at a low level*, instead of *the animal walked*. That is something we talked about in class, so there was definitely a connection and improvement throughout the course.”¹⁵

The net affect (the overall increase or decrease, in this particular case, the increase when all of the changes of scores are added together) for this classroom is 4.84. The average net affect per child is 0.40333. This shows, that for the majority of the

¹⁵ Trinity Student # 1, Interview, verbatim minutes, 1 November 2001.

students participating in the arts program, the scores do improve over the course of the program. This may be because of their involvement in the ART program, and that transfer of knowledge that occurs when participating in the ART program. However, I understand that I do not know if the ART program itself is the only cause of this increase in scores because I am not studying any other variables, for example the scores of students not participating in the arts program.

Adult Perspectives:

The debate about the importance of arts in the curriculum exists, in part, because of the lack of understanding about the *purpose* of implementation of arts education into the curriculum. “Administrators, board of education members, other teachers, and the community at large have little to no understanding of the purpose of the arts, and less skills and understandings. This lack of understanding leads to a general lack of support for the arts.¹⁶” Other educators, like Charles Silberman believe the opposite, that “activity and experience, both physical and mental, are often the best means of gaining knowledge and acquiring facts.¹⁷” One Trinity faculty member says, “Before this program there weren’t enough arts programs in Hartford. Most were haphazard and band-aid programs with no follow through.¹⁸” As a result of the combination of this lack of follow through and unawareness of the purpose of arts implementation, the arts often get cast aside as unimportant in the educational system. On the contrary, they are a very valid piece of the learning process.

¹⁶ “Regarding the Status of Arts Teachers and Disciplines in Schools.” *Arts Education IDEAS: Orff Process and Reading*, p. 1-2. Arts Education: IDEAS.

<http://www.aeideas.com/statusarts/> (Retrieved 27 November 2001)

¹⁷ Charles E. Silberman, *The Open Classroom Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 145.

¹⁸ Trinity Faculty # 2, Interview, verbatim minutes, 6 November 2001.

According to the Status of Dance in Education as described in the ERIC database, Dance education programs provide opportunities for developing the following:

- Critical thinking and analytical skills
- Cooperation and teamwork
- Self- expression and self- esteem
- Organization and problem solving
- Cultural literacy; and
- Communicating emotions through movement¹⁹.

The second question of my research is: Do all parties in the Hartford Elementary school's ART program have the same understanding of its purpose? This research assumes that if different parties share the same understanding of its purpose, the ART education program will work better than if different parties involved in the program do not share the same understanding of its purpose. Adult participants of this ART program do share common understandings of its purpose. Furthermore, there is a direct correlation between purposes stated by the adult participants in the ART program and common criteria cited for the purpose of dance education, such as those of the ERIC database (see above). This strengthens the case for the ART program's inherent worth.

Methodology:

Since my research is about adult perspectives, I sought to attain the most inclusive picture possible. In other words, I wanted to look at adult points of views from all sides of the ART implementation process. I decided to study Trinity faculty members, Trinity students, and the elementary school teachers participating in the ART program.

In order to conduct my research, I began by contacting two Trinity faculty members involved with the program. Shortly after my research process began, I was

¹⁹ "Status of Dance in Education." *ERIC Digest*, p. 1. ERIC database.
<http://ericae.net/db/edo/ED348368.htm> (Retrieved 30 November 2001)

invited by these faculty members to a conference about this particular ART program, and its implementation into a Hartford Elementary school. Since one Trinity Faculty member directly addressed my interview questions in her speech, my research on this Trinity faculty member is based primarily on verbatim minutes taken from the speech given at the conference. The findings about the second Trinity faculty member are based on an interview. These two faculty members make up the Trinity faculty perspectives in my research. In order to find Trinity students to interview, I asked one faculty member for a list of students involved with the ART implementation program. After being given a roster of seventeen students, I mailed a form to each student introducing myself, briefly explaining my research, and requesting participation. Of these seventeen, four responded. The interviews of these four students make up the Trinity students perspectives. The following questions were asked to all Trinity adult participants:

1. What is the purpose of the ART program?
2. Why/ how did you get involved in the ART program?
3. Before this program, what were your thoughts on arts education? And after?
4. Through your experiences with the ART program, do you see its (ART program) intended purposes being carried out?
5. Are the goals set by the designers being met?

I also studied the perspectives of the Hartford elementary school teachers. Due to difficulties of access into the school, I was unable to conduct interviews, and rather left questionnaires for six participating teachers. The questionnaire consisted of one question: *In your own words, what is the purpose of the ART program?* Out of six teachers, two

responded. These two teacher responses make up the Hartford Elementary school teacher perspectives.

Interpretation and Analysis:

When asked the specific question, *What is the purpose of the Hartford elementary school's ART program?* Participants responded with a variety of answers. In order to analyze the data, I categorized responses into themes. For example, Trinity student 1 said, "One purpose is to provide kids with a different way of looking at things." Trinity faculty 1 said, "A purpose of the arts program is that it really does open up a whole new way of looking at things." Therefore, theme A is *to provide kids with a different way of looking at things*. In all there are eight themes in response to the purpose of the ART program.

The following is a list of the eight themes generated by student, faculty, and teacher responses:

- Theme A - to provide kids with a different way of looking at things
- Theme B - a way to use body to express emotions (in positive ways)
- Theme C - understand each other in new ways; communication skills
- Theme D - increase sense of students working together/ cooperative learning AND community building in the classroom
- Theme E - help enhance overall learning/ integrate AND transfer what's being learned in the arts program into other things being learned at school (academics)
- Theme F - increase self- esteem/ self- confidence
- Theme G - to work on problem- solving skills and risk- taking
- Theme H - to unite students in program with Trinity students who become positive role models for them

Again, as you can see, these are not far from the themes developed in the ERIC database. It is my finding that all parties involved are in agreement in that they think there are multiple purposes for the ART program. Also, of the eight themes, there was a shared opinion in five themes by at least four or more adults. This proves a shared

understanding of purpose. The one theme that was common to all participants was theme A, *to provide kids with a different way of looking at things*. Themes B and E were also prominent themes, showing agreement among six of the eight adults. Theme B, *a way to use body to express emotions (in positive ways)*, was common to 3 Trinity students, 1 Trinity faculty, and 2 Hartford teachers. For example, Hartford Elementary teacher # 1 said, “The purpose in my opinion is for students to find another outlet (movement) in communicating and expressing their thoughts and ideas.” Theme E, *to help enhance overall learning/ integrate what learning in arts program into other things being learned at school*, was common to 2 Trinity students, 2 Trinity faculty and 2 Hartford teachers. Again, this relates back to the notion of how there is a transfer of knowledge that the arts foster.

Themes common to all faculty members and Hartford Elementary school teachers were themes A and E. These are also significant findings because it means that the purpose is being shared not only within Trinity, but through the two schools as well.

Conclusion:

According to the National Standards for Arts Education, “There is ample evidence that the arts help students develop the attitudes, characteristics, and intellectual skills required to participate effectively in today’s society and economy. The arts teach self-discipline, reinforce self-esteem, and foster the thinking skills and creativity so valued in the workplace. They teach the importance of teamwork and cooperation.²⁰” These values are also represented in the research presented for Adult Perspectives. And yet, educators

²⁰ “What Students Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts.” *Summary Statement: Education Reform, Standards, and the Arts*, p. 3. National Standards for Arts Education. <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ArtsStandards.html> (Retrieved 30 November 2001)

still clamor for a justification based on academic achievement. I have contributed to the ongoing research to pave a rationale for the arts in education by being the first to study this particular ART program. I presented evidence that for a representative sample of the students, participation in the ART program corresponded with a positive increase in writing scores based on CMT standards. I also proposed evidence that shows adult participants of this ART program share common understandings of its purpose. The ‘arts offer a way of thinking unavailable in other disciplines’ such as the use of movement to express feelings, and the transfer of these feelings once embodied, into creative writing prompts.

Without having studied other variables within the school, it is implausible to make a definitive statement about involvement in the ART program being solely responsible for the improvement in CMT scores. These are the conclusions I am comfortable making at this time. If time and research methods permitted, I would study the possibility that there may be other factors within schools that bring in arts programs that cause academic improvement. I would also probe deeper into the study of making the arts stand on its own merit. Perhaps, for those students, and there are numerous, who do not flourish in the construct and cultures of our educational system today, “the arts provide engaging and motivational entry points into academic study.²¹”

²¹ “The Arts and Academic Improvement: What the Evidence Shows.” *Translations*, p.4. The National Art Education Association.

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