

# Time for Revolution: Arts Education at the Ready

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*The selfish or shallow person might be a great musician technically, but he'll be so involved with himself that his playing will lack warmth, intensity, beauty and he won't be deeply felt by the listener. He'll arbitrarily play the first solo every time. If he's backing a singer he'll play anything he wants or he'll be practicing scales. A person that lets the other guy take the first solo, and when he plays behind a soloist plays only to enhance him, that's the guy that will care about his wife and children and will be courteous in his everyday contact with people.*

- Art Pepper, from *Straight Life* excerpted in *Gottlieb (1996)*, p. 278.

The arts may have lost their way with regard to a purposefulness in today's education, perhaps even in society, but it is not too late to revolutionize the wheel. I started

“What one learns in order to play music well, or for that matter, what one learns in practicing any art form, can transfer to what one does in everyday life.”

this piece with a quote from Art Pepper, a great jazz saxophonist. Arts education is often framed as if it is outside the realm of life, as if it is simply a subject to be studied (or not studied). Pepper, in musing about musicians and their attitudes, stumbles upon key parallels to the role that arts can, and over the years *have* played, in education. Namely, what one learns in order to play music well, or for that matter, what one learns in practicing any art form, can transfer to what one does in everyday life.

Plato, and similarly Socrates, described the study of music as key to becoming an educated member of society. Plato, born in 427 B.C., stated that “education in music is most sovereign, because more than anything else rhythm and harmony find their way to the inmost soul and take strongest hold upon it, bringing with them and imparting grace, if one is rightly trained...” (Strunk, 1950, p.8). To these Greek philosophers, music was key in the development of an individual within an educated and humane society.

When music was first introduced to public school education in the United States, it was very intentional and purposeful. The curriculum followed much along the lines of Greek philosophers in that music was deemed fundamental to the overall general well-being of an educated person. Music education was introduced and developed in the context of how it enabled an individual to aspire toward becoming a valuable and contributing member of society.

As first introduced into the public schools in Boston in 1837, music was framed with the following three standards for its functionality: the teaching of music developed students'

intellectual capabilities, moral attitudes, and physical strength. Here are the standards as they were originally written:

1. Intellectually. Music had its place among the seven liberal arts, which scholastic ages regarded as pertaining to humanity. Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, and Music— these formed the quadrivium. Memory, comparison, attention, intellectual faculties— all of them quickened by a study of its principles. It may be made to some extent a mental discipline.
2. Morally. Happiness, contentment, cheerfulness, tranquility—these are the natural effects of music. It is unphilosophical to say that exercises in vocal music may not be so directed and arranged as to produce those habits of feeling of which these sounds are the type.
3. Physically. It appears self evident that exercise in vocal music, when not carried to an unreasonable excess, must expand the chest and thereby strengthen the lungs and vital organs. Judging then by this triple standard, intellectually, morally, and physically, vocal music seems to have a natural place in every system of instruction which aspires, as should every system, to develop man's whole nature. (Birge, 1928/1988, p.41)

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These three standards are enlightening in that they give us important insight to the underlying philosophy that guided the beginnings of education in the United States. Education was conceived as quite purposeful in its role as a vehicle to the development of well-rounded, compassionate members of society. Music played an integrated role in the overall purpose of education rather than a role as simply a discipline to be studied. Vocal music was especially important in the early days of music training. Studying music meant the child's intellectual ability would be strengthened in areas such as memory and attention. Studies in vocal music would affect the child's habits of the emotion and support the nurturing of a happy contented person. The actual process of singing strengthened the child's lungs and vital organs, deemed fundamental to any course of instruction.

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Furthermore, it was demonstrated that music “increased attendance of the pupils on the days of the lessons” (Birge, p.51). This was also noteworthy at the time. As originally conceived, the music curriculum was probably our first good example of arts integration.

Education paralleled society in general as it progressed steadily in the United States. Public funding of education mirrored the ups and downs of the economy, and various national organizations, for example the American Federation of Teachers and the Music

Educators National Conference, formed and remain in existence to this day. Educational

philosophers such as John Dewey had a great impact on educational thought and practice, and on the role of schooling as a platform for an informed citizenry. In the world of music education, instrumental music and band instruction came into importance early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in addition to vocal music, owing in part to the technology to mass produce and sell instruments.

Things changed suddenly, however, in October of 1957 when the Soviets successfully launched the Sputnik satellite into orbit. In direct response to events surrounding the launching of Sputnik, U.S. government agencies thrust into panic mode. A consequence that played itself out in the educational arena was a new emphasis focusing on bolstering students' knowledge in the sciences and to a certain extent in mathematics as well. It was at this moment that discipline-based study—meaning focusing on just one subject for the sake of learning that subject—took precedence in teaching philosophy. As a result, teaching philosophy and practice changed dramatically.

The model of teaching and learning whereby subjects were taught in service to an overall education was about to erode. An enormous shift in educational philosophy was at hand. Rather than view education as a method of cultivating an engaged member of society, education became a forum for cultivating student proficiency in discrete subjects. Following the Sputnik launch, new discipline-based education placed special emphasis on science and mathematics. This was to ensure that the United States could compete in the world (and especially with the Soviets) in the sciences. Congress even passed the National Defense Act, which funded initiatives aimed at refocusing educational practice toward discipline-based study.

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Arts educators themselves joined the discipline specific frenzy of the late fifties and moved forward with curriculum that focused on the study of arts for their own sake. By that I mean study of great works or art, or studying the technique involved in creating art. Individuals associated with the Getty Foundation in the 1970s and 1980s broadened the definition of discipline-based education in the arts to include the study of historical and aesthetic contexts. Many people bought into this discipline-based arts education. It was adopted as a basis for many arts education programs, including the California Frameworks for elementary education. It was challenged in terms of what some perceived as a narrow Western focus, and to the Getty Foundation's credit, they expanded their focus and

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materials to become more multicultural. However, as public education budgets across the country dwindled, the fight for arts became tougher and tougher.

Despite budget challenges and school reform hurdles, arts education entered the conversations concerning teaching and learning thanks to the recognition of a changing student body, namely an increasingly multilingual and multicultural student body. The arts are a natural bridge to communication across cultures and languages. The arts are also a historical repository of

cultures. In embracing the arts, it was possible to uncover the power of the arts to reach, motivate, and capture the attention of students.

In response to the challenges of the changing student body, several theories emerged and blossomed onto the education scene in the 1970s and 1980s including Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI). Gardner's theory impacted education, broadening teachers' views on how to teach and reach students. The Multiple Intelligences theory reminded teachers that there was more to teaching than the teaching of subject matter. Teachers were reminded that they were teaching *children* in addition to subject matter. And, teachers were reminded that children entered the classroom with many capabilities which could be brought into the teaching and learning equation. Still, the emphasis of MI remained on how to reach students *in order to* teach the subject areas. Nonetheless, the notion of broadening teaching tools to include learning through the arts was broached.

It was in the 1980s and 1990s when the arts started playing a role in education as a vehicle for learning. Rather than simply as a discipline to be studied (such as learning to play the trumpet or perspective drawing), educators and writers such as myself (Goldberg, 2006) and Karen Gallas (1994) began uncovering and documenting the importance of arts in the classroom as a "language" or mode of communication for children, especially children

whose first language might not be English, and children for whom speaking and writing is enhanced when they can sing, dance, or draw an idea out prior to writing about it or speaking about it.

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The arts reemerged and played a role in what is now referred to as "interdisciplinary" or "integrated" learning, providing learners with strategies to express subject matter through arts-based methods. For example, dramatizing the life cycle of a butterfly to understand it, or drawing from nature to

study ecology. Often this is referred to as "learning through the arts." In fact, the 1997 California Department of Education Publication *Artswork*, outlined five recommendations, and the first was "Literacy in and through the arts," recognizing art as not only a discipline to be studied, but as a tool for the study of other subjects such as science mentioned above. The notion of arts integration stuck, and has been a part of the standards since.

This brings us back to the notion of purposefulness. As a tool for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, arts have a renewed purposefulness within education, namely as a language for teaching and learning. If we can have our cake and eat it too, which is what we should aspire to in educating our children, each child should have access to an education that integrates the arts as well as a chance to learn a specific arts discipline. Integrated or discipline-specific, each are parts of a whole arts education and should not be viewed as an either/or proposition. Furthermore, the purpose of arts education should be tied directly to the potential to educate a child to become an engaged, knowledgeable, and compassionate

citizen who will contribute to his or her community, as it was when public education was first developed in the United States.

Unfortunately, since testing has become such an entrenched staple of education, discipline-specific learning is a difficult nut to crack open. Teachers and schools are held accountable to test scores in disciplines to the detriment of focusing on an educational philosophy that prepares students intellectually, morally, and physically. Instead, the system forces them to be concerned with math and language arts standardized test scores.

There is no better time than now to restore a balance to our educational system. As our times change, so do our purposes for educating our children. I believe we are past the time when the value (if there was one to begin with) of test scores based on discipline-specific subject matter is so important that it can drive educational strategies. It is time to enter a post-single-subject-disciplinary study and post-test-score era and refocus efforts on educating children to be knowledgeable human beings who love to learn.

It is time for a revolution—in the true sense of the word. Igor Stravinsky, composer and writer, reminded students at Harvard of how his music was considered revolutionary, and before its time by critics (Stravinsky, 1942/1970). “I was made a revolutionary,” he wrote, “in spite of myself” (p.10). Stravinsky pointed out in his lectures, however, that the true definition of revolution means to come back upon itself. It is time for education to come back on itself. Let’s return to the purpose of education and come to consensus concerning the role of arts education.

The arts are an arena that immediately draws students into the learning process and keeps them engaged. When including learning through the arts or about the arts (hopefully both), education becomes revolutionary for our time if our intention is to educate caring, compassionate, engaged, thoughtful, and reflective citizens. Completing a revolution to the standards conceived in the 1830s, music (and I would add the other arts forms as well), provides the educational opportunity to increase intellectual, moral, and physical abilities.

The learning of discrete subject matter will always have a primary role in the educational process, and that includes learning about the disciplines of the arts. The underlying reason for learning subjects, however, is where the revolution can begin. “Art is by essence constructive,” continues Stravinsky. Engaging with the arts, especially under the guidance of trained teachers and specialists, provides the space to students to construct, push boundaries, and expand venues for understanding. No matter what sector of the community each child decides to enter into as a career, I am advocating a revolution in education such that each student has the chance to learn to perform like the musician in Art Pepper’s band who enhances the music. Thus, we as educators provide the next generation of learners the opening to make the world a little better place for us all, one note at a time.

## About the Author

Merryl Goldberg is a Professor of [Visual and Performing Arts at California State University San Marcos](#) (CSUSM) where she teaches courses on Arts & Learning, and Music. She has numerous publications including books, articles, chapters, and editorials. She is the recipient of many grants including a joint Spencer and John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur grant, Fulbright-Hays Foundation grants, and California Arts Council grants relating to her work with arts in the schools. Prior to entering academia, she was on the road for 13 years playing the saxophone and making recordings with the Klezmer Conservatory Band.

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