

*In light of Maxine Greene's paper, 'The Artistic-Aesthetic Curriculum' discuss the view that art has only a minimal role to play in education.*

In this essay, I will discuss the statement that “art has only a minimal role to play in education”. I will explain the role of art as a subject. I will elucidate the positive effects that art has on a developing mind and their personal advancement. Why, as a subject, does it always seem to be looked down upon or not seen as important as the rest of the curriculum?

An education with minimal artistic input, is an education that is focused more on vocation. To prepare children for a world of employment by having them memorise facts and historical dates, learn woodwork, science, metal work skills or study algebra and combinatorics. Who needs to appreciate the aesthetic when you are working twelve hours on a production line anyway? But art can and does have an effect on all subjects. To learn to see artistically is to open the mind to new worlds of possibility. Or not, if you were to listen to Plato...

*Art can never truly represent reality, for life itself, of which art is merely a copy, does not represent reality, according to Plato. Our world “...as we experience it, is an illusion, a collection of mere appearances like reflections in a mirror or shadows on a wall.” (Quoted by Rosalind Hursthouse in “Truth and Representation,” Philosophical Aesthetics.) [1]*

A long standing debate in philosophy, concerns whether art is a source of knowledge. In Plato's cave allegory, prisoners are chained since childhood, staring at a wall as shadows dance back and forth in front of their eyes. Behind them is the fire and marionettes that produce the shadows on the wall. A prisoner escapes and emerges from the cave into the light. An interpretation of this is that the philosopher is the one who has been freed from the shackles of a constructed reality,

transcending and attaining knowledge of the real world outside the cave. Alternatively, this could also be one educated in the arts. Someone who sees beyond what is in front of their eyes, who is sensitive to the universe without and within.

Plato had little respect for the arts and poetry, yet spoke in allegory's. Is that not the workings of an artistic mind? Using imagination to conjure images to represent a narrative?

Harken back to fifty thousand years ago, where our ancestors put their marks on the walls of caves. Drawing is as natural as speaking, it is a response, an act of interpreting their environment. In every culture, children draw. They draw what they see as important: their parents, their friends, homes, animals, the trees and the sky. Yet drawing is held in less regard than other human faculties.

Drawing and painting gets left behind when a child learns to read and write.

*“The visual language begins to develop in babies as the eye and brain become able to focus, and be able to recognise patterns. Children's drawings show a process of increasing perceptual awareness and range of elements to express personal experience and ideas. The development of the visual aspect of language communication in education has been referred to as graphicacy, as a parallel discipline to literacy and numeracy. The ability to think and communicate in visual terms is part of, and of equal importance in the learning process, with that of literacy and numeracy. The visual artist has developed the ability to handle the visual language to communicate ideas. This includes both the understanding and conception and the production of concepts in a visual form.” [II]*

With the development of a curriculum for schools, the artist, philosopher or scientists involvement is only to be found in the text that the pupils have to memorise or in the lessons that the teachers are familiar with. This type of curriculum can encourage apathy and boredom.

The arts then are substantive to a child's education. Frank Hodson writes, "*they involve thinking and problem-solving as well as expression; they require the learning of visual, aural, and spatial languages. A knowledge of them is needed to see and hear, as well as to read and write; it is also needed to express nonverbal concepts.*" [III]

According to a report by the Economic and Social Research Institute on behalf of the Art's Council, "*It found that, by age 13, children who participate in artistic and cultural activities have an improved "academic self-image", along with reduced anxiety, better academic skills and fewer socio-emotional difficulties.*" . [IV]

So if the experts or analysts consider art to be an important process in the development of a person, why is it so horribly funded in schools? Teachers in some schools pay for their own materials so that the children have access to paper and paints. Some teachers spend their own free time running after-school programs because the current timetable isn't accommodating enough to give children time to work on drawing or painting skills. A regular secondary school class is forty minutes, a double is eighty minutes. In those allotted times, the teacher has to have a roll call, settle down the children and after, have the children clean up after themselves. Desk space is another issue as in most schools, pupils have to work on small tables with A3 size paper. This does not allow for a creative environment.

In *The Arts and the Creation of Mind, What the Arts Teach and How It Shows* (2002) Elliot Eisner outlines 'Ten Lessons the Arts Teach'.

- 1. The arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships.*
- 2. The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution.*
- 3. The arts celebrate multiple perspectives.*

4. *The arts teach children that in complex forms of problem-solving purposes are seldom fixed, but change with circumstance and opportunity.*
5. *The arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what we can know.*
6. *The arts teach students that small differences can have large effects.*
7. *The arts teach students to think through and within a material.*
8. *The arts help children learn to say what cannot be said.*
9. *The arts enable us to have experience we can have from no other source.*
10. *The arts' position in the school curriculum symbolises to the young what adults believe is important. [V]*

Underfunding the Arts is detrimental for a free-thinking society. A society without the Arts leads to ennui and despair amongst the masses. When you mention art, the hoi polloi automatically think that its something as lofty or high brow as a painting by the Old Masters or some strange abstract sculpture, but its the foundation of our world...from the naturally occurring patterns that can be found in nature, the Golden Ratio that inhabits the Universe to the man-made objects that were designed with the use of thinking and drawing. Art is everywhere.

Incorporating the arts into state-provided education in Ireland began with the publication in 1979 of *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education*, generally known as the Benson Report. In this report, Ciaran Benson puts forth the upmost importance of art as a core subject, realising that not only is it beneficial to the child in learning to appreciate the aesthetic but it also prepares them for a future where audio and visual are the dominant forms of communication.

*“The visual artist or the musician does not seek to communicate in the modes that are most familiar to children i.e., words or perhaps numbers. The child looking at, listening to or even reading a work*

*of art needs to develop the necessary sensitivities to derive the meanings and intentions of the artist. An education in the arts can provide one of the best opportunities for training in the skills needed to interpret the complex situations so frequently presented or re-presented by today's forms of mass-communication. This is an obviously valuable skill, and particularly so in a culture which is increasingly dependent for communication on audio-visual media.” [VI]*

As of 2018 a revised Leaving Cert has been introduced that will help students focus on the process involved in art; the notebooks, scrapbooks, primary and secondary sources and research that help build towards an end goal. Students will be encouraged to analyse and reflect upon the mistakes that are made or the ideas that just won't work. These are the places that serendipity resides and new ideas grow. As Maxine Greene states, *“The test, finally, in in the aesthetic experiences we can make possible, the privileged moments through which we can enable our students to live. There must be attending; there must be noticing; at once, there must be a reflective turning back to the stream of consciousness - the stream that contains our perceptions, our reflections, yes, and our ideas.” [VII]*

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