

THE ARTS: WHO NEEDS THEM?  
THE ARGUMENT FOR PUBLIC/PRIVATE SUPPORT  
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SESSION FOCUS

- Are the arts an add-on or essential? As arts professionals, there should be only one answer.
- How best to frame the argument so the arts are seen as essential and a public benefit to be supported?
- How to frame the argument so that the meaning the arts bring to our lives is as essential as what food is to the hungry? That the PROCESS of creating and experiencing the arts can be essential and transforming?

We often hear:

- You are taking food from the mouths of children—that should be the priority.
- I love the arts/collect art/saw Dolly Parton just last month, I just don't want my tax dollars supporting them.
- The arts aren't for me, they are for the elite.

YET AS ARTS ENTHUSIASTS WE HAVE A DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE:

- What was your first experience in the arts?
- Where? How old were you?
- What do remember the most?
- What was a recent experience you had with the arts?
- What made it memorable?

AND THE ARTS HAVE A POWERFUL EFFECT:

Picasso's *Guernica* gained a monumental status. When completed, *Guernica* was displayed around the world in a brief tour, becoming famous and widely acclaimed. This tour helped bring the Spanish Civil War to the world's attention. As early as 1968, Franco had expressed an interest in having *Guernica* return to Spain. However, Picasso refused to allow this until the Spanish people again enjoyed a republic. He later added other conditions, such as the restoration of "public liberties and democratic institutions". Picasso died in 1973. Franco, ten years Picasso's junior, died two years later, in 1975. After Franco's death, Spain was transformed into a democratic constitutional monarchy, ratified by a new constitution in 1978. However, MOMA was reluctant to give up one of their greatest treasures and argued that a constitutional monarchy did not represent the republic that had been stipulated in Picasso's will as a condition for the painting's return. Under great pressure from a number of observers, MOMA finally ceded the painting to Spain in 1981.

Imagine: The impact of a single painting!

The Vietnam War Memorial generated more controversy than any work of architecture in recent history. Now, with three million visitors annually, it has been a site of national healing.

After 9/11, it seemed everyone responded to the tragedy with works of art, from handmade shrines, to poems, to performances.

And our own government responded to a past economic crisis with art, with the 1934 Federal Arts Project, which provided jobs for more than 5,000 people and created more than 225,000 works of art for Americans.

Do the arts help with social skills? Go on Google, where there are more than 39 million citations on “Arts and Social Skills.”

Do the arts help build job skills?

- According to the S&P 500, intangible assets like employee talent, innovation and “engaged” employees account for 80% of the company’s value
- The cost of the “disengaged employee” costs the American economy as much as \$350 billion a year in lost productivity, according to the Gallup Organization

How do the arts help?

There are more than 5.3 million references on Google to “Arts and Aid in Job Readiness” and the skills the arts teach:

- Passion/engagement
- Critical thinking/problem solving
- Oral and written communication
- Teamwork/cooperation
- Creativity/Innovation

But we’re in trouble: 81% of corporate executives say they consider creativity an essential skill, yet only 21% reported excellence in this area among recent college graduates, according to a study by the Conference Board/Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.

What skills do the arts teach---according to eminent arts educator, Elliot Eisner, who documented the following skill mastered by those who participated in arts training:

- How to notice the world.
- How to use imagination to explore new possibilities.
- To feel comfortable with ambiguity/uncertainty.
- To think metaphorically and to use language to communicate meaning
- To self-reflect.
- Commitment/discipline/focus/engagement

You say---others say---so? I don’t want to be an artist, or want my kid to be one.

Neither do these folks, yet they tell us that their training in the arts prepared them the best for what they are doing now:

- CEO Clarence Otis of Darden Restaurants...”Theatre prepared me the most for what I do...it was the starkest lesson in how reliant you are on others.”
- “Rob”, VP of Admissions at local College: Theatre... truly defined me as an individual in many, many ways ,from my ability to talk with anyone to getting up on a stage and addressing a crowd. “

- Jenny, Adm. Aide: I had my first art class at age of 21...it was life altering. I don't consider myself an artist, but I love picking up a paintbrush and some oil paints and "diving" into a white canvas." Jenny spends what discretionary income she has by joining numerous art museums and attending free and when possible, paid performances, and writing about them on her blog.
- Karla, Financial Research: "I grew up playing all kinds of instruments, and getting my degree in Theatre at NYU. My training truly helps me every day. It taught me that you cannot focus on trying to make everyone like you – you have to have confidence in yourself and your abilities and understand that if some love your work, some may hate it equally – but better to be true to yourself and delight some of the crowd than to compromise yourself by trying to please everyone."

And these donors aren't artists either:

- *Mary*: "I love going to performances and being entertained, and appreciating the talents of others. It's not like a football game or basketball, where you want your team to win. When I enjoy a musical, I just enjoy being with my friends, and am in awe of the talented people on stage. Also, when you elevate the arts, you provide valuable educational experiences to children across the Valley. Supporting the arts reinforces a family's philanthropic values."
- *Bob*: "The arts are the glue that makes us civilized and human"
- *Wright's of Seattle*: "A lot of people get involved with the arts for civic reasons, business reasons, but what the hell? Whatever the reason, it's good they are there!"

What are the consequences of NOT making the arts essential?

- The 9/11 Commission cited "...The lack of Imagination Led to Failure to Prevent 9/11 Attacks." Commission Chair Thomas Keane said, "...what we needed to do was to take our clues from artists and authors, to help us conceive of such a catastrophic event."

Hurricane Katrina....report cites "Empathy was lacking from officials and policy makers in dealing with Hurricane Katrina," says a report from New Orleans Times-Picayune

- "The lack of empathy led to a lack of adequate planning to help those with no car, no bus fare, no family outside the city..."

Can the arts help prevent war? An award winning professor James Thompson uses theatre to resolve conflicts, from prisons to war zones.

- "Theatre's dual nature," says professor James Thompson, "can resolve conflicts, lead to greater self-esteem, and provide positive benefits... but it's also beautiful, sometimes scary, and aesthetically interesting in its own right."

What could happen **IF** the arts were supported throughout our schools and communities?

"Imagine if a city invested in raising the next generation of active and creative young people--- just like it invests in streets or parks or good government---what that could mean for every child's learning and development?"

- BigThought /Thriving Minds in Dallas does that---not just for the few or gifted, but all 156 elementary schools are involved in the program, with ongoing, measurable results that show more than a 70% improvement in active learning behaviors, including self-evaluation and curiosity. Reading, math and science scores have improved more than 50%.

- In 1997, Thriving Minds began working with over 50 arts and cultural organizations and their teaching artists to integrate the arts into the instructional practices of thousands of Dallas public school teachers. In 2007, the program was formalized with support from the Dallas Superintendent and City Manager.
- Artists have augmented instruction as art specialists, and also have been added into the City's after-school programs.
- City Manager Mary Suhm: "Better students have more opportunities and these opportunities lead to a stronger workforce."
- The partnership uses arts, culture, and creativity in "Creative Integration in Schools, Fine art Instruction in School and Creative Learning Out of School Time."
- The results: more engaged students, with greater levels of comprehension, who display better verbal and problem-solving-skills, are curious, imaginative, and more cooperative. How is this measured: In addition to testing, a cadre of parent-volunteers are taught to observe students in action, and to measure more subjective attributes, from social engagement to how a child approaches problems or conflicts. These volunteers turn into passionate and determined advocates to keep the arts programs alive in schools and after-school programs.

Conclude:

- How does your personal experience relate to the "real world" of business/education/social settings?
- Why is your organization's mission relevant to how the "real world" works?
- What do you consider the most important reason for someone to support your organization?