

DATE: MARCH 19, 2012

SUBMISSION TO: OCDSB EDUCATION COMMITTEE

FROM: ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE ARTS

RE: ROLES OF THE ARTS IN OCDSB STRATEGIC PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The literature on the contributions that arts learning can make in the achievement and fulfillment of the OCDSB Strategic Plan is significant. The implication for OCDSB action is to intensify in-service education in the arts for regular classroom teachers, in Grades 1 – 6.

This summary report offers suggestions that particularly relate to student well being and to student creative and critical thinking. In addition, the literature cited below suggests that arts learning enhances a balance of orientations and intelligences related to felt-knowledge (the balance between thought and feeling) and to the fundamental unity of mind, heart and body that is at the foundation of all learning by all students in all schools.

BACKGROUND:

This report results from requests from the Education Committee and the Director for periodic research summaries in arts education that may relate to current Board initiatives. The ACA accepts that part of its role in advising the Board on arts education policy issues, is to provide summaries of current research that may inform enlightened policy and program decisions that support all the arts, for all students in all schools. All of the research summaries quoted here, refer to American education as Canadian studies are too small for statistically valid conclusions.

The Arts: 21st Century Skills Map:

This summary is the product of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (www.P21.org) that offers specific evidence in support of the arts at the centre of all curriculum design. The recommendations result from 470 different studies carried out in 37 states, involving about 65,000 students, at all school ages. The general evidence points to the engagement of students from enlightened arts instruction in dance, drama, music and visual arts in all schools studied.

The conclusions include a recommendation for all the arts to be placed at the core with all academic subjects. The articulation of new learning skills and learning orientations for the 21st Century, can be powerfully met with enhanced arts experience throughout the education lives of students. Creativity in exploration and expression are seen as increasingly valuable skill sets in the current century and can be most poignantly met through enlightened exposure in the arts. “The development of globally aware, collaborative and responsible citizens is a primary benefit of study in the arts” (p.2).

Critical skills development are finely tuned by arts experiences through the emphasis on sensitivity to non-verbal media, interpretation of media symbols and acceptance of multiple forms of human communication, often simultaneously. Specific evidence cited include topics related to Critical Thinking and Problem-solving; Communication; Collaboration; Creativity; Innovation; Information Literacy; Media Literacy; Flexibility and Adaptability; Initiative and Self-direction; Social and Cross-cultural Skills; Productivity; Leadership and Responsibility.

Online Colleges – Studies on the Arts in Education:

This compendium of research relates to the issue of well being; particularly the reduction in drop outs and co-operation/collaboration in school settings. There are examined, 10 major studies, each supporting different aspects of well being data that is favourably influenced by enlightened arts experiences in schools. Some of the studies include: Arts Education Partnership (2002), which concluded that social skills and motivation for all learning were enhanced by insightful arts programming. The evidence pointed to particular improvements in schools from socio-economically impoverished areas. Project Zero, at Harvard University, (2007), in the longest ongoing research tracing project in the US (23 years), concluded that the central value of arts education was the development of insights and skills unique to the arts and that the resulting aesthetic literacy added to the glue that made school meaningful for students.

The Rand Corporation (2005) concluded that disadvantaged students exposed to quality arts experiences in schools, significantly improved in most indicators of well being, including socialization, balanced mental, emotional and physical health, feelings of inclusion and valuing of alternative learning insights and skills. The Centre for Arts Education (2009), published their 6 year study of student achievement and well being in New York City schools, with primary conclusions that suggested positive co-relationships between participation in the arts and motivation for remaining engaged in their schooling with resulting lower rates of delinquency and truancy.

John Hopkins University researchers have just published “Neuroeducation: Learning, Arts and the Brain” (2011), which asserts that positive arts experiences improves general motor control, attention and motivation, as measured by physical brain changes. Also, attention concentration generally was shown to be greatly improved by focused arts instruction. Preliminary conclusions include a life balancing tendency in school and beyond, associated with quality arts exposure.

Arts Education Partnership:

This is a national agency for articulating trends in current arts education research literature that has policy implications for arts curriculum design, development and implementation. Some of their recent highlights (Dec., 2011) include a 2010 summation, following analysis of the exhaustive Catterall Report of 1999, indicating strong pro-social outcomes from deliberate arts instruction, especially for ESL learners, socio-economically challenged school populations and “learning disabled” identified students. The AEP also provides a summary of commentary on arts education, including a recent publication by

Ruppert (2010), suggesting from the literature, a strong co-relation between creativity, innovation and direct arts education.

CONCLUSIONS:

All of the research findings refer to arts education as being thoughtfully and imaginatively taught by regular classroom teachers or those teachers working in partnership with specialist teachers and/or other community contributors. But the ultimate responsibility for the quality of those experiences is within the hands of the regular teacher. The study groupings cited, all point to the importance of equity of access to all of the arts by all students in the study range. All curriculum policy implications imply an equality of opportunity for all students in all of the arts.

Reference is regularly made to arts programs that are taught with enthusiasm, knowledge and commitment. Teachers must be motivated to accept the vital importance of the arts to basic educational values so that students feel that their engagement in the arts is as vitally important as engagement in all other aspects of school. The teacher remains the key variable.

The literature summaries spotlighted in this report support, among other values and beliefs, the centrality of the arts to overall student well-being and in being at the foundation for enhancement of creative and innovative thinking as well as parallel skills in critical thinking.

In general, those elements of the OCDSB Strategic Plan that are concerned with equity, engagement, leadership, creative and critical thinking development, and community involvement, are central to all enlightened arts programming and to the objectives and actions of the ACA.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The OCDSB should examine how effective opportunities in all of the arts, to all of our students, in all of our schools can be ensured.
2. The OCDSB should examine how best to ensure that all regular classroom teachers, Grades 1 – 6, can provide meaningful instruction in all of the arts or the arts as a whole.
3. The ACA recommends re-examination of how best to use the “networking” model and instructional coaches, in the provision of the most effective possible in-service education in the arts for all Grade 1 – 6 teachers.
4. The ACA recommends that all separate arts subjects, taught in Grades 7 – 12, are taught by OCT qualified teachers.

The arts cannot be viewed as icing on the cake. They must be a vital component of the cake itself.

REFERENCES:

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