

## Viewpoint

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### **The Arts, Post-Secondary Institutions, Learning and Living\***

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It is more than a little depressing to realize that we are still discussing the subject of the role of the arts in general education. One would have thought after the last 20 years of explosive development in the performing and visual arts in Canada that this debate would long have been laid to rest.

Indeed, Mavor Moore put it rather well when he suggested:

It would be more to the point if our legislature would launch a study of the impact on our young people of artistic deprivation during the years when their sense of the "real world" is being developed.

It is now some 20 years since the special project panel of the American Council for Arts stated:

... this panel supports the concept of basic education but maintains that the arts properly taught are basic to individual development since they, more than any other subject, awaken all the senses—the learning pores. We endorse a curriculum which puts basics first because the arts are basic, right at the heart of the matter. And we suggest not that reading be replaced by art, but that the concept of literacy be expanded beyond work skills. The arts provide unique ways of knowing about the world and should be central to learning for this reason alone.

But it is also significant that arts education can influence two elements of human behavior which concern every teacher: discipline and motivation.

As a *Harvard Report on General Education in a Free Society* stated some 36 years ago:

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... precisely because they wear the warmth and color of the senses the arts are probably the strongest and deepest of all educative forces.

And why do the arts receive so little attention? Perhaps it is because of the nature of the schooling system, based as it is on an industrial model in which external discipline is given pre-eminent place. Teachers and principals like quiet classrooms. Secondly, because it is so subjective and personal it is very hard to make judgments about artistic things. It certainly doesn't work well in a system devoted to objective testing, especially tests that can be marked by computers.

As well, there is a sense that the teachers feel very much less at home in non-linear, non-print-oriented knowledge areas. The effect of television is also apparent. Having first-class performances in music, theatre and visual arts on constant display makes teachers even less anxious to put themselves at threat before a class of students. At least in the elementary school the reticence and nervousness of teachers is the main problem that must be addressed by the teacher-education programs.

Ironically until very lately it was believed that the arts would be merely the icing on the cake as it did not seem to most people that there would be jobs on stage and in art galleries, etc. for graduates of fine arts programs. The irony of this position can be seen in the fact that the arts sector of our economy has grown more rapidly over the last decade than practically any other.

We are finally getting a few good statistics in the fine arts, which include performing arts, and it appears that compared to the 20 largest manufacturing industries during 1980, the "arts industry" was the eleventh largest in Canada with a revenue of \$7 billion. It was the fourth largest with full time equivalent employment of 146,000. It was the sixth largest with salaries and wages of \$2.3 billion. One must read these statistics knowing that 66 per cent of all expenditures in the cultural sector are in salaries and wages, whereas in the 20 large manufacturing industries only 20 cents on the dollar is spent on salaries and wages. When one adds to that the fact that the average wage in manufacturing was \$22,057 in 1982 (twice as high as the performing arts) it becomes apparent that the arts were six times more efficient in creating jobs than the manufacturing sector in that year. One could say that it costs \$102,982 in revenues to support one job in manufacturing, but only \$17,164 to create a job in the performing arts. All these statistics are not being wasted on governments that are obsessed with the level of unemployment in our post-industrial society.

And of course that is the very point, we have now moved into the post-industrial society. The arts represent the emphasis on communication. That is what artists are all about—they are solving problems (not decorating rooms or titillating the senses) and they are communicating through movement, sound, word, form, texture, *et al*—the realities of our society. And yet we still are asking why the arts receive so little attention in the general education sector.

Certainly one of the most obvious reasons is that these perceptions are translated into action very slowly in our schools. By definition, educational systems are at least two or three decades behind societal reality. We are still operating a schooling system which is not far different from the one that we ourselves attended and quite frankly most of us like it that way.

The irony of this discussion at a time when vocational education is receiving such attention is that one of the major ways by which we can save our dollar and restore our economy is through the tourism industry. We have lost our hold on world tourism by a factor of some 50 per cent since the early 1970s. The tourism industry is one of the most labour-intensive activities in our economy and that represents hundreds of thousands of jobs that have been lost as a result of our belief that people wanted to come to Canada to see mountains, trees, lakes, and rocks, when in fact they wanted to experience far more than that. They wanted to know what Canadians felt about human relationships, about world peace, about the environment, indeed what wisdom we had accumulated on the questions of being human. These are the very subjects that our authors, our playwrights, and our composers are expounding and yet we continued to advertise mountains, rocks and trees. Further they wanted to know what talents we had to express these ideas in our theatres, art galleries, concert halls and museums. Thus art enthusiasts find themselves in a position of being able to beat the opposition at its own game. If it's jobs that education is all about (a position I find most unattractive) then in fact teaching the liberal and fine arts is one way of getting at the problem.

I think there was one period in which the arts were damaged by some simple-minded perception that these activities were related in some way to the leisure society. In this way we managed to let people think that teaching music, dance, painting and sculpture in the schools had something to do with the "bread and circuses" necessary in a society unable to keep people employed. Thus we trivialized and demeaned the arts in a way that most artists found humiliating—and were unprepared when the leisure society did not emerge as expected.

Strangely enough in the area of adult or continuing education the arts have revealed their real meaning. Whether we like it or not a very large number of people go to the theatre instead of attending night courses. They find their intellectual and spiritual resuscitation in the concert hall and the dance theatre rather than in the lecture hall. Perhaps it is those who are in the lecture halls who also go to the theatres and concert halls. I suspect that is also the case. The point I'm making however, is that the performing and visual arts represent the most intense, on-going, accessible and, I think, meaningful form, of continuing education that one can find in our society. It was for this reason that Roby Kidd, that extraordinarily prescient educator, turned his attention decades ago to the question of the arts as an educational force. He put a great deal of his energy into his support of the National Film Board and the development of the film awards for recognition of achievement in that area. Roby Kidd and, more lately, Alan Thomas who has realized the importance of

the CBC not as an entertainment and current events medium, but as an educational tool. Alan Thomas, as a director and as a President of the Canadian Association for Adult Education, developed new and exciting ways of using the CBC through a national, interactive program on current issues called, "People Talking Back". In so doing, he was building on the unique adult education initiatives of the CAAE in public broadcasting. "Farm Forum" and "Citizen's Forum", were initiatives that made Canadian adult educators world renowned. Very recently it was the CAAE which supported David Suzuki's efforts to point out the problems of the quality of our environment in his series on CBC, "Planet for the Taking". The CAAE is behind an organization called Friends of Public Broadcasting who are trying to bring attention to the way in which the CBC's capacity to be an education instrument is being eroded day by day in this country.

Having addressed the question of the arts in the state schooling system and the public sector, allow me to turn to post-secondary institutions. Fine arts departments, and activity in music, theatre, and the visual arts have developed enormously over the past couple of decades. Indeed, the university in many communities is the focus for the arts. It is a service which many universities and colleges provide to the community and needs to be recognized. I am personally aware of the effect which the coming of Trent University and later Sir Sandford Fleming had on the development of the arts in the city of Peterborough. The Guelph Spring Festival, a gathering of artists and arts groups to present entertainment at a world-class level has come about because of the work of Murdo McKinnon and the University of Guelph. The effects of Lakehead on music and theatre in Thunder Bay and Laurentian on visual arts in Sudbury have been crucial. Queen's and Waterloo are making comparable contributions to the Kingston and Kitchener areas. More lately, post-secondary institutions have been putting their attention to the question of arts administration and the work of John Stubbs in the University of Waterloo has been outstanding. However, I would suggest that if the arts are given minimal attention in the public school system they are still somewhat peripheral at the post-secondary level. Too often when cutbacks take place they take place in the area of the department of fine arts in the staffing and quality of the art galleries or museums associated with the university. This signals the fact that the university still sees education as a library- and lab-oriented activity, at a time when theories of left and right brain development are demonstrating that knowledge acquired by all the senses plays a more efficient part in the process of learning than we had ever realized.

It is also important that universities take a stand and influence society to recognize the arts as more associated with learning than with entertainment. Unfortunately our newspapers contribute to the confusion by listing serious plays and symphony concerts on the same page as the most ridiculous drivel under the heading "Entertainment". It means that the university becomes a major force in public acceptance of the fact that plays being written in Canada about Canadians are exploring major issues such as the plight of minority

groups—the economically disadvantaged, the physically handicapped, native people, and yes, even the problems of women in our society. Alexina Louie, a major force in Canada among Canadian composers, recently had a premiere of her piece, “The Eternal Earth”, by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Her comment about the work was that it was “at once my plea for the continuation of life on earth and a celebration of the joys of the universe.” In fact one could say that the arts represent the research and development sector of our society in the very same way that a research and development office is at the forefront of any mature and effective industrial development, indeed, in the same way that universities argue with governments that their research deserves as much attention as their teaching.

That might well be the major *raison d'être* of an increased emphasis on the arts at the post-secondary level. The arts are about creativity. If there is anything that will make life tolerable in the days ahead it is a recognition that creativity is what being human is all about. There is a desperate need for us to recognize the importance of this divine spark if we are to survive on this planet and if our lives on this planet in the so-called “technological society” are to have any meaning. That is exactly what Robert Fulford meant when he wrote:

Computers came into the world advertised as the helpers of humanity. In no time they become the governors of humanity—machines can now judge human clerks not only on how many transactions they make in a day, but on how many keystrokes they make in a minute. No one, in the Communist or capitalist worlds, has yet even theorized about a way to offset this new tyranny. The only thing to do is endure it.

Endure it, that is—and hope that the artists can help us. The artists and their supporters should stop asking for support on the grounds that they contribute to the economy (tourism, job creations, etc.) and begin to tell the simple truth—that they, and they alone, possess the inherent ability to assert in the world an element that is unmanaged, unadministered, illogical, emotional and supremely human. That's the purpose of art in our world now, art has never been more precious.

At a lower level it is creativity which will allow us to compete in that technological society. We are just beginning to understand that the same dynamic which drives the Japanese to produce extraordinarily fine musicians and methods of teaching (the Suzuki method) also fuels their creativity in management and production techniques. They know that having national “treasures” who are artists and craftsmen symbolizes a point of view which enhances their economy. If post-secondary institutions have to justify all of their activities in the name of a more prosperous national economy then that is one argument which might be usefully made.

I think the time is long past when universities have to argue that a truly educated person is one who has addressed the meaning of life outside the world of books and manuscripts. However, in a society in which we are seeing

technical stress, in which we are seeing the effect on our writing and reading of word-processors, and seeing our thinking and planning being molded by computers—it is surely time for the fine arts to be seen as central in our post-secondary institutions.

This means finding ways by which those who are in our liberal arts programs and our professional programs have some connection with the arts. One becomes very distraught when one sees the level of debate when professions make their arguments for more attention and more remuneration. One comes very quickly to the realization that there are such things as uneducated doctors and virtually illiterate lawyers. Certainly one comes to the conclusion that the sensitivities and compassions which the arts encourage have little place in the training of our engineers, our technologists and our technicians. That is very sad because technology without “a human face” can create havoc on our planet. If there are people in this room who believe that we can have a continuing arms race without a Chernobyl-like future I am surprised indeed. The technology of space exploration is not dissimilar to that of weapons delivery—and we are all sitting on the flight deck of the Challenger. Universities have made an extraordinary contribution through Writers-in-Residence programs. Few authors in this country can survive on the proceeds of their writing and having the time to write and do a little teaching and consulting has made a major difference. It would be fascinating to know how many books have been written in Canada, at least in part, because a university has reached out to an author at a critical point in his or her career, and provided support.

But, don't we also need dance-companies-in-residence, chamber-orchestras-and choirs-in-residence? The school experience in London, Ontario is enriched because Gerald Fagan is given time to work with external choirs as a part of his role at Fanshawe College. This fall, the Young Company of Stratford will spend six weeks on the Waterloo campus. What an opportunity for the interaction of artists and scholars.

“Artists and scholars”—how easily the two words trip off the tongue. Yet rarely do they seem to act as allies when indeed they are so often cast as wanderers in an alien land.

The revolutionary changes which must inevitably come if we are to save the planet and ourselves, will emerge from the freedom of the mind to which the university is devoted and the unfettered liberty of the artist. It behooves the university and, indeed, the college to recognize and celebrate that reality.

I think it is the responsibility of universities, and post-secondary institutions who are concerned with the training of teachers, to use all their influence in creating a new wave of instructors who see the kind of educational experience every child will need in order to cope with the technological society and see the arts as central to that capacity to cope. I am quite aware of the effect of departments and ministries of education across this country, but I think that the universities do have influence and can exercise that influence.

**Jeanne Sauvé put it well in speaking at the 25th Anniversary of the National Theatre School:**

(At the National Theatre School), young people with a taste for adventure and the challenges of the stage have learned an art of great importance to the intellectual life of a nation. Theatre, which shows us life from a new perspective, reveals its mysteries or broadens it through introspection is more than entertainment. It is humanity's mirror and conscience; it bears witness to our qualities and our weaknesses. It seeks out, in the depths of our souls, the feelings and motives we keep hidden. By amplifying and stylizing these feelings and motives, its characters, whether they laugh or cry, throw a spotlight on the psychology, life and history of human beings everywhere, past and present. It in turn exalts, judges, denounces, praises or condemns. It forces us to reflect. Through intimate analysis or high drama, it seeks the truth. Its power lies, as has so often been pointed out, in the catharsis it provides, in its feeling of repressed passions. It takes us out of ourselves, shows us situations with which we can identify. At times, it makes us feel the pain of tragedy; at other times, it relaxes us or invites us to share an easy laugh or an easy cry.

Can anything more be said? I think not.