Perceptions of Value and Perceived Strengths of Arts Education During an Age of Accountability: Conditions and Qualities That Shape a Citizenry - Implications for Leadership

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Abstract
This research examines the perceptions of arts education during periods of educational efficiency and accountability focusing specifically on the arguments made by advocates for the value of arts education within the Chicago area. It is intended to help leaders understand how we can learn from our past through revealing cyclical behaviors that can guide future decisions about how best to lead a school.

This study utilized a mixed methodology of historical documentary with oral history to compare two distinct time periods in education focusing on schools that operated in opposition to the norms of the time. Historical documentary was used to study The University of Chicago Laboratory School, led by John Dewey during the efficiency movement of the Progressive Era. Oral history was used to study three Chicago area recipients of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as Schools of Distinction during the current era of educational accountability.

The oral history collected at each school site involved interviews with four leaders that served as a voice of advocacy and support for arts education. The participants were asked to articulate the effect that continuing to embrace arts education has had on their school as well as beliefs that have driven their action as it pertains to sustaining arts programming.

Data collected from historical documents and interviews was analyzed for themes amongst leaders' attitudes and beliefs. Comparing and contrasting the oral histories of the Schools of Distinction with The Laboratory School brought clarity to the value of maintaining a focus on an education that supports the arts.

This study concluded that education responds to prevailing conditions, be it social, political, or economical. Regardless of the time period, qualities we desire to shape our citizenry remain common. Among the most commonly stated are: diversity of talents, curiosity, imagination, creativity, entrepreneurship, and passion.

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Perception in art stands for a complex relation between visual stimuli and a personal understanding of them. It is a theoretical postulate that aims to clarify the relation between artworks and individual opinions and evaluations. Instead of general models of understanding, it is conditioned by numerous factors, including political, social, cultural, gender and racial. It affects how we see art and what meanings we attribute to it, but is also an active factor in artistic creation. There is no difference in how art is perceived today and what factors affect our understanding of it. Our views are still formed by complex influences, and perception is not divested from them. The strength of the situational cues also affects social perception. Some situations provide strong cues as to appropriate behaviour. In these situations, we assume that the individual's behaviour can be accounted for by the situation, and that it may not reflect the individual's disposition. When we judge someone on the basis of our perception of the group to which he or she belongs, we are using the shortcut called stereotyping. Stereotypes reduce information about other people to a workable level, and they are efficient for compiling and using information. It is a means of simplifying a complex world and it permits us to maintain consistency.

During perception of a work of art it not simply informs the addressee, but gives to sense it is emotionally unique—personal character — makes it «my experience, my sense». At high-grade perception there is a spiritual contact of feelings of the artist and feelings of the spectator, there is an aesthetic reaction, «the strengthened work of imagination». The basic pathos of pedagogical process concerns conditions and factors of education the creative person as the teacher-artist. Conditions of formation the art-creative person: creative deposits (talent), impressions of the childhood, environment and family traditions, acquaintance to language of art forms, «museum lessons», «scan» the original works (masterpiece), figures from originals, «imitation» samples.