

THE FUTURE OF ARTS EDUCATION BROADEN, DEEPEN, DIVERSIFY, INTENSIFY

by D. Paul Schafer



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Let's start with the context of arts education. This is because context plays a crucial role in determining the contents of arts education, as it does in virtually all other disciplines and areas of life.

There is no doubt about what the most important factor was in determining the present context of arts education. It was the publication of C. P. Snow's book *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* in 1959. (C. P. Snow, 1959)

In this book, Snow made the case that intellectual life in the western world was divided into two cultures - the artistic-humanistic culture and the scientific culture. This was a real hinderance in coming to grips with the world's most difficult problems at that time according to Snow because the artistic-humanistic culture was given too much attention and the scientific culture too little attention in western countries and their educational systems and institutions.

Snow made such a powerful case for giving much more attention to the sciences and scientific education in the western world that a shift began to occur away from the arts, humanities, and an artistic-humanistic education and towards the sciences and a scientific education. It wasn't long after this that the sciences were treated as "hard subjects" and the arts and humanities as "soft subjects." This was accompanied by an increase in funding for the sciences and a scientific education and a decrease in funding for the arts, humanities, and an artistic-humanistic education in educational institutions in the western world.

If this practice had been confined to education in the western world, Snow's case may not have had the powerful effect it eventually had in determining the present context of arts education. But it was not to be. Not long after this practice was commenced, it became popular in the western world *as a whole*. This was because science was linked to economics, politics, industry, and technology - and therefore the convictions of businessmen, politicians, civil servants, corporations, and governments - that this was the key to solving the world's most difficult problems, much as Snow had proposed. It was also seen by these people, corporations, and governments as the key to returning to the economic age that had begun with the publication of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776 but had been stalled for a long time in the middle part of the twentieth century due to the stock market crash of 1929, the Great Depression from 1929 to 1939, the Second World War from 1939 to 1945, and post-war recovery after that. It was time to get things back on track.

By this time, it was no longer a case of treating the sciences as hard subjects and the arts and humanities as soft subjects. More fundamentally, it was a case of treating the sciences as "**hard activities**" and the arts and humanities as "**soft activities**." Viewing activities in this way was not only becoming firmly entrenched in the minds of businessmen, politicians, civil servants, corporations, and governments, but also in the minds of most citizens. As this happened, the "Snow thesis" - as it was called at that time and is still called today - became a societal phenomenon and not just an educational phenomenon. Hard activities were concerned with "the basics of life" and what life and living were really all about; soft activities were concerned with "the

frills in life," and what life and living were about in people's "spare time." Visualized and dealt with in this way, artistic and humanistic activities were appropriate as leisure-time pursuits, but had little to do with the necessities and essentials of life. Their purpose was to "round people out" and make them more civilized and sophisticated, as well as provide them with the recreation and entertainment they needed to prevent them from becoming bored in life and capable of enjoying their free time more.

When Snow saw what was happening after *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* was published in 1959, he wrote a second book on this subject called *The Two Cultures: And a Second Look: An Expanded Version of the Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* in 1963. (C. P. Snow, 1963) In this book, Snow attempted to explain his case for science and a scientific education in much more detail, as well as to rectify the rift that had developed between the arts and humanities on the one hand and the sciences on the other hand. However, it was too late. The pendulum was swinging away from the arts and humanities and towards the sciences and Snow was powerless to prevent it, as often happens in situations that become polarized like this.

In the years to follow, and especially after the arts and humanities were seen and treated as soft activities and the sciences as hard activities, courses and programs in the arts began to be cut in many educational jurisdictions throughout the world because a lower priority was placed on them in both the curricular and extracurricular sense. This worsened in the final decades of the twentieth century and first decades of the twenty-first century, especially as this practice became more commonplace and entrenched in government departments of education and educational institutions around the world.

As this happened, arts educators found themselves in a very difficult position in more and more countries in the world because they were forced to decide what courses and programs should be terminated and what courses and programs should be maintained. Seen and treated largely as recreational, entertainment, and leisure-time activities - and valued primarily for their economic impact in the economic age people were living in - arts educators had to make the best of a very difficult situation. This was not an easy task to deal with, since the context of arts education was stacked against them. Nevertheless, they fought back, and began to justify arts educational courses and programs not only for their ability to teach students to play musical instruments, paint pictures, act in plays, dance, write, and prepare people generally for enjoying the arts later in life, but also for their ability to address important social and cultural concerns and stimulate people's creativity.

An excellent example of this "added dimension of arts education" was the creation of the "Seoul Agenda" that was produced by delegates at the Second World Conference on Arts Education convened by UNESCO in Seoul, South Korea in 2010. Included among the goals and objectives of the Agenda were:

- Apply arts education principles and practices to contribute to resolving the social and cultural challenges facing today's world;
- Support and enhance the role of arts education in the promotion of social responsibility, social cohesion, cultural diversity, and intercultural dialogue; and
- Affirm arts education as the foundation for balanced creative, cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and social development of children, youth, and life-long learning.

This describes the present context of arts education in most parts of the world today. It is a context that is heavily oriented towards seeing and treating arts education as a soft activity, arts educational courses and programs as soft courses and programs, preparing students for living in an economic age where the arts are valued primarily for their leisure-time capabilities and economic effects, and, more recently, focusing on the ability of arts education to come to grips with socio-cultural issues and stimulate individual and collective creativity.

This context manifests itself most conspicuously in Canada where I live when students in secondary schools talk about the need to take the "six pack" - three sciences and three maths - if they want to get into a good university, receive more job offers, land a better job, bring home a bigger pay cheque, and enjoy a higher material standard of living and quality of life. This is endorsed by many parents who are reluctant to see their children get involved in arts education and especially think about pursuing a career in the arts.

This attitude says a great deal about "the image of the educated person" that is promoted and entrenched in the economic age today. It is an image that is based on the concept of "economic man" or "economic personality." This is a person or personality who is concerned largely with the production and consumption of goods and services and creation of material and monetary wealth - as well as maximizing consumer satisfaction in the marketplace - in order to keep economies functioning effectively and growing at a rapid rate.

The problem with this image is that it is not compatible with the type of individual or educated person who is needed if we are to be successful in coming to grips with the life-threatening challenges that exist throughout the world today. Clearly a new image of the person or personality in general - and the education of the person or personality in particular - is needed to come to grips with these challenges. (D. Paul Schafer and Sal Amenta, 1992)

Fortunately for arts education and arts educators, "**the moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on**" as the Persian poet, Omar Khayyam, said in his poem "The Rubáiyát" that was translated into English by Edward FitzGerald in 1859. Clearly the moving finger is writing and writing a great deal these days, as well as moving on and exposing some exceedingly difficult and dangerous problems in the process.

Over the last few decades, powerful signs have been emitted throughout the world that the economic age is not capable of coming to grips with these problems. Not only is it having a devastating effect on the natural environment and producing colossal inequalities in income and wealth, but also it is not capable of coming to grips with the hostilities and conflicts that have arisen in many parts of the world in recent years as a result of the interaction and intermingling of people, groups, races, cultures, and religions with very different worldviews, values, traditions, customs, beliefs, and ways of life. This is because the economic age is designed to produce goods, services, and material and monetary wealth, and is not designed to come to grips with problems as vast, vital, and multidimensional as this.

To do this, it is necessary to pass out of the economic age and into a cultural age. Not only would a cultural age provide a more effective context for dealing with these and other problems - especially when culture is defined and dealt with in holistic terms as a complex whole or total way of life - but also it would provide a much better context for developing the arts in general and arts education in particular. This is because the principal priority in a cultural age would be to achieve balanced and harmonious relationships between all the different forces, factors, disciplines, and activities that constitute global development and human affairs. Moreover, there has been an inexorable bond and intimate connection between the arts and culture dating back to classical times. (D. Paul Schafer, 2008)

Just as the economic age has an image of the educated person buried deep within it, so does a cultural age. This latter image is concerned with the education of "the whole person" or "cultural personality," and consequently with people who are holistic, centered, creative, altruistic, and humane. (D. Paul Schafer, 2019) This is necessary to achieve more happiness, fulfilment, and spirituality in life, as well as live in harmony with the natural environment and other people, races, religions, countries, cultures, and species. It is also required to develop new worldviews, value systems, mindsets, and modes of behaviour than the ones that exist today, as well as different skills, abilities, and assets if people are to function effectively in a cultural age and this age is to provide an effective context for arts education and other disciplines in the future.

There are many signs that indicate that things are moving in a favourable direction in this regard. One of the most important of these signs is the rapidly evolving realization that the arts in general - and arts education in particular - have an essential role to play at all stages and ages in life, from the earliest years of life to the final days of life. And this is not all. These signs also reveal that the arts and arts education have a key role to play in coming to grips with many different types of illnesses and diseases, such as depression, anxiety, autism, Parkinson's, ALS, Alzheimers, and many others.

What is ironic about this is the fact that the sciences are playing a very important role in this area. This is because they are shedding a great deal of light on the nature and functioning of the human brain, the interaction that goes on between the right and left hemispheres of the brain,

and the necessity of achieving balance and harmony between these two hemispheres if good health and well-being are to be assured.

Scientists involved in Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), for instance, have discovered through scientific research that music provides “a total workout for the brain,” whereas most other activities provide only “a partial workout for the brain.” This is because music stimulates blood flow, the brain, the mind, the body, the senses, and all other human organs and faculties. It also reduces blood pressure and relieves pain, improves sleep, increases motivation and mental awareness, and enhances memory. (6) Added to this are all the scientific studies and empirical experiments being undertaken in this area at the International Arts+Mind Lab of the Brain Science Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine through its “research-to-practice initiatives” and what is called “neuroaesthetics.”

Empirical and scientific findings like this have not only been revealed in music, but also in most other art forms as well. Take the visual arts as another illustration of this. Scientific research has confirmed that paintings enhance many brain functions by having an impact on brain wave patterns and emotions, the nervous system, and increased serotonin levels, as well as neural systems that yield a broad range of additional benefits such as motor skills, creativity, and improved emotional harmony. And this is not all. Research undertaken by Professor Semir Zeki, Chair in neuroaesthetics at University College, London, has revealed that “whether it is a landscape, a still life, an abstract, or a portrait” that people are looking at, “there is a strong activity in that part of the brain that is related to pleasure.” When people look at paintings, and especially beautiful paintings, blood flow increases in certain parts of the brain quite considerably.(7)

These studies, and many others like them, confirm that the arts and sciences - like arts education and science education - are mutually complementary rather than mutually exclusive as well as cooperative rather than competitive when it comes to researching and finding solutions to a whole set of basic human problems and improving people's health and general well-being. In other words, the pendulum has started to swing back towards the centre rather than remaining stuck on one side, just as most people in the arts and probably many people in the sciences have hoped. One organization that knew about this all along and incorporated it into their work is the Scientific Research Institute of Spiritual Development of Man and UNESCO Chair “Spiritual and Cultural Values of Upbringing and Education” at Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian University in Kyiv, Ukraine. This organization has been providing courses and programs, undertaking research, writing about their scientific and artistic findings, convening conferences, and producing informative publications in this area for many years now, thereby enhancing collective knowledge and understanding of the rich cornucopia of artistic and scientific benefits that can and are being derived from this.

Studies and findings like this, and many others that are taking place throughout the world today, confirm that the time is ripe to visualize and deal with arts education in a whole new way in educational systems and institutions around the world.

Rather than cutting back on arts education courses and programs, it is time to broaden, deepen, diversify, and intensify arts education in elementary, secondary, post-secondary, and adult education institutions and learning centres throughout the world. Not only does a cultural age provide a far better context and fit for arts education in this sense, but also it confirms that the arts have a central rather than marginal role to play as “drivers” of cultural activities and “exemplars” of cultural experiences in an age of this type.

Many developments are required in educational systems and institutions around the world if this role is to be realized. One is broadening the scope of arts education, from the traditional performing, exhibiting, and literary arts to the film, photographic, architectural, design, environmental, culinary, material, and language arts, as well as what different countries deem to be art forms in the first place. In Japan, for example, tree-dwarfing and flower-arranging are considered art forms, just as calligraphy is in China and tattooing is in Tanzania. There is an enormous amount to be learned from each and every one of these art forms, and others like them such as the horticultural arts, that appear less frequently on the list but are very important in the diverse and globalized world we are living in today.

What is true for the scope of arts education is also true for artistic styles. This is especially important with respect to what is usually referred to as the “classical arts” and the “popular arts.” Surely the time has come to incorporate the more popular arts into many arts educational curriculums, courses, and programs in the world, such as folk music, folk art, art in public places, street theatre, wall murals, pop music, country music, ethnic dancing, jazz, and so forth. There is a great deal to be learned from these many diverse styles. This can be achieved by understanding the social barriers and class structures that have been created over many centuries that separate these different styles, as well as focusing much more attention on the pedagogical benefits and educational rewards that result from this. As Leonard Cohen, composer of “Hallelujah” said in his popular song “Anthem,” “Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack, a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”

There are also the different genres. If, as the saying goes, “all is known by comparison,” then it makes a great deal of sense to compare and contrast different genres, especially genres in various periods of history and parts of the world. What are the similarities and differences, for instance, between the arts in the ancient, medieval, early modern, and contemporary periods of history in different areas of the world, as well as between musical and visual art genres in different countries of the world during this time? What are the major differences between occidental and oriental art, or, to push this point a bit further, between music as it evolved in England, Germany, France, Spain, Russia, and Japan over the last four hundred years? What do differences here say about other aspects of the cultures of these countries, as well as their different ways of life?

Then there is the creative dimension of arts education. While most arts educational programs around the world are strong in the performing, exhibiting, literary, and presentational side of the arts, they are less strong and often weak on the creative side, largely because less attention has been paid to this particular dimension of the arts in both the historical and contemporary sense. This has been addressed in music education by the Canadian composer, author, and educator, R. Murray Schafer, who worked as a composer in many classrooms in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools in Canada, United States, Europe, and South America. As a composer, he took an approach to music education that was based much more on exploring sound, sounds, and composing music than on melodies, learning to play musical instruments, and performing music. While his approach was strongly resisted at the beginning, the international popularity of his many books on this subject - including *Composer in the Classroom*, *Ear Clearing: Notes for an Experimental Music Course*, *Creative Music Education: A Handbook for the Modern Music Teacher*, and especially *The Thinking Ear: Complete Writings on Music Education* - confirm that there is a great deal to be learned from taking a compositional approach to music education and not just a performing or presentational approach.

In a comprehensive and full-fledged arts education curriculum of the type proposed here, a great deal of consideration would also be given to the multiplicity of ways in which the arts can enhance and enrich our knowledge, understanding, awareness, and appreciation of both the natural world and the human-made world. As far as the natural world is concerned, the mind boggles at how many artistic works have been created that are concerned with this world in all its diverse forms and dimensions, and especially with how it cleans, cleanses, expresses, and manifests itself, creates communication among its myriad different components, and connects everybody and everything in countless ways. There are millions of artistic works that do this, such as the constellation of works that have to do with the sun, moon, stars, sky, planets, landscapes, seascapes, the phases of the day, the seasons of the year, lakes, rivers, streams, forests, mountains, and an infinite number of plants and animals. While these works provide an incredible amount of pleasure in a recreational and entertainment sense - is there anything more enjoyable than listening to Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* in a concert hall or sitting in a living room or study at home? - they also expand our comprehension and affection for the natural world immensely, especially at a time when we are losing contact with nature and the natural environment due to increased urbanization and other factors when this is required more than ever.

This brings us to the human-made world, which is also composed of countless elements, ingredients, and complex entities such as towns, cities, countries, cultures, civilizations, and the universal cultural heritage of humankind. There is a vast reservoir of artistic works that can not only be enjoyed and appreciated here, but also studied in great depth through the arts because the arts teach us a great deal about how past and present generations of people in every part of the world have imprinted and are imprinting their thoughts, ideas, creativity, culturescapes, and beliefs on a very specific piece of the world's geography.

This is especially true for artistic works that are “symbolic” of towns, cities, countries, cultures, civilizations, and the cultural heritage of humankind in the all-encompassing, holistic sense. Just as a picture is worth a thousand words, so are works of art created by painters, playwrights, choreographers, composers, filmmakers, photographers, and so forth. They act as “gateways” to these cultural creations as dynamic and organic wholes and total ways of life that are constantly evolving, mutating, transforming, and transcending.

No person has contributed more to our individual and collective understanding of this miraculous symbolic process and holistic capability than the American documentary filmmaker Ken Burns. He has demonstrated an uncanny knack for selecting works in the arts - as well as certain people, events, and achievements - that are not only significant in their own right, but also highly representative of American culture and the American way of life. This is evident in all of his films, but particularly in such films as *Country Music*, *Jazz*, *Baseball*, *The Civil War*, *The West*, *The Roosevelts*, *The Statue of Liberty*, and *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*. It is impossible to watch these films, and others like them, without learning an enormous amount about American culture as a whole and total way of life.

This is also true for the works of many other American artists, such as Andy Warhol, Jackson Pollock, and Georgia O'Keeffe through their paintings, as well as Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, Irving Berlin, Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, and a host of others through their music and especially such favourites as *The Sound of Music*, “God Bless America,” “White Christmas,” *Appalachian Spring*, *West Side Story*, and many others. Not only do these works transport us into the heart and soul of American culture, but also they convey a great deal about what this culture and way of life are really all about in the all-inclusive sense.

And what is true for American culture and the American way of life is also true for all other cultures and ways of life in the world and the indispensable role the arts and artists play in this symbolic and all-encompassing process. This should be one of the principal goals and objectives of all arts educators and arts educational courses and programs in the future, namely to teach students to construct portraits of their own cultures and the cultures of other countries as wholes through symbolic works of art by their own artists and other artists using this same representative process.

Finally, there is the cultural heritage of humankind. Due to countless technological advances and the work of UNESCO over the last five or six decades, it is now possible for teachers and students in every country and school in the world - as well as at every level of the educational system - to achieve access to and information about virtually every element and item included in this heritage. Not only is this a remarkable achievement at present, but also it promises to be an even more remarkable achievement in the future. This is where the tangible and intangible heritages of all the various countries of the world - historic monuments and sites, cherished urban and rural communities, districts, and hubs, priceless architectural masterpieces, exquisite poems, paintings, stories, songs, and dances, captivating and challenging games, literary heavyweights,

oral traditions, and so forth - come to light and shine brightly in the world. Should this not be an indispensable dimension of all arts educational courses, programs, and curriculums in the future?

While all people would benefit immensely from the type of comprehensive arts education recommended here, it would be particularly helpful to young people and future generations. Through teachers, courses, cellphones, iPads, computers, social platforms, and cultural networks, they will be able to gain access to virtually every historical and contemporary work of art by every artist of any age or stature in the world. My experiences with arts education and studies in culture and cultures over many years have convinced me that artistic, educational, and cultural experiences like these are capable of producing exquisite sensations, powerful images, exciting ideas, and spiritual states that are without equal and border on the sublime and occasionally on the divine. This is something that young people and future generations should think about very seriously and very often because it doesn't carry any risks or dangers and produces countless results and rewards that can be enjoyed, cherished, and capitalized on over a lifetime.

One doesn't have to stretch the mind or imagination a great deal to conjure up the multitude of benefits and opportunities that can be derived by people of all ages and classes all over the world from arts educational courses, programs, and curriculums of the type advocated here. Not only will this enhance their knowledge and understanding of their own culture and the cultures of others - thereby reducing the tensions and conflicts that often arise from the inability to understand the different cultures and civilizations of the world as well as different worldviews, values, behaviors, attitudes, and motivations - but also it will open up an endless array of possibilities to enjoy from an education of this type.

We have progressed with the need to broaden, deepen, diversify, and intensify arts education throughout the world long enough to realize how valuable this would be in terms of coming to grips with some of humanity's greatest problems and most fundamental needs going forward into the future. Not only will this open the doors to a whole new era in the history of the arts and arts education, but also it will come at a time that is of vital importance to humanity and the history of the world.

Endnotes and references

1. C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959). This book was published following C. P. Snow's Rede Lecture on this subject earlier in 1959.
2. C. P. Snow, *Two Cultures and a Second Look: An Expanded Version of The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: New American Library, 1963).

3. D. Paul Schafer and Sal Amenta, 'Image of the Educated Person of the Future.' Paper prepared at the request of the International Bureau of Education in Geneva for distribution at its 43rd Conference on Education in 1992.
4. D. Paul Schafer, *Revolution or Renaissance: Making the Transition from an Economic Age to a Cultural Age* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2008).
5. D. Paul Schafer, *The Cultural Personality* (Oakville, Rock's Mills Press, 2018).
6. Findings like this have also been confirmed by the International Laboratory for Brain, Music, and Sound Research (BRAMS), which was created to "study music as a portal into the most complex aspects of human brain functions." This is also true for the many studies undertaken by Jonathan Burdette, a neuroradiologist at Walk Forest Baptist Medical Centre, who has concluded from these studies that "It doesn't matter if its Bach, the Beatles, Brad Paisley, or Bruno Mars. Your favorite music likely triggers a similar type of activity in your brain as other people's favorites do in theirs."
7. Information on these and many other studies and findings related to the impact of the arts in general and arts education in particular, and especially the functioning of the minds, brains, and thoughts of artists can be accessed on The Healing Power of Arts and Artists website.

This article was written in 2020.

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