

Why study art?

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ARTS AND UBUNTU TRUST'S INTERVENTION IN ART EDUCATION

The World Economic Forum, global challenge insight report, The Future of Jobs, (January 2016) discusses employment, skills and workforce strategy for what is now known as 'the fourth industrial revolution'.

'A revolution more comprehensive and all-encompassing than anything we have ever seen. ...the patterns of consumption, production and employment created by it also pose major challenges requiring proactive adaptation by corporations, governments and individuals.' '...most occupations are undergoing a fundamental transformation.'

In a chapter entitled 'the future of jobs and skills' we are told that '...65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in completely new job types that don't yet exist.' This 'will challenge the skill sets required in both old and new occupations in most industries...requiring an urgent and concerted effort for adjustment.'

'With regard to the overall scale of demand for various skills in 2020, more than one third of all jobs across all industries are expected...to require complex problem-solving as one of their core skills...' 'Overall, social skills-such as persuasion, emotional intelligence and teaching others - will be in higher demand across industries than narrow technical skills such as programming or equipment operation and control. Content skills (which include ICT literacy and active learning), cognitive abilities (such as creativity and mathematical reasoning) and process skills (such as active listening and critical thinking) will be a growing part of the core skills requirements for many industries.

'Overall...a wide range of occupations will require a higher degree of cognitive abilities - such as creativity, logical reasoning and problem sensitivity - as part of their core skill set. 'Not anticipating and addressing such issues in a timely manner over the coming years may come at an enormous economic and social cost for businesses, individuals and economies and societies as a whole.' (1)

In the 1960s the biologist Roger Sperry identified differences in the two hemi-spheres of the human brain. Although the two interact constantly, there has been an overemphasis on left brain activity in the last half century. As Dr Sperry tells us "Our educational system, as well as science in general, tends to neglect the nonverbal form of intellect. What it comes down to is that modern society discriminates against the right hemisphere."

This imbalance was already being addressed by industry 15 years ago when General Motors hired Robert A. Lutz to re-animate its product development; he described his new approach thus: "It's more right brain. It's more creative," ... "I see us as being in the art business," he said, "art, entertainment and mobile sculpture, which, coincidentally, also happens to provide transportation." (2)

The Fine Arts provide a non-verbal language that develops intellectual skills and teaches creative ways of expressing and communicating knowledge. Images present information that has to be teased out, puzzled over, sensed, imagined, felt and pieced together before

the viewer 'gets' the message. Art students become skilled in linear and lateral thinking, develop unusual approaches to problem solving; they learn to watch and wait, to listen, practice empathy and exercise their intuition; they welcome criticism, find inventive ways to communicate, are not afraid of experimenting and are flexible and process-orientated.

Because the arts draw on the non-verbal, non-linear parts of the brain, a student engaged in creative tasks is not held back by rationalisations and fear. They confidently enter a terrain referred to as 'the flow'. When in the flow the person is energised, absorbed, involved, focused, and is happy and productive. Flow promotes mastery of a skill and guarantees enhanced performance. This is why it is sensible to allow a child to explore their interests. This enables a deep learning experience in which their confidence increases and they feel more able to try out unfamiliar challenges. (3)

In a stimulating blog in the Huffington Post, artist Dustin Timbrook argues the merits of a fine art education in finding employment in the future. "It's inherently human to want the objects in our lives to communicate feelings and ideas to us and about us. The constant searching for and assignment of meaning dwells in everyone, but the artist is the person who exercises this muscle regularly enough to control it.' The artist can therefore use this 'muscle' to fit into the job market or create their own employment. He reminds us that 'The person with creative literacy — a basic understanding of the mental, emotional, and sociological tools used for creative thought and communication — is able to find purpose and apply meaning to her world rather than having meaning handed down and purpose assigned to her.'" and adds, rather sensibly, '...we should hone the skill that best ensures adaptability and resourcefulness during times of constant change.' (4)

In 1999 a Report to the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, Washington DC, declared: 'Involvement with the arts provides unparalleled opportunities for learning that enables young people to reach for and attain higher levels of achievement' and ...'the arts should be more widely recognized for their current and potential contributions to the improvement of US education.' (5)

In 2002 the economic and technology policy studies advisory body of the Center for Best Practices of the NGA (the National Governor's Association of the USA), gave the following advice on the impact of arts education on workforce preparation.

'Programs incorporating the arts have proven to be educational, developmentally rich, and cost-effective ways to provide students with the skills they need to be productive participants in today's economy;

Schooling in the arts has cognitive effects that help prepare students for the 21st century workforce;

Research reveals that when young people study the arts they show heightened academic standing, a strong capacity for self-assessment, and a secure sense of their own ability to plan and work for a positive future;

Children who study the arts are four times more likely to participate in a math and science fair; four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement; and three times more likely to win an award for school attendance;

the arts contribute significantly to the creation of the flexible and adaptable knowledge workers that businesses demand to compete in today's economy;

arts education in the classroom can increase art skills while encouraging attitudinal and behavioral changes, such as reduced truancy and reduced dropout rates;

Diverse arts education programs-both in an out of school curricula-have proven to be valuable options for states seeking to develop advanced workforce skills. (6)

In *The Future of Jobs* the World Economic Forum urges educators to remove the artificial dichotomy between the Humanities and the Sciences, and develop skills around emotional intelligence in order to prepare learners adequately for jobs of the future. An example of how potent this could be is exemplified by mathematician Ron Eglash who ignores this dichotomy by using braided hair, basketry and the structure of villages to illustrate the self-organising algorithms of fractals. (7)

The South African experience

In South Africa we find that 'The number of children excelling at maths in matric has fallen steeply since 2008'. (8) 'Most of the metrics we use to determine our progress as a country, such as economic growth and racial transformation, are in fact determined for us by the schooling system. Without significant education policy reform...it is unlikely that we will see improvement in these metrics'. The 'poor quality of most public schools...is the single biggest obstacle to creating a more prosperous and equal society.' (9)

In South Africa the arts are not fostered at school after grade 9. Ironically it is the study of the arts that improves the learner's capacity to achieve cellular learning because both the intellectual and emotional parts of the brain are used to solve problems. It strengthens the acuity of their perception and enhances their critical abilities. In an educational context, young people will experience this fulfilment and enjoyment as part of their school careers, making the entire experience more positive. According to Japanese philosopher, Professor Haruhisa Handa, the study of the arts at school fosters happiness and thus promotes a positive and empowering experience of school in general. Happy pupils learn better and have a more productive disposition towards schoolwork. Research from the US has shown that academic performance progresses significantly in schools where art is well taught and creates a positive, empowering learning environment. This makes school a pleasant place where children really want to learn. (10)

In September 2010 the HSRC in South Africa produced a research report entitled 'An assessment of the visual arts in SA', for the Department of Arts and Culture. It acknowledges the poor infrastructure and proposes key principles to remedy this. These include, among others:

1. Recognition of the importance of building connection and synergy between the urban centres of the industry and the less-resourced and more rural regions of the country; It also stated that 'Any strategy for the development of the visual arts in South Africa will need to have as a fundamental objective the widening of access to the experience of and participation in the visual arts.' and

2. A commitment to achieving greater equity in the sector with regard both to wider access to the enjoyment and benefits that flow from exposure to and participation in the visual arts

for a more diverse cross-section of the population, as well as to achieving the greater empowerment of black and women artists, entrepreneurs and initiatives in the sector.

The report also recommended strengthening the organisational infrastructure that supports the visual arts. (11)

There was an encouraging 'boast' on Facebook recently. A rural drama coach nurtured the talent of a girl from Dinokana Village in Zeerust, who ended up (in March 2016) with an honours degree in Drama from Wits University. (12)

The Trust's experiences through evaluation of its extensive outreach programmes have demonstrated that, given adequate support, it is possible to make this achievement a reality for many others,.

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