

THE UNESCO OBSERVATORY

FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE, BUILDING AND PLANNING

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE REFEREED E-JOURNAL, MULTI-DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH IN THE  
ARTS

**MAX WYMAN**

GUEST EDITOR

## EDITORIAL

It has been a privilege to have been invited to guest-edit the current edition of this journal, on the broad topic of Making the Case for the Arts. We are at a propitious time for reconsidering and, perhaps, restructuring the framework and manner in which the case is presented. The need to find new arguments and evidentiary materials, and new ways to present them, has been of growing concern in recent years to all those interested in advancing the cause of the arts, culture and creativity as a recognized element of social policy and as a significant contributor to the new imagination economy. Arts and culture organizations around the world are having to rethink what they deliver and how they deliver it, in order to accommodate the changing needs and desires and interests of contemporary society. Depending on our location, we can be confronted by deeply entrenched assumptions, deeply conservative systems and deeply protective bureaucracies that are inherently (and perhaps properly) suspicious of change.

The importance of advocacy of this kind (also referred to as public awareness or consciousness-raising) was emphasized at the First World Conference on Arts and Learning in Lisbon in 2005, and by the World Alliance for Arts and Education at its World Creativity Summits of 2007, 2008 and 2009. Both the Road Map that emerged from the Lisbon World Conference and the plan of action for the World Alliance identify advocacy as one of the three principal paths of action to be followed if there is to be any hope for social and educational transformation, and the issue constitutes an important element of the proposed debates at the forthcoming Second World Conference on Arts Education, to take place in Seoul in May, 2010.

With these thoughts in mind, scholars and researchers were invited to contribute articles that address the issue of advocacy from a broad variety of perspectives for this special theme issue of this e-journal. Among suggested topics were:

- Case studies of the economic, social and/or educational benefits of exposure to and engagement with the arts and creative expression in all disciplines and at all levels (professional, recreational, educational);
- Examinations of the role and use of the Internet and social networking as a means to build understanding and support;
- Analyses of other messaging formats, messaging media and message-making campaigns that could elevate public and political awareness and discourse across a broad social audience;
- Discussions of the relationship of cultural advocacy to national and international approaches to multiculturalism, globalization and the protection of cultural goods and services.

In inviting an examination of possible new arguments and approaches, the intention was not to suggest that basic, well-known arguments for the importance of the arts and creative activity are not sound and well-developed. The instrumental value of the work is not in question. The intrinsic values remain intact as well. As Michelle Obama put it in her address to the spouses of the international leaders deliberating at the G-20 economic summit in Pittsburgh in September, 2009, the power of the arts is “to remind us of what we each have to offer, and what we all have in common; to help us understand our history and imagine our future; to give us hope in the moments of struggle; and to bring us together when nothing else will.”

However, the enormous pressure to justify what we advocate in terms that can be measured and quantified has led us all too often to talk about our work in industrial or manufacturing terms – its contribution to the economy, to social cohesion, to national identity. In the hurly-burly of popular debate, more nuanced and subtle arguments, to do with social and personal benefit, gain less traction. In the words of Diana Ragsdale, of the Andrew C. Mellon Foundation: “Perhaps it’s time for us to stop waiting for people to find us, to appreciate us, and instead move toward them; seek to understand them; break into their hearts and minds—in that order.”

The papers that are presented here step well beyond the basic arguments to address the challenge of relocating the arts and culture at the heart of the public agenda from a wide variety of viewpoints. Taken together, they provide valuable new food for thought about an increasingly urgent issue facing world societies.

A repositioning of the arts in a central role in the educational curriculum (a major ambition of the World Alliance for Arts and Education, an international body made up of the professional academic associations of music, dance, theatre and visual arts, and the organization that hosts the World Creativity Summits) has frequently been cited as a prerequisite to any major public and political re-valuation of the arts and culture. Curriculum transformation of this kind is of course a challenge fraught with difficulties, and several papers address different aspects of that challenge.

An essay by Frances Alter from Australia, *Using the Visual Arts to Harness Creativity*, suggests that in order for arts education to remain significant in discourses around creativity, arts educators need to keep abreast of advances in knowledge in the broader field of scientific and educational research around creativity, and learn more about the conditions that support its growth. The visual arts can be an engine that drives creativity and innovation in schools, but that will not happen without “a determination to critically review arts pedagogies and to connect curriculum reform to creativity research and innovations occurring in other fields.” Collaborative research that provides connections among the arts, science and education, she argues, would provide a powerful platform

for instituting radical reforms that may change the culture of schools so that they establish the conditions for creative growth. These themes are explored through a review of literature pertinent to the nature of learning in the visual arts, visual arts and creative pedagogies, and teaching visual arts for creativity.

One concern that is frequently voiced at the Summits is the ability and willingness of teachers to take on the front-line task of actually doing the teaching. The value of professional development in the arts for generalist teachers is stressed here in a paper from Rena Uptis in Canada, *Teachers' Experiences of Professional Development Programs in the Arts: Generalist Teachers as Arts Advocates*. This research study explored teachers' experience in four well-established North American arts programs. The topic was explored from three principal approaches: What changes in teachers' professional and personal lives were attributed to taking part in the programs? Was there an approach, as exemplified by the programs, that appeared most successful in terms of positive change? What role did institutional support play in each of the programs? The findings show that teachers agreed on the favourable impact of the programs, particularly the learning of new skills and artistic techniques, in building their own confidence and creativity, as well as increasing students' confidence. Almost all teachers gained confidence in one of two ways; confidence in teaching the art curriculum and confidence to use the arts as a vehicle to assist in teaching the core subjects. The common belief that artistic ability is confined to a talented few was also challenged. For many participants, actual involvement in art-making led them to revise existing stereotypes about art and artists, although some indicated that the programs had no special effect on them. A few believed that the program had a negative effect. Some of these noted that they were intimidated at the prospect of making art, and found the process frustrating. The study supports the notion that professional development initiatives need collegial and institutional support to be effective. It is also the case that support for teachers in terms of their personal growth is necessary. Without personal change—including the desire on the part of teachers to learn new skills and competencies, especially in the arts—professional development programs have limited opportunities for long-term success.

Equally important is the engagement of students in the creative process. As Miriam Davidson and Mary Ladky from Canada suggest in *Finding 'The Power to Believe': Creating multi-modal texts in the intermediate classroom*, offering children the opportunity to construct forms of self-expression - visually and through written language - increases their sense of themselves as active producers of their arts and literacy education rather than just passive consumers/readers of texts. The paper examines the empowerment of children to express themselves in the fields of visual art and creative writing through a study of a collaborative project involving the development of their own photography and related narratives. An aim of this year-long in-school project, they explain, was to recognize the diversity of the participants' social worlds, affirming their value and their connection through multiple literacies to their own efforts at constructing their identities. Students' initial resistance to self-expression was overcome through support and affirmation from teachers and peers as the children negotiated the difficult terrain of engagement with these creative practices.

Another paper from Canada examines the complex relationships between student experience and school design in public, purpose-built, and Waldorf schools (*If I Could Design My Own School: Students' Perceptions of their Learning Spaces*: Rena Uptis et al). Part of a three-year study on architecture and pedagogy examining close to a dozen schools in North America and Europe, it starts from the recognition that while some studies in the field of architecture have examined the relationship between the design of educational facilities and academic performance, there is currently scant research addressing the way school architecture affects students in more subtle ways, such as building community by developing affection for one another, for their school community, and for the natural world. The researchers report that students involved in the study were in fact greatly impacted by

their school environment in terms of shared architectural ideals, and emphasize the importance of providing an outlet for students to voice their innovative ideas regarding school design.

Not all learning, of course, is acquired within the formal school setting. In their paper, *Creativity and arts-based knowledge creation in diverse educational partnership practices: Lessons from two case studies in rethinking traditional spaces for learning*, Angeliki Triantafyllaki and Pamela Burnard from Cambridge, England, call for more in-depth exploration of the ways in which student engagement in artistic processes leads to new forms of knowledge and experiences. They suggest that the transformation of educational practices and learning cultures could depend on merging individual potential and competencies with collaborative arts practices in non-formal contexts. Arts partnership practices in secondary and higher education that are located outside formal curricula are presented as case studies in learning relationships, learning engagement, and spaces for learning.

Giving opportunities for creative expression to marginalized youth presents a particular challenge. Underserved youth in communities of socio-economic and other forms of deprivation often have restricted access to formal and informal educational opportunities, including the arts. This lack of access both hampers their intellectual and creative development and challenges educators to understand the full scope of their intellect and abilities. In their paper *Expanding possibilities for underserved and marginalized youth using Freire's critical pedagogy of active and reflective arts practice: Three case studies from Bronx (USA), Coventry (UK) and New Delhi (India)*, Mousumi De from the UK and India and Roberta Altman from New York explain the conceptual framework of the three chosen case-study projects within the context of Freire's critical pedagogy, and discuss arts potential in transcending the isolation, disconnection and stigmatization of these communities and in understanding the full capabilities of such marginalized youth.

The argument that the arts are influential in helping children acquire the skills necessary to succeed and thrive in the coming social and economic world can also be applied to inclusive education, whose goal, as defined and adopted by the 1994 World Conference on special needs education in Salamanca, Spain, is to end all forms of discrimination and foster social cohesion. In their paper, *Advancing Inclusive Education and 21st Century Learning Skills Through the Arts*, education specialist Géraldine D. Simonnet and arts administrator James E. Modrick, both associated with VSA Arts, an international, Washington-based organization committed to advancing the arts in the lives and learning of people with disabilities, discuss the concept of inclusive education. They explain that it goes far beyond the common view, which links inclusion only to children with disabilities, to reaffirm the fundamental human right to education for every child, stressing their unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs. In this way, it is possible to build inclusive societies in which all individuals can participate, with differences and diversity being valued. However, in order to deliver quality teaching and learning across the curriculum for all, they argue, a variety of inclusive practices must be implemented, and they suggest that the arts encourage and support such practices. Moving toward the inclusion of marginalized learners within mainstream environments, they assert, is not only a legal obligation but also an opportunity to improve the overall quality of education systems around the world. Including *arts education* and *arts in education* in this process should be of policy concern because the arts naturally develop some of the aptitudes – creativity, innovation, and tolerance – critically demanded by current and prospective labour markets, and because they support and encourage inclusive learning and teaching practices. This paper encourages more research on the impact of the arts in facilitating inclusive practices, which ultimately improve the quality of teaching and learning across curriculum.

In the area of case studies of the benefits of exposure to creative expression, an instructive example is drawn from a pilot project that targets heritage revival and preservation in the United Arab Emirates through micro-enterprise involving home-based women weavers in Abu-Dhabi (*The weavers exploration in Abu-Dhabi's Western region*: Leila Ben-Gacem). Initiated by the Khalifa fund for Enterprise Development in partnership with Abu-Dhabi Culture and Heritage Authority, the project addresses the challenge of rapid socio-economic change in the region, and the threat it poses to the continued existence of traditional crafts. An intensive field assessment of Bedouin women weavers shows that this pilot project was instrumental in helping the women come to terms with the new socio-economic realities, as well as enhancing their social involvement and financial success.

Access to creative expression has also been cited as an essential tool in advancing the cause of arts and culture, at the levels of both individual and community engagement. It follows that the ability of musicians and other artists to make their work available is equally vital if they wish to develop their talents and sustain careers in their chosen artforms. In *The tyranny of distance: Viability and relevance in regional live music performance*, Christina Ballico and Dawn Bennett examine the evidence surrounding live music and regulation in Western Australia, where the music scene is, they say, "known for celebrating its isolation." Drawing together two recent research projects, the paper suggest that high costs, limited returns and current funding strategies and regulatory restrictions (rules regarding noise generation, for instance) inhibit the ability of regional areas to create live music opportunities and, in turn, the ability of musicians to develop regional audiences and work with communities. It is suggested that it would be useful to review funding strategies so that intra-state touring and community engagement are considered alongside the usual inter-state and international activities; to establish formalised touring circuits and networks of stakeholders, and to encourage musicians to engage with communities beyond performance, creating inter-acts exchange and community cultural development activities. Although the paper focuses primarily on the importance of live music performance, it also acknowledges the crucial role of arts and culture, including music, in promoting the vibrancy and wellbeing of regional areas and enabling communities to foster a sense of local identity.

Two further papers broaden the discussion by looking at the relationship of arts and culture to the ways in which contemporary society organizes itself. The impact of creative activity on the process of social change is addressed in *Creativity in the City: The New Measure*, by Linda Lees, founder and director of Creative Cities International LLC (CCI), a consultancy based in New York and London. The impact of social change on creative activity is addressed in *Artist Meets Audience: Understanding the Social Meaning of Art on the Internet*, by Beryl Joke and Bauwens Joke, from Brussels.

In the view of Linda Lees, cities are revealed most clearly through their creativity, which prompts understanding of the past and contemplation of possible futures. Beyond demographics and economic indicators, cities are "moods and energy, history and aspirations." How, she asks, can we measure these intangibles and argue for their value in city life? Her paper discusses the development of the Vitality Index™, whose objective is to improve cities through a rethinking of creativity and its relationship to economic development and public policy. The index can insert the value of culture -- as opposed to cultural institutions or creative industries alone - into the planning process, and she gives as an example a project in West Harlem, New York. This approach does not limit possibilities for innovation, she says, but helps create them by engaging residents with the destiny of their city.

The role of the Internet in social and creative discourse is still evolving, and will continue to do so as more and more individuals become engaged by its potential as a form of interactive exchange. In what ways might these enormous social changes affect art as a process of social communication? In *Artist meets audience: understanding the social meaning of art on the Internet*, Beryl Joke and Bauwens Joke seek to understand how

the relationship between the artist and the audience is potentially altered in an interactive Internet environment. Drawing on a review of old and contemporary theorists, they make the point that ideas about the digital encounter of artists and audiences closely resemble opinions uttered about "old" media's impact on this relationship. "The critical, pessimistic and ... more hopeful belief in the risks and opportunities of the interactive Internet for art, artists' role in society and artistic reception, have their roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century thought," they say. It appears that new media's impact on the social dialogue between artists and their audience needs to be understood as an evolution rather than as a revolution. Following these recurring insights, the possible change in aesthetic experiences can be understood in contrasting ways. This article gives an overview of the different arguments and so aims to provide a framework for researching and understanding the changes in the field of art induced and reinforced through the use of the Internet. It also suggests that empirical research that focuses on the opinions and experiences of both the artist and the audience could be an important eye-opener as well as making a relevant contribution to our understanding the social meaning of art on the Internet today.

Clearly, change is coming. But U.S. educational theorist and teacher Howard Gardner has warned us that the change will not take the form of a revolution. There will be no sudden sweep of overwhelming forces. It will happen by degrees. And it is likely to be built on innovative and ceaseless advocacy that shows how the enormous potential of creative engagement within the educational process goes far beyond the narrow, conventional definitions of artists in the schools, to the far more important function of liberating the creative imagination, of allowing every individual in every land the possibility of true fulfilment and the opportunity to make a lasting contribution to the greater good.

*Lions Bay, Canada, March 2010.*