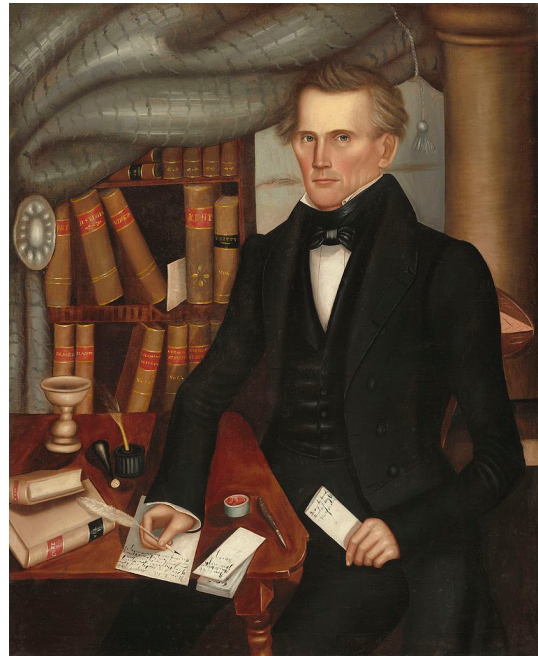


BLOG by Anne Brisson on The Artistic Edge

Introduction

Painting can make you a successful CEO. Acting can make you a successful public relations executive. Writing can make you a successful lawyer. The arts can help to develop “habits of mind” that can be applied in all areas of a person’s life. *An artistic edge is a competitive one.*

Author Lisa Phillips of The Artistic Edge (2012) makes a strong case for arts education as a means to help set children up for success. She is an arts and leadership educator in North America, connecting arts education with leadership skills in order to provide children with a competitive advantage later in life. She states that “skills we learn in the arts can transfer to other parts of our lives” and arts education should not be reserved for the select few. The book focuses on ways in which the arts can develop those skills.



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Book Summary

The author’s main premise, which aligns with the field of creativity, is that *“we are born creative, and then it is educated out of us.”* She goes on to add that our fear of failure is



educated into us. But the arts can teach us to learn from trying and making mistakes. She states that competence comes with practice and the arts provide a safe space to develop that competence without the fear of failure. In the arts, failure is accepted and seen as a useful skill to develop. It teaches us the importance of practice and avoids the trappings of judgement. It encourages us to learn from our mistakes which in turn develops confidence. Learning by making mistakes is a skill and trying is the only way to succeed. She points out that

“making mistakes is an indispensable part of the creative process.”

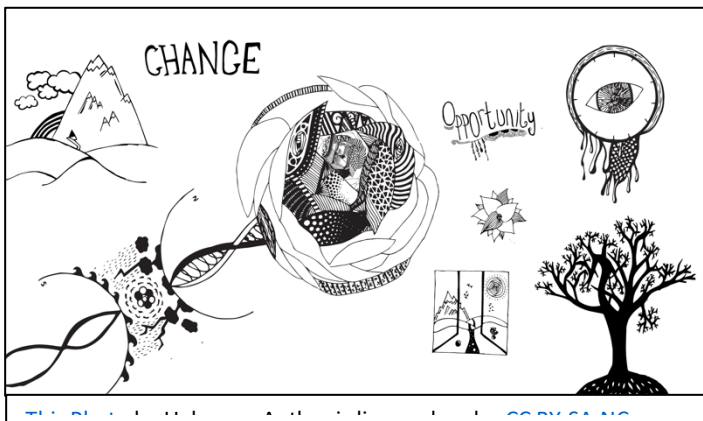
The arts can build empathy, which, the author claims, is a skill that is essential to learning accountability. She offers theatre as one way to do that – immersing yourself in a character helps people to understand how someone else feels by “learning to see through their eyes and not their own.” The author states that the act of introspection which is often required with

writing helps you to become more in tuned with other’s perspectives, and in turn can build empathy. Another way is to be a part of a play or dance where you are a member of a team, building a piece together. You build accountability to play your part, which other characters are dependent on, as you are on them.

The author puts forward the argument that the arts can help develop communication skills. The *arts teach the power of non-verbal expression*, helping students to learn the art of communication without using any words. In visual arts, non-verbal language is very important, a painting or drawing can express emotion in one stroke. Music as well is intensely expressive. Theatre teaches verbal expression but more importantly, expression through body language. Theatre students learn that “the most important aspect of performance is not what you say, but how you say it.” The author claims that this in turn helps to prepare students for the workforce, where communication is a critical skill required in most jobs.



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Change is a constant. The author claims that adaptability is a key skill required in today’s workforce. *The arts help to build adaptability* in several ways.

One is through improvisation. This is a valuable way to learn to adapt to situations “on the fly”. Another is dance, and in particular the Salsa. This dance style applies practiced dance moves without choreography. It is created in sync with a partner while dancing.

My Reactions

I found this book to be useful and incredibly inspiring. It has helped me understand myself better, and how the arts helped me to develop in adulthood. I realize that many of my abilities and work place skills were directly developed as a result of my art hobby. This book strengthened my interest in using the arts as a way to



develop skills in creative problem solving. It *reinforced my belief that it is possible.*

This book relates to the larger issues in the creativity field, with its focus on using arts education in children to develop critical skills needed in life. This is an ongoing issue which is undertaken by many scholars in arts education. However, I would like to address *the adult side of the equation.*



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I agree with the author of using the arts as a means to develop creative thinking abilities. However, I differ in opinion where the author exclaims this opportunity best exists with children. She states, “...it is never as easy to learn to play as an adult as it was when we were kids.” The book focuses on a redesign of the education system as a solution to this issue. Whereas I am more interested to produce a solution for adults.

My position is that education was historically developed as an institution of conformity into society. Referring to the conformity / creativity polarity, why use that institution as a place to teach creativity which often goes against conformity? So, my quest is, let’s *use the arts to teach adults creativity skills, during the time when they better understand how to apply it, and when they impart their beliefs onto children.*

The question for me now is, what will that look like? How can we train adults in the arts without it appearing to be only an arts class? What will make them accept that learning the arts will help to develop creative thinking skills they can utilize in life and work that will give them a competitive edge?



Phillips, Lisa (2012). *The Artistic Edge: 7 Skills Children Need to Succeed in an Increasingly Right Brain World*. The Artistic Edge. Toronto, Ontario.