

Teacher Perspectives on No Child Left Behind and Arts Education: A Case Study

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Abstract: The author investigates the condition of a public school's arts education program under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and obtains teachers' perspectives on their experiences under the federal policy. The author used qualitative and quantitative approaches to conduct a case study of an Ohio public school district. The data collected revealed changes in the arts education curriculum, particularly in music. Teacher interviews provided the context in which the changes occurred and a more accurate representation of the decrease in arts learning opportunities and the challenges that exist for arts education funding under NCLB. The information illustrated how administrative decisions made to improve test scores and accommodate policies mandated by NCLB threatened arts education.

Keywords: arts education, arts education funding, No Child Left Behind, reauthorization

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 has been a topic of great debate among educators, politicians, and the public regarding its ability to improve the quality of education for the nation's youth and create academically achieving students. In theory, NCLB

is intended to create equitable educational opportunities for all students and close achievement gaps among different groups of students, particularly minorities and whites. In practice, researchers argued that NCLB is "substituting one form of educational inequity for another" (von Zastrow 2004, 9). Although the arts are defined as a core academic subject under NCLB, the federal mandate has been blamed for the reduction of learning opportunities in the arts and other subjects because schools are required to test children in math and reading. This is particularly the case in schools with high minority and disadvantaged populations in which many students do not have access to dance or music instruction if these subjects are not already part of the formal curriculum.

Examinations of NCLB have provided little quantitative data confirming the decline or elimination of arts education resulting from it (Ashford 2004; Colwell 2005; Mishook and Kornhaber 2006). Many analyses offered general fears and predictions that arts education would suffer due to the proliferation of mandated tests for math and reading. For example, Chapman (2004) and Meyer (2005) expected that less time would be available for art instruction because few states have incorporated the arts into their accountability systems. Recently, these predictions were reported to be

common practices in schools (Cavanagh 2006; Manzo 2006; Tambucci 2006).

Few researchers (see Center on Education Policy 2006, 2007; Pedulla et al. 2003; von Zastrow 2004) have presented empirical data regarding arts education at risk under the NCLB. However, school administrators and teachers who taught tested subjects were the primary participants in these studies. Arts teachers were not represented or used as a source in the collection of empirical data, because these studies were not solely focused on the arts but rather sought to find broader implications of NCLB practices. The absence of arts teachers' perspectives and experiences in the literature means there are untapped resources available for investigators who want to better understand NCLB and its impact on arts education.

A reduction in arts programs occurred due to years of budget cuts and state budget deficits (Massie 2004; McElroy 2005) in addition to dwindling private funding sources (Ashford 2004). Data on NCLB's impact on arts education funding are not present in the literature. Although Neill (2004) and Darling-Hammond (2004) criticized NCLB as an underfunded mandate, and Hamilton et al. (2007) cited few administrators who believed they had adequate funding to implement NCLB, researchers have not investigated whether the fed-

eral policy directly affected a school district's ability to fund arts classes. In this study, I set out to address these gaps in the research—the lack of information on funding for arts education and the lack of arts teachers' insights and perspectives—while investigating the condition of a public school's arts education program under NCLB. Discerning NCLB's role in funding public schools' arts curricula and giving arts teachers a voice in the research will help educators, administrators, and politicians make more informed decisions about arts education for our nation's youths.

Method

Setting and Participants

This research took place in the Ribbon Valley School District, which is located in a rural area of Ohio and earmarked for Title I funding. The district is composed of five buildings—one high school, one middle school, and three elementary schools—with a student population nearing 2,500. At the time I conducted this research, 32 percent of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged, which was representative of the state's average (Wood 2004).

Participants in the study included one high school visual art teacher, one elementary school visual art teacher, one elementary school music teacher, one middle school music teacher, one middle school math teacher, and one elementary school language arts teacher. All six educators were highly qualified as defined by NCLB and had a minimum of five years of teaching experience in the district. The purposeful sampling of participants for this study facilitated the collection of contextual data about how educators perceived NCLB to be affecting education in their district and classrooms. This sampling strategy also permitted a better understanding of teachers' direct involvement with the federal policy and its effect on the schools' curriculum, classroom practices, and student learning. I gave participants and the school district pseudonyms to protect identity, provide confidentiality, and promote candid responses from the interviewees.

Data Collection

For the purpose of this research, arts education as part of Ribbon Valley's formal curriculum was the focal point of the investigation. Music and visual art are required in kindergarten through eighth grade, and the district's high school graduation requirement includes 0.5 credits of fine arts. Dance and theater arts are not offered at any grade level. Peripheral or extracurricular activities such as marching band and drama club are not considered for the research because they are not part of regular school-day instruction.

I conducted one-on-one interviews in person and on-site at each school to obtain qualitative data on arts education under NCLB in the Ribbon Valley school district. I audiotaped all interviews with a digital recorder and designed semi-structured interview protocols with open-ended questions to provide some structure for each interview while providing flexibility to elicit discussion and clarification from interviewees. Conceptual ideas for the protocol came from the literature as well as my own experience as an arts education teacher. My interest in the arts and arts education stems from fourteen years of professional performing experience in dance and nine years of teaching dance in higher education. I believe that government policy is the best way to ensure the nation's youths an equal opportunity and access to a sound education that produces an appreciation for learning, diversity, discipline, creativity, and change. As an artist and educator, I have experienced and witnessed the arts' capacity to generate these ideals.

I collected quantitative data on the district's arts education budget and spending from arts teachers, school principals, and the district treasurer. School principals provided information on student populations, arts classes offered as part of the formal curriculum, and instructional time in the arts for each grade and school year starting in 2001. I also gathered data on instructional time for math, reading, and science and used them for comparative and contextual purposes. I retrieved information including student

demographics and district report cards from the Ohio Department of Education Web site.

The teacher interviews and data collection sought to answer the following questions: Has instructional time for arts education in Ribbon Valley been affected as a result of NCLB's policies and if so, how? Has the district's formal curriculum for arts education changed since NCLB went into effect in 2002 and if so, how? In what ways have arts teachers and teachers of other subjects altered classroom practices as a result of NCLB, and were their teaching strategies effective? In what ways have arts education budgets and spending changed since NCLB went into effect in 2002?

Data Analysis

I transcribed teacher interviews, hand analyzed the text data, and identified and coded text segments. Themes emerged from multiple readings of the data and provided structure for reporting the research findings and answers to the research questions. I compared the information obtained during teacher interviews with data from the district to identify similarities and differences between teachers' perceptions and administrative practices regarding arts education.

To address validity issues, I shared interview transcripts and drafts of the final report with research participants. Triangulation also supported the validity of this research, as obtaining information from different sources provides various angles from which to analyze the central phenomena (Creswell 2005; Glesne 1999). To address researcher bias, I took great care to formulate questions for the interview protocols that would not lead teachers or convey my preconceptions into the interview process. I continuously explored my own subjectivity and reflected on my desire and pursuit for a particular research outcome. By recognizing and acknowledging my subjectivity, I was able to examine and analyze the research data with a more objective lens. These verification procedures are often used in qualitative research (Glesne).

Findings

Data from this study indicate that both arts teachers and nonarts teachers believe instructional time and classroom practices have been altered in the district to accommodate NCLB requirements, resulting in a loss of both access to and learning in the arts. Ribbon Valley administrators reduced music and other nontested subjects to make more time for math and language arts instruction, particularly at the middle school level. Themes that emerged from the data included changes in the curriculum and instructional time, changes in teaching strategies, and challenges to fund arts education. In short, arts education in the Ribbon Valley School District was threatened and showed signs of deterioration as a result of the administrators' attempts to meet NCLB objectives.

Curriculum Changes and Instructional Time for Arts Education: "It's the Scores That Drive It a Lot"

The investigation on the curriculum and instructional time for arts education revealed that music and visual art education for kindergarten to fifth grade remained generally the same since 2001. At the middle school level, the music curriculum experienced a cut. In grades six to eight, daily instructional time for math, language arts, science, and social studies amounted to fifty-five minutes per subject from 2002–05. At the start of the 2005–06 school year, district administrators increased class time for math and language arts to eighty-four minutes per day per subject. Five of the six teachers interviewed determined the increase in math and language arts to be because of the state tests. "We are trying to get the scores up in math right now, and reading. They're both low; students are not meeting the standards, so [administrators] are pushing it more" (Mr. Cherry, unpublished data).

To accommodate the increase in focus on math and language arts, administrators reduced science and social studies instruction to forty-two minute periods each day, and the music curriculum was significantly modified. Prior to the scheduling change, all middle school students

attended general education music classes. For example, all eighth-grade students studied music history, all seventh-grade students received instruction in keyboarding and music theory, and all sixth-grade students learned about families of instruments and their acoustical profiles. In addition to these yearly general music requirements, all middle school students had the option to participate in band and choir classes. To make room for the increased class periods in

The music teacher identified band and choir students as those most interested in learning music and developing skills in the music discipline. Mrs. Simpson expressed a concern for these students who might want to major in music at college but would lack keyboarding skills and knowledge of music theory and history that would have been acquired in the middle school's general music classes. Mrs. Simpson also feared that by eliminating opportunities for

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math and language arts, band and choir were scheduled at the same time as the general music classes so students lost the opportunity to study general music and participate in band and choir. The administration's answer to this problem, according to one of the music teachers, was "If we want more time for music, then we should have it all after school" (Mrs. Simpson, unpublished data).

Because of the altered scheduling, general music became a requirement for only those students who did not elect to take band or choir and as a result, the number of general music classes went from six sections per year to three. "I saw every kid in the building throughout the year . . . and now I see a very, very small portion of them," stated Mrs. Simpson, the middle school general music teacher (Mrs. Simpson, unpublished data). Although class periods for the general music classes remained at forty-two minutes daily for nine weeks of the school year, the music curriculum narrowed for many students who were involved in band and choir.

instruction in these areas, students were at a disadvantage when applying for college admission to music programs. Music history, music theory, and keyboarding instruction were offered at the high school level, but they were not required classes, as was the case in the middle school curriculum prior to the scheduling change.

Teacher interviews revealed that time for music instruction throughout the district was expected to be reduced further if math scores on state tests linked to NCLB did not improve. Mrs. Raven, an elementary school music teacher stated, "If our math test scores don't go up, we are going to lose more time in music. They told [us] that at a music meeting. So that tells me right there that math is really important for one reason or another, and it's the scores that drive it a lot" (Mrs. Raven, unpublished data).

The other music teacher interviewed for this study confirmed the administration's warning that music education would be cut further if test results were inadequate.

Ribbon Valley's report cards and test scores revealed why math test scores were so important to district administrators. I found that, although the school district received a rating of effective on its 2004–05 report card, the district did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and was labeled at risk under the category District Improvement Status. Sixth-grade math, science, and writing test scores fell in 2004–05 from the previous year; and seventh-grade and eighth-grade math scores were 4 percentage points and more than 8 percentage points, respectively, below the state requirement of 75 percent. A general feeling among the teachers at the time of this study was that math test results for the current year would be insufficient to increase student achievement in the district. This situation would result in Ribbon Valley's failure to reach AYP for a second year and move it into District Improvement Status.

Visual art saw a change at the high school level as well. Although Ohio did not mandate fine arts credits for high school graduation at the time of this study, Ribbon Valley required 0.5 credits in this content area. This arts requirement was in place prior to the enactment of NCLB. Instructional time for visual arts classes increased from forty-two minutes to forty-seven minutes in the 2005–06 school year, as did all subjects such as math, science, social studies, and language arts. The reason for this change, the teachers perceived, was that "We needed to be more focused and spend more time on science and math and those areas [in which] schools traditionally struggle" (Mr. Thompson, unpublished data).

By adding five minutes to each class period, the high school schedule went from nine periods a day to eight periods. But because there was one less period each school day, administrators reduced art classes. For example, five Art I classes were offered per year under the nine-period system. Only three sections of Art I were available in the eight period days. Essentially, the high school arts curriculum did not change, but learning opportunities in the arts were reduced. The elimination of some of the

Art I classes was anticipated to lead to a decline in enrollment for upper-level art classes and to ultimately decimate the art program, according to the high school art teacher. In addition, fewer Art I class sections created a bottleneck effect for students who wanted to take visual art; enrollment was limited so students had to be turned away each semester.

Instructional Strategies and Teaching Effectiveness: "Multiple Opportunities for Assessment, Multiple Opportunities for Learning"

According to the data collected, changes in instructional strategies throughout the district began in 2002. Adjustments to classroom practices were associated with aligning instruction to Ohio state standards and mandated testing of those standards under the NCLB Act. Mr. Cherry, the middle school math teacher, indicated that the administration pressured him to use math resources that had been acquired through a grant. The resources were to provide a more hands-on learning experience for the students: the teacher adopted a supervisory role with the new instructional materials and moved away from the traditional style of whole-group teaching. According to Mr. Cherry, the administration wanted to implement this new teaching strategy because "It showed there was better learning, students learn better this way . . . and students weren't succeeding the other way, the traditional way" (Mr. Cherry, unpublished data). The teacher used the term *succeeding* as a reference to outcomes on mandated tests.

The math resources provided instruction on a series of state math standards. Students had to complete math exercises linked to a specific standard and then pass a test before they could move on to the next standard. If a student did not perform well on the test, he or she had to return to practice exercises associated with the standard and complete additional work. The student was then retested. This cycle recurred until the student achieved an adequate score on the exam. The math teacher had a positive view of this strategy, as it was thought to provide students with

a deeper comprehension of math skills that were necessary for achievement on state tests.

Retesting became an adopted teaching strategy throughout the district. Tests designed by classroom teachers were expected to cover specific standards. When a student missed test questions that correlated with certain standards, the student was given as many chances to retake portions of a test until he or she passed every standard. Both the math and language arts teachers indicated the administration prescribed the reassessment practices in the last two to three years. One music teacher was told that the reassessment policy came from the state. Regardless of the source, the district adopted a system whereby no student would fail. The language arts teacher explained:

The idea is multiple opportunities for assessment, multiple opportunities for learning. So you bomb, you intervene, you teach, and then you reassess. . . . That's one of our basic thinking and philosophy. You know, you can't accept the fact that the kid failed. You gotta do something; you have to intervene; you have to try another way. (Mrs. Russo, unpublished data)

The teachers whose subject areas were tested had a favorable opinion of reassessment strategies. This practice, along with moving from whole-group teaching to small-group instruction another teaching strategy that had recently been implemented, was viewed as making teachers more effective and giving them a better chance to identify students' academic deficiencies. Alternatively, the middle school music teacher interviewed did not experience retesting as a constructive mechanism. Reassessing students essentially decreased student learning and teaching effectiveness in her music class:

With this No Child Left Behind thing, the idea is you keep teaching the same concept until he knows it. You don't move on until he gets that concept. Well, a lot of these kids are taking advantage of it. I'm giving a test on the Renaissance period tomorrow, and I've told them, I said, from now on, there will be no more retesting, which is supposedly one of our requirements. We are supposed to be testing and retesting to make sure

they know the material. Well, first of all, if you give them the same test over and over enough times, they are just going to know the test. But they ask me, why not? And I said, I read the test to you; we find the answers in your worksheets; we highlight them; we review in class. We have a review quiz everyday. I said, I don't think you need another chance. You should be prepared the first time. Now, if the retest was showing me that your grades were coming up and you were actually studying and learning the stuff you didn't know the first time around, it would be different. But they don't. They just think that they can continue to retest and retest and retest and they don't put any more additional work into it. . . . This was new this year for us. So, the first nine weeks, I didn't get anywhere because I kept retesting and going over the same material in class. And those kids figured out, well, as long as we're retesting, we're not moving on. This is great! And I'm thinking, we're only going to get one time period done in nine weeks, and we have six time periods to get done. So the second nine weeks I started retesting during lunch. I didn't take class time any more. We didn't take class time to go over anything. It was all during lunch. Well, sometimes they would show up to retest, sometimes they wouldn't. They'd forget. They choose not to come because I can always do that the next day. Well, again, this just keeps dragging it out and dragging it out. And what I found out is that the kids get confused. If he is retesting on the Medieval period today, and we're halfway through the Renaissance period, he's getting everything mixed up; because I see Renaissance answers appearing on his Medieval test. And it's not working. At least in my class, it's not working. So, like I said, I told them today, we are not retesting anymore. I don't feel like I've accomplished anything this year compared to where I should be. (Mrs. Simpson, unpublished data)

The data did not provide any indication that the reassessment policy applied to or affected visual art classes in the district. However, the data did suggest that Ribbon Valley administrators were taking a more prominent role in student learning by prescribing what and how teachers teach. Teachers interviewed indicated that NCLB and the need to improve student achievement, as measured by test scores, were driving administrators to be more involved with teaching strategies and classroom practices.

Arts Education Resources: "We Just Don't Have the Money"

In this case study, I did not find evidence that NCLB was affecting spending on arts education in the Ribbon Valley School District. The district administration was unable to provide specific data on arts education budgets and expenditures. No administrator or office kept a complete record on how much money was spent on arts education. Based on teacher interviews and information collected from school principals, little change in arts education expenditures occurred since NCLB went into effect. However, I discovered that the school district focused its efforts on fund-raising to support tested subjects over arts education.

According to the district treasurer, visual arts teachers purchased their materials two ways: with fees charged to the students and parents (consumable materials fees) and with money provided from the school's building budget. Consumable materials fees for students in kindergarten to fifth grade, which covered the expense of paper, paint, and other visual art materials requested by teachers, ranged from approximately \$1.50 to \$2.35 per student since 2002.

The middle school's building budget reserved about \$2,000 per year (approximately \$3.79 per student) for visual art materials for the art teacher as well as regular classroom teachers. At the high school level, consumable materials fees for visual art instruction were consistently \$6 per student for a half-year or \$11 dollars per student for a year of art classes. In addition, the high school building budget provided the art teacher with \$1,500 in the 2001–02 school year but it decreased to \$1,200 by 2005–06, which resulted from a 50 percent building budget cut. Large equipment or special purchases were handled on an as-needed basis.

With the exception of purchasing new music books for the elementary school students, the general music teachers in kindergarten to fifth grade were not given annual funds to purchase classroom-teaching materials. Teachers'

views of the district's resources were "We just don't have the money" (Mrs. Raven, unpublished data). Band and choir teachers for sixth to twelfth grade received some funds from the building budgets to buy sheet music, and the middle school music teacher purchased music books with the "principal's funds, which they [sic] cut in half last year . . . he got me the books, but it was very unwillingly" (Mrs. Simpson, unpublished data). Most of the music and art teachers in the district spent their own money—anywhere from \$300 to \$2,000 per year—to purchase classroom materials that consumable materials fees or building budgets did not cover. This was the case for as many years as the teachers were teaching in the district.

Although budgets were limited or nonexistent for Ribbon Valley arts classes (music in particular), the teachers did not perceive that NCLB had a direct role in influencing the amount of money the district spent on arts education. Arts education represents a small percentage of total kindergarten through twelfth grade expenses in public education (O'Fallon 2006). This appears to be the case at Ribbon Valley as well. Obtaining sufficient funds for music and art was always a challenge for the teachers, and the low spending on music and visual arts classes were ameliorated by an extensive history of arts teachers' personal expenditures.

Funding education overall was problematic for the district. In the school year 2005–06 alone, Ribbon Valley's property tax payments declined nearly \$1 million, and state aid was reduced by \$800,000. One area in which the budget effects were seen was in the building budgets, which were cut by more than half over four years. For example, the middle school's building budget was \$72,000 in fiscal year 2002 and fell to \$31,500 by fiscal year 2005. Although funding for arts education already was limited, expenditures for arts education were not reduced when the district's finances fell.

Federal funding echoed the declining pattern in state and local funding. Title I monies Ribbon Valley received consistently dropped in a four-year period. In the 2002–03 school year, the first

year of NCLB, Title I funds totaled over \$290,000. This amount decreased to less than \$220,000 by the 2005–06 school year. Student enrollment remained the same over these four years whereas the number of economically disadvantaged students rose 5 percent. Thus, the reason for less Title I funding could not be attributed to an improvement in the students' socioeconomic status.

I attempted to acquire data on expenditures and consumable materials fees

how much money they have brought in just from the grants" (Mr. Cherry, unpublished data). Another teacher mentioned, "We live and die by grants in this district . . . for books, for technology. That's how we get by" (Mr. Thompson, unpublished data). Other teachers interviewed made similar comments. These remarks suggest a funding plight and the lack of local, state, and federal resources available to Ribbon Valley. It also indicates that NCLB is

Obtaining grants for arts education did not demand the same attention from the curriculum director. The director had sent grant applications to one music teacher who was expected to write her own proposals for music education.

Discussion

Manzo (2006) discusses penalties tied solely to inadequate student test scores in reading and math, resulting in a school's tendency to spend more of its efforts on improving student achievement in those subjects. The investigation of Ribbon Valley revealed added efforts by way of teaching and reassessment practices that were prescribed by the administration as a means to improve test scores. Teachers of tested subjects deemed the retesting policy helpful, because it allowed them to intervene and provide students with multiple opportunities to develop academic skills and retake exams designed around standards that would later be present on state tests. Alternatively, retesting efforts slowed class progress and minimized learning in the district's middle school music program, thus demonstrating that a one-size-fits-all teaching strategy can be detrimental in the education of youths.

This and other problems the teachers at Ribbon Valley identified have a potentially marginalizing effect on the arts as a whole as well as those students who value their schooling experiences in the arts. For instance, if the circumstances at Ribbon Valley are representative of other school districts across the nation, they could lead to a shortage of visual artists, musicians, visual art educators, and music teachers in public education. As exposure to music or other art forms declines, students will not gain an appreciation for the arts disciplines nor will they learn about career opportunities available in the arts. Furthermore, cutbacks in arts education in schools affect younger generations of potential audiences and lead to lack of public support for the arts (Kotler and Scheff 1997; Ross 2005). For those students who do not have the means to pay for private instruction outside of school but want to pursue the arts in higher education, reducing the arts curriculum in

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for math and language arts instruction. However, because the district could not provide this information, I could not perform a comparative analysis with the arts education budget and spending on tested subjects. The alternative approach was to examine grant money acquired by the district. The treasurer reported that since 2001, only a single grant for \$3,000 was obtained in 2003–04 to start the middle school's theater group, an after-school program. No funds or grants were received for arts education as part of the formal curriculum during this time period. One district elementary school had received a grant for a fourth-grade language arts project that integrated social studies and art, but it was not included in the treasurer's report.

The district did not provide information on grants and funds received for other areas of instruction such as math or reading. However, teachers indicated that grants obtained by the school district were numerous. One teacher interviewed stated, "There have been so many this year. It's unbelievable

an underfunded mandate, as the district has had to seek out alternative sources to cover the cost of educating students in compliance with federal policy.

Obtaining grants for visual art and music was difficult. The general consensus among the arts teachers was that it was challenging to get grants to pay for art or music supplies and instructional materials such as instruments, recorded music, workbooks, sound equipment, and batteries for keyboards because these items do not qualify for grant funds. However, finding funds to purchase classroom materials did not appear to be a problem for tested subjects such as math. The district's curriculum director wrote grant applications and acquired grant money to purchase resources for this subject. For example, the middle school math teacher verified that the curriculum director was "paying for most of the supplies we use" with grant money (Mr. Cherry, unpublished data). The math teacher did not solicit the instructional materials and grant acquired to purchase resources.

public schools puts these individuals at a competitive disadvantage; the students will lack the skill sets and field knowledge necessary for college admittance. Finally, reducing music (and arts) curricula sends the message to students that language arts and math are more important than music and art. Music students, like the band and choir students at Ribbon Valley, are dismissed in terms of their learning values and accomplishments and are put at risk of losing their identity and place in the school environment and larger community.

There are additional implications when districts deemphasize their arts curriculum: educators concede opportunities to improve student math and language arts skills. Active engagement in the arts increases academic achievement. This mantra appears throughout the literature on arts education (Meyer 2005). For example, *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development* offers an array of research that correlates arts learning with academic and social outcomes (Arts Education Partnership 2002). Specifically, arts-integrated learning increases complex cognitive processes in students and promotes positive risk taking, an increase in self-confidence, motivation, focus, persistence in performing tasks, and collaborative learning (Horowitz 2004).

As the employment market has shifted in the last two decades to demand creative thinking and problem-solving skills, reducing arts education also undermines a primary purpose of education: preparing individuals for the workforce. The creative economy of the twenty-first century, or the conceptual age as Pink (2006) coined it, necessitates right-brained or *R-Directed* thinking, the type of synthesizing and metaphorical thinking that learning in the arts cultivates. Pink purports that the Master of Fine Arts is the new Master of Business Administration and that left-brain aptitudes, as measured by state math and reading tests as well as by the SAT, “are still necessary. But they’re no longer sufficient. Instead, the R-Directed aptitudes so often disdained and dismissed

. . . will increasingly determine who soars and who stumbles” in the workplace (2006, 27). Robinson (2001) also discusses the need for an educational system that recognizes intelligence in its various forms and develops relationships among disciplines as a means to develop creativity in individuals.

There must be a different balance of priorities between the arts, sciences and humanities in education and in the forms of thinking they promote. They should be taught in ways that reflect their intimate connections in the world beyond education . . . the price of failure is high. (Robinson, 201)

Furthermore, limiting access to and reducing instructional time in the arts for students, like those found at Ribbon Valley, who are already economically disadvantaged could unintentionally produce greater hardships for those individuals when they enter the job market; they will be unarmed with the skills and worker traits needed to secure better paying jobs than their parents. Research has shown that involvement in the arts is an effective measure to help disadvantaged populations acquire competencies necessary to become economically self-sufficient over the long term (Psilos 2002).

The Ribbon Valley school district teachers proved to be a valuable information source regarding the data collection on arts-education funding. Because Ribbon Valley could not provide specific budgetary information or expenditures on arts education, the teachers’ perspectives gave the context in which the arts are funded and compete monetarily with tested subjects under NCLB. In school year 2005–06, two-thirds of school districts in the country received no increases or lost federal funding for NCLB compared with the previous year, and a large percentage of districts reported absorbing costs that federal funds are not covering (Jennings and Rentner 2006). The data on Ribbon Valley reflect these reports, and it is evident that the district is compensating for the lack of funds through its grant acquisitions. However, monies obtained are earmarked for curriculum materials that

support tested subjects such as math. This is another example of how the federal mandate is marginalizing the arts. Because the arts are not tied to NCLB’s accountability system, it is unlikely they will receive an equal distribution of funding efforts by district administrators in the near future.

Policy Recommendations

Ramifications of Testing

We must find better ways to project and address the ramifications of policies, such as testing, in the developmental stage. The discovery of damage after implementation produces difficulties that are hard to remedy. Arts teachers and education administrators need to do the following:

- Continue to observe, document, and collect empirical data regarding the negative effects of testing on the arts and other subjects at both the micro- and macrolevel of a school district’s educational system.
- Demand greater local autonomy in the teaching and evaluation of students.
- Reject strategies that amount to one-size-fits-all instructional and evaluation methods.

In addition, policymakers must allow educators to document student growth and development in areas other than math, language arts, and science in ways that are not tied to high-stakes consequences if outcomes are unfavorable.

Retesting

Blanket policies meant to produce, at any cost, desirable outcomes in tested subjects are negatively affecting the learning of other subjects such as the arts. Although retesting may help teachers intervene, providing students with multiple testing opportunities tells students there is no immediacy to their learning and that they do not have to be accountable for their own achievements. Educators and policymakers must ask:

- Where is the cutoff point on the number of tests students are allowed to take?

- How many opportunities should be given to a student to demonstrate proficiency in a particular topic?
- How does testing prepare individuals for society, in general, and the workplace in which competitiveness, meeting deadlines, and preparedness are key attributes employers seek?
- Is retesting an effective teaching and learning measure for all subjects?

Further research is warranted on the far-reaching effects retesting policies have on arts instruction and other subjects. It is a measure used by districts with the intent of improving student learning. However, there is no evidence that this practice helps students acquire knowledge for the long term. Understanding the amount of time schools spend on testing and retesting will bring to light the amount of instructional time that is lost in the classroom, because students are not in a state of learning when they are subjected to phases of testing and retesting. Empirical data should tell us:

- The amount of classroom time teachers devote to testing and retesting by subject
- The ratio between instructional time and time devoted to testing and retesting each subject area

Representation

Arts teachers need to participate more in policy-oriented efforts if they are to successfully channel resources their way. Their representation is critical in:

- Explanations of NCLB's effect on arts programs, curricula, and classroom practices: administrators and policy-makers should not only seek arts educators' views when developing and implementing local policy, but also value their participation and work with them to ensure that state and federal policies are truly improving the learning environment for the arts and not triggering negative side effects
- Future research on NCLB
- The definition of core academic subjects, and the development of curricula and educational policies at the local, state, and federal levels

Evaluation in the Arts

Testing, as mandated by NCLB, does not evaluate creativity, the ability to solve problems, or higher-order thinking, skills needed to be successful in the creative economy of the twenty-first century. These abilities are cultivated at an early age through involvement in the arts. Having reliable assessment tools to evaluate a student's ability to solve problems and adapt to situations gives educators a better picture of a child's intellectual and mental development. Certain kinds of studies in the arts provide the arena for such assessments. Content standards are already in place for the fine arts. Arts educators need to continue to develop effective content and evaluation methods and correlate student achievement to these standards.

Funding

Increasing funding for arts education is paramount for sustaining an educational system that teaches the arts. The following changes would improve the present situation:

- Increase funding for arts education without centralized curriculum control or using high-stakes testing to reduce the local interdependence of schools.
- Approve the use of federal funds to purchase equipment for arts education.
- Create significant granting opportunities in all funding sectors for project-based learning in the arts.
- Provide substantive funding for arts education research and continue work to define and develop new evaluation methods in this discipline.

The federal government must change educational granting opportunities to permit equipment purchases. Batteries for keyboards, instruments, sound systems, visual arts materials, costumes, sets, curtains, and ballet barres, for example, are necessary for teaching basic arts standards, project-based learning in the arts, and providing valu-

able lessons in creativity, cooperation, problem-solving, and collaboration that math and language arts do not.

Reauthorization

As NCLB is currently slated for reauthorization, federal legislators would improve the country's educational environment by doing the following:

- Eliminate high-stakes testing for math, language arts, and science and allow local educators to establish their own accountability measures and goals to improve student learning in all subjects, including the arts.
- Increase federal funding to public schools so teachers and administrators can focus on educating students rather than fundraising.
- Discontinue economic penalties practiced under NCLB and provide sufficient funds to schools that serve needy children.
- Revise policy development and implementation patterns so that the mandate is driven from the local level, rather than from distant federal policymakers.

Reducing or eliminating the arts (and other disciplines) from a child's educational diet is likened to cutting food groups from a child's nutritional regime before he or she has reached physical maturity. Dietary deficiencies lead to developmental defects and disease in children. Educational deficiencies lead to the mental and intellectual equivalences of these problems. We would not willingly limit our children's diets to only two of the six required food groups and expect them to grow into hearty individuals, so why would we want to focus education on a couple of subjects and sacrifice the social, mental, and cognitive health of our children?

Federal legislators must recognize that NCLB and high-stakes tests are forcing schools to take measures that will produce developmentally and educationally malnourished citizens. As NCLB enters the reauthorization process, federal legislators must listen to practicing educators who are witnessing

firsthand the shortcomings of it. They must also take action to prevent the educational plight of our youths, especially the disadvantaged groups, by establishing policy that give the arts and other disciplines not subject to and not necessarily compatible with standardized testing parity with math, language basics, and science. Equity in education is the foundation from which NCLB was built. This philosophy is undermined with the emphasis on math, reading, and soon to be science that is forcing schools with limited resources to take away learning experiences and opportunities for students to succeed in other subjects such as the arts.

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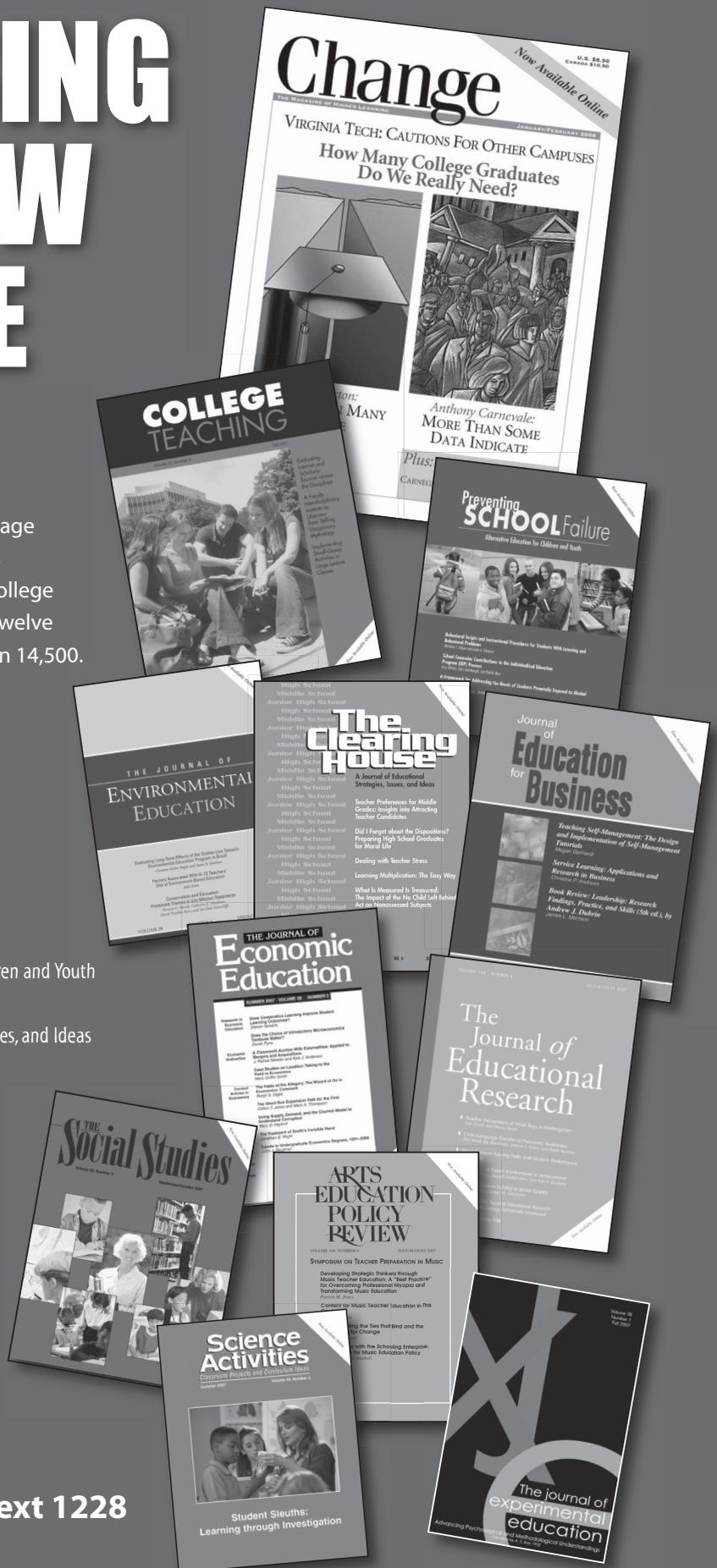
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