



The Entertainment Arts Department An Editorial by Beth Rand

There is a disconnect between high school and the real world. What is it this time? The amount of funding going to the arts versus sports for children in schools is in inverse proportion to the amount of money spent on arts entertainment versus sports by grown ups in the real world.

How can that be? Americans love their sports, and it seems there is always a movement fighting the cutting of funding in athletic programs in our schools. One such association fighting the cuts in sports funding, the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, asserts on their website "The Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP) is using federal funds to jumpstart innovative P.E. programs in American schools. To date, PEP has provided nearly \$500 million in grants to P.E. programs in schools and community based groups to help them buy more equipment and train more instructors." However, regardless of any hype about a need to supplement school sports funding, school sports proportionately continue to get more funding and receive a higher perceived societal value than the arts in schools. In fact, George Heymont, in a Huffington Post article in The Blog, titled "More Funding for School Arts Programs, Less for Sports", begs to differ that there is a shortage of funding for sports. He exclaims "Ironically, the folks who are quick to cut funding for school arts programs are often in favor of increased funding for sports facilities and athletic teams at the schools their children attend."

It's not surprising that one is likely to come to the conclusion that there is more sports funding than arts funding in our schools because grown up Americans like their professional sports more than their professional entertainment. But this isn't the case. When they grow up a shift happens. Yes, grown up America spends a lot of their hard earned cash on sports, as attested to by www.reference.com, which affirms "As of 2012, Americans spent \$25.4 billion directly on professional sports." But, according to www.cheatsheet.com, "In 2012... more than \$20 billion is spent each year on movies, and \$13 billion — or more, depending on whom you ask — on video games. As far back as 2009, Americans were spending more than \$14 billion per year on performing arts tickets as well." That adds up to \$47 billion spent on entertainment versus \$24.5 billion spent on professional sports.

So this then begs the question, why is there this disconnect between schools and real life? Does the general public not realize that the students involved in theatre, visual arts and music in our schools are our future cinematographers for our TV shows, artists who design the graphics in our favorite video games, musicians who play the music for the scary scenes and love scenes in our movies, editors for our scientific documentaries, and sound technicians at our radio stations, not to mention our Olympics organizers and our football half time show designers and technicians? Does the general public not draw the connection between underfunded school arts departments and their entertainment that they can't live without as adults?

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What if we were to simply change the semantics? What if we were to stop calling it our school's "Performing and Visual Arts Department" and start calling it our school's "Entertainment Arts Department". Would we get more funding then? They're all going to be clamoring to be let in!

So whom do we let in to our coveted – and well-funded - Entertainment Arts Department? Certainly the video class, but what about the photography class? If books are entertainment - not to mention script writing - do we let in the English department too? And if we now include gaming and costumed role playing as a form of viewing entertainment do we include the computer science class, the CAD class, and the fashion design class? We should probably also let in the business and marketing classes, too. In fact, heck, we don't hold a grudge - Parkour is becoming prevalent in television and film now, so we'd better allow the sports folks to join our Entertainment Arts Department too. After all the school gymnastics star and the school soccer star are much more likely to end up in a movie than in the Olympics

Now I'm not trying to perpetuate the 'sports versus arts in schools' debate. While I don't disagree that many sports mirror real life skills such as critical thinking, goal setting, and "character building" (albeit usually a euphemism for sucking it up), the general public's willingness to fund school sports over school arts evidences that they don't seem to have really considered the value of championing the life skills inherent in the Performing and Visual - oops – Entertainment Arts.

In the Entertainment Arts there is a direct correlation between the life skills practiced at school and the life skills used in adult life. For instance, in my experience over the years of working in educational technical theatre, I have found that tech theatre students - from 5th graders to 12th graders - are some of the most highly motivated, dedicated, energetic, team-oriented, thick-skinned, professional-acting and technically-proficient students you can hope to work with. (I am only addressing technical theatre here, because that is my personal area of expertise, but my experience is not unique to just tech theatre.) When I am working with technical theatre "arts department" students, I am always pleased to see that, as well as increasing their proficiency in the curriculum content, the students inherently develop a broad range of skills that will benefit them throughout their lives, such as:

creative thinking,
teamwork,
decision making,
problem solving,
perseverance,
diversity,
analytical thinking,
self-responsibility, and
responsibility to others.

And while there is a school of thought that putting on a school show is just a bunch of silly fun, I have experienced first hand that events in a high school arts department are run intrinsically professionally. Unfortunately this is often scorned as overindulgent. But why then are FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) students required to dress in office attire when attending their conferences – couldn't they attend in jeans? Why do sports teams wear expensive uniforms – couldn't they play just as well in t-shirts and shorts? Why do robotics clubs, such as the renowned FIRST Robotics (www.usfirst.org), expect students to have "gracious professionalism"? For the same reasons - to allow students to actually experience first hand the professional standards and expectations that they will encounter in the 'real world'.

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What the general public also doesn't seem to connect is that Entertainment Arts courses in schools are also CTE (Career and Technical Education) vocational subjects. Designers, managers and technicians in the Entertainment industry are the backbone of every event our society. We often think of them in live theatre, sitcoms and movies, but they also work for:

political rallies,
sporting events,
concerts,
documentaries,
radio programs,
Olympic games,
amusement parks,
art galleries,
conferences,
tradeshows,
press conferences,
circuses,
video production companies,
gaming companies,
museums,
the list goes on...

The skills students learn by participating in the Entertainment Arts aren't just learned by sitting in a classroom, or by competing against others. These are tangible, real life results. While I'm not saying that sports don't train students in aspects of real life, the skills all students learn in the arts are transferable to a wide variety of careers in our society. High school arts students who go on to work in the Entertainment Industry are not just "skilled laborers" but leaders, innovators, collaborators.

In his article, Heymont, while comparing the results of sports and arts programs in our schools, states that "Sports programs often teach kids the importance of winning at all costs" while "Arts programs like theater, dance, band, and chorus teach students to sharpen their skills while working toward a shared goal. Arts programs often produce extremely creative students whose critical thinking skills and ability to adapt to new situations deepen as they mature." Heymont reminisces about "what it used to be like to wait in line for standing-room tickets to the Metropolitan Opera ... many opera lovers would camp out in the tunnels under Lincoln Center all weekend, waiting for the box office to open on Sunday morning. The line for tickets was highly disciplined ... No one ever got drunk, no one started fights, no one misbehaved." He continues on to quip, "Despite the machinations of Jane Lynch's evil Coach Sue Sylvester, the musical-theater program in Glee continues to thrive...Exposure to the arts helps to build a much stronger foundation for a young person's future than merely being taught to conquer and destroy any opposition..."

At the end of the day, it's perhaps not really productive to continue comparing how much funding the sports department, or any other department, receives in comparison to the arts department, nor which school subject teaches the "best" life skills. The main objective is that we want to increase funding for the arts – we're not in a pity competition with anyone else's funding battle. To do this we need to make our grown up society aware of the direct correlation between investing in the arts in schools and the value they place on the skilled entertainment industry, around which our society thrives.

What if it getting more funding and respect for the 'Arts' at your school were as simple as changing semantics? How is your school's Entertainment Arts Department prospering?

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