



To enjoy “the life of arts” together with children

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Many parents begin to pay attention to the importance of arts education to their children when their children begin to grow or even before they become parents. Although some parents have a slight knowledge of arts, they believe that arts have an important role in the growth of children. Some parents start prenatal care before they give birth to their children. Pregnant mothers often listen to classical music. Everyone probably believes that classical music exerts the cultivation of oneself’s disposition.

### The significance of art education on the growth of next generation

It has been so said for a long time that “Arts can cultivate oneself’s disposition”. Is it truly effective? How to make it effective? How to prove that it is effective? All these questions are not important to parents, because all of them believe that art is a beautiful thing and is advantageous to children. No matter how the effects of “cultivation of disposition” are, it is of no harm to children.

This kind of mentality reflects that in today’s society, most people, including educational workers and arts workers lack knowledge on arts. That is why arts are increasingly marginalized in society. The existence of arts is considered optional and window decorations. In the eyes of the government, other government officials, parliamentarians, and community leaders, culture and arts often come after education, health care, environmental protection, transportation, public security and others in importance etc.

In fact the importance of arts is absolutely not only for the cultivation of disposition. In order to understand the significance of arts to the growth of children we need to have accurate knowledge in the function of arts. This knowledge can be illustrated by “Stories” of last century.

Let us go back to the age of 1950s, when the “cold war” between United States and Soviet Union was heating up. In the year 1957, the former Soviet Union successfully launched its first satellite which greatly shocked the United States leadership. A team of experts looked for methods to overcome the gap in space race and the final focus was to reform the education system. In the year 1961 when John F. Kennedy was the President of United States, the “Education Research and Development Team” which led the reformation of education, pointed out clearly in one of the reports: The most outstanding scientist will never limit his professional knowledge to his engaged field”. It also proved that “Scientists who are familiar with and master the arts of humanities disciplines have broader vision and are more acute.” In the implementation of education reformation, music education became an important focus and many research groups were organised for this purpose. In the year 1963, the research team at Yale University published the report «The direction of Music Education». In the conclusion it stated that to carefully promote the learning of subject on humanity arts will be able to promote the development of science and develop scientific capacity. The report also listed a lot of information and statistical data collected to strengthen this conclusion. One fact was that most of the scientists with accomplishment had passion on some cultural arts.

During this period, some of the teams after a large number of scientific experiments and data analysis published new discoveries on how the human brain learns and functions. This included the well known characteristics division of different functions between left brain and right brain. In particular, the report pointed out that most people used only a small amount of brain cells in their life. In order to develop the potential of the brain, right brain and left brain must be

developed in balance. If the left brain which emphasized on the use of logic reached a saturation stage, the left brain would be difficult to sustain development. Only if the right brain was actively functional in artistic sensibility can the left brain potential continue to develop ; learning music would balance the development of left and right brain.

This “story” clearly illustrated the importance of arts to the development of human intelligence. In particular it played a crucial role in the potential development of science and technology. Hence, the assertion of “cultivation of disposition” was only a general statement.

### The effectiveness and goal of “Popular Arts Education Program”

The purpose of “Popular Arts Education Program for Secondary School Students” of The Youth and Affairs Bureau was to lead students to appreciate arts in concert hall and theatre, so as to enhance their interest in arts performance and to instill arts into their lives during their growth. Eventually it became an important part of life and stimulated the development of both their left and right brain.

This year after the appreciation of ‘Drama’ by senior high school grade three students, a full six-year cycle of “Popular Arts Education program for Secondary School Students” was finished. It started to enter into the second cycle. In other words, every year from now the six-year secondary school students will enter the Grand Auditorium and small theatres of Macao Cultural Centre to watch puppet show, opera, music, Western music, dance and art shows in six different forms of arts performance. In the past six years, the number of schools and students that participated in the event was constantly increasing. I personally watched six different arts performances. This year in between February and March, I participated in three different forms of arts performances which were held in Macao Cultural Centre Grand Auditorium: the first being targeted at high school grade two students “Get into western music, watch the world” (4th February afternoon); the second targeted at high school grade two students “Dance

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Appreciation, Aesthetic Understanding" (25th February in the morning); the third was "Taste tradition, appreciate Chinese Music" (25th March afternoon). These three arts performances were performed respectively by Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra, the Hong Kong Dance Company and Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra. Each performance lasted one and half-hour. Since this was the second "Cycle" of the activities, compared with the previous "cycle", there was no big change in the design of the three performances, but "minor adjustment". It was wise that there was no big change in the second "cycle". Because I watched the performance before, my "freshness" was reduced, but I personally enjoyed the feeling again. For students who watched the performance the first time, still they should have high "freshness".

After the first cycle of six years, it was time for the program to consider "follow-up" and "deepening". In addition to the organizer, DSEJ and the participating school authorities, clearly the parents also played an important role. The purpose of "follow-up" and "deepening" was to continue the interest of children after they had watched the first "seeds" performance. This interest would become a part of their life and it was the ultimate goal of this program.

#### How should parents complement to benefit children more?

So how should parents complement to enable their children to be the real beneficiaries of this program, in order that the impact arts could be maximized in children's growth process?

In fact, the real beneficiary of this program was the next generation whose interest in watching arts performances could be continued and became part of their life. "Teaching by example" was the first and most important thing to achieve this effect. Only if arts became part of parents' life (better in "family") that arts could enter into children's life in their growth process and achieve its purpose. Now most parents only had "entertainment" in life, but lack "culture and arts". So how could arts become part of children's life after they grew up? It was a pity that today parents did not know the difference between "entertainment" and "arts" and felt that children, but not they, needed arts in their growth.

It was not difficult to understand the reason. Modern city life had too much work pressure. To relieve stress, most people sought entertainment that provided sensual excitement after daily work. Entertainment became something that a lot of people could not lack in life. Entertainment was undoubtedly the lubricant of life, but it usually only provided sensory stimulation or physical relaxation. It often resulted in greater physical and mental fatigue and emptiness.

The difference between entertainment and arts culture was that entertainment mainly focused on direct stimulation of sensory organs. The user was passive. Arts mainly focused on the intellectual senses and the user was active, undergoing a definite process of thinking. Hence, arts had great effect on the enhancement of human thinking capability and was very important to the enhancement of human quality.

In fact, arts culture carried with it functions in education, health care and improvement of environment. The educational role of arts culture was to cultivate a complete personality and enhance the quality of people; the medical effect of arts culture was to treat mental pain and achieve a balanced state of mind; also overlooked was its effect on improvement of mental environment and transformation of customs and social norms. The human mind also needed artistic culture to "green" in order to resist the growing "spiritual pollution". Our education often emphasized too much on "practical" knowledge filling of subject teaching materials and ignored humanities and arts culture; parents of previous generation had less conditions and opportunity to touch and learn arts. This was the reason that today most of the families had entertainment but lack arts in life. Actually it took time to learn arts (actually learning process had much fun), parents and children also had to learn so as to really make arts an important part of life for each family member.

#### Design our own cultural and artistic ways of life

The quantity and quality of Macao's cultural activities had enhanced greatly in all aspects after its return to Motherland. Despite the still weak cultural atmosphere, it had provided an environment for Macao citizen to design their own cultural and artistic ways of life with their limited financial conditions, while previously only wealthy families could have artistic life.

It was uproar for a ticket to cost a few hundred dollars to watch the famous arts performing groups, but there were only a few kinds of these performances. After all you could spend only the cost of a movie ticket to enjoy concerts, drama and dance performances and there were a lot of free indoor and outdoor performances. These performances were of great variety and good level performances. Amongst them were the concert in church organized by Macao Cultural and Arts Bureau and the weekend evening concert in Taipa House-Museum organized by Macao Civil and Municipal Affairs Bureau, both featuring Macao's program.

On arts exhibitions, the collections in Macao arts museums and Macao Museum were much less compared to similar famous organizations in world, but it was becoming increasingly abundant. Fees for admission were low and it was free on Sunday and some special designated dates. Besides, drawing exhibitions, visual art exhibitions and various arts exhibitions were held continuously in a year in Macao Cultural Centre, Gallery of IACM Building, Oxwarehouse, cultural organizations and bookstores. Most of these exhibitions were free for admission and there was no limit on hours for appreciation. Any person could pay nothing to appreciate these cultural arts exhibitions all day and experience the truth, goodness and beauty of cultural arts.

Similarly, the libraries distributed in different areas provided opportunities for those who had interest and perseverance to pursue knowledge and arts cultural life to read books for free. Even when they needed to buy audio equipment and music software, the costs were lower compared with many other countries and places.

When the dignitaries spent a large sum of money to watch the famous arts performance, the purpose was just a kind of social entertainment and living decoration. Today Macao citizens who lack good financial conditions could have a rich arts and cultural life. The key lied in whether the parents themselves recognized the artistic culture of heart and spiritual life of harmony, especially for enhancement of individuals thinking (which would be seen more obviously in younger children) and whether they had the determination to pursue. The meaning of arts and culture was always a way of life for people. Why did the parents not change their ways of life to increase the proportion of arts and culture for building humanity by themselves and enjoy the interest of arts life together with their children? If they did, surely arts would be rooted in the next generation and bring positive effects to their growth!

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