

Recapturing Soul and Spirit: Towards a Vision For Arts Education in Canada

By Dennis F. Tupman

We are well on the way toward soul when we feel attachment to the world and the people around us and when we live as much from the heart as from the head. (Thomas Moore: “Care of the Soul”, page 304.)

Overture

In order to shed light on what a vision for arts education in Canada should involve, let us reflect on what some writers have said recently.

Robert Moore, recent past president of the Canadian Education Association (the group that superintendents of education belong to in Canada), said that the school system should capture soul as one of our main goals for the school system. Walter Pittman from the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education some time back said that we should create and adopt new metaphors in education to act as a framework for what we do.

John Naisbitt and Neil Postman among others have stated explicitly that we should strive for a balance between technological metaphors and human metaphors to guide our practice – a balance between high touch and high tech as Naisbitt explains.

The Getty Foundation for the Arts affirms that our arts programs should balance the following principles in what is called disciplined-based arts education: perceiving, creating, comprehending, and judging.

Howard Gardner espouses principles which have been named under the PROPEL acronym and which balance doing, creating, and criticism.

Thomas Moore, in his book *“The Education of the Heart*, “ reminds us that it is largely through the area of our emotions that we reach and nurture the soul. Moore also carefully selects literature from all over the world to shed light on those attributes, spirit and soul.

Robert Sylwester, in his book, *“A Celebration of Neurons”*, says

The school activities that provide the most emotional support tend to emphasize non-evaluative social interaction (e. games, discussions, field trips, interactive projects, cooperative learning, and engage the entire body/brain in the activity (e.g phys.ed., the arts.) (Page 76.)

He adds:

By separating emotion from logic and reason in the classroom, we’ve simplified school management and evaluation, but we’ve also then separated two sides of the coin – and

lost something in the process. It's impossible to separate emotion from the important activities of life. Don't even try." (Page 75)

And so?

All this adds up to a major challenge for us, in my view, as arts educators to reaffirm what arts education can espouse: to express human emotion, to shed light on the soul and spirit, and to begin a search for artistic and cultural truth.

The Concern

In my considerable travels with much experience in the classroom, in festivals, and displays I have found far too many students who seem to be disconnected from the artistic activity.

Robert Sylwester feels from a limbic brain, emotional development standpoint that students need to tell their stories in order to connect with the material, whether this is in the arts or in any other subject. Sometimes we as educators become almost totally preoccupied with the technical skill development in our students. Public presentation of our artistic "products" must be balanced with meaningful connecting with these products. Part of our teaching must be, in this view of education, to encourage students to explore their emotional domains and make personal meaning and attachment with the material.

In adjudicating music festivals, for instance, I have found far too many groups of students who have no or little connection to the music either historically, theoretically, or emotionally. Many groups play well but are "dumb" to the deeper significance of the music being played.

I am not blaming anyone at this point. I am very aware of the pressures that teachers work under today. I do feel, however, that there is an opportunity here to capture more of the soul and spirit in what we are doing in our classrooms. When we feel that this is important, and when we are supported to move in this direction, then we will work toward achieving this state of involving our heart, head and hand. As George Feuerstein stated:

If we believe in the rebirth of our civilization...then clearly this renaissance must begin in the chambers of our own hearts....We cannot wait for society to change, or for our institutions and organizations to be renewed. We, as individuals, must assume responsibility for our own personal transformation. ("Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga", page 89.)

At this point I want to state that I believe as arts educators we are doing a good job under often very trying circumstances – barely keeping our heads above water sometimes as a result of cutbacks and educationally marginalizing of the arts. We are working unbelievably hard and pouring our whole selves into our jobs. Too hard sometimes so that we sacrifice ourselves and our families.

We deserve a lot of credit as “soul workers”. Our task of arts education is extremely important in providing a total, balanced education – and this is a belief which we must hold in spite of the present atmosphere of cuts and bruises.

I am left, however, with the disquieting notion that we could do more particularly in the area of connecting the art with the student. Making the art live inside the student (and in us). Making the art a “whole” rather than a detached “piece”. Bringing the art to life, in other words. Going beyond the technical performance considerations.

Art and Connecting

While speaking of “connecting”, I am reminded of Howard Gardner’s two new human qualities or attributes: ecological/environmental /natural concern, and spiritual aspiration and awareness. Both of these qualities are “connecting” impulses rather than dividing, fragmenting impulses which Gardner’s seven other “intelligences” may be construed as being (although he did not intend this separation.)

And so –the big questions

- 1 In our teaching, how do we acknowledge or foster emotional growth in our students? We do a lot in this respect, I feel. Are we conscious of how we do it? Is there anything more we can do?
- 2 How do our classrooms and our teaching foster spirit and soul? Again, what do these key words mean to us? What do they have to do with music teaching? What do they have to do with you as an arts teacher?
3. For instance, thinking metaphorically, how is making the artistic line in our art work (painting, musical phrase, dance gesture, rise and fall of action in a play) similar to life’s journey? Is life akin to artistic meaning of the artistic line? What has soul and spirit got to do with this?

Of all creatures in earth, only human beings can change their patterns. (William James: “The Will to Believe”, page 27)

Soul and Spirit

Thomas Moore, in his book “*The Education of the Heart*”, acknowledges that spirit and soul are both difficult to explain and are also inseparable. They work together. However, many writers over time have seen fit to distinguish between the two phenomena. Moore has this to say about education.

In its deepest form, education is the art of enticing the soul to emerge from its cocoon, from its coil of potentiality and its cave of hiding. Education is not the piling on of learning information, data, facts, skills or abilities – that’s training or instruction – but it is rather a making visible what is hidden as a seed. (“The Education of the Heart”, page 3).

In Moore's model, which he has gleaned from comprehensive study and reflection, he provides the following partial list of distinctions between spirit and soul. One realizes that this is a bare bones look in order to pique interest for further reflection.

In the following table one can see in Moore's model spirit and soul compared and contrasted.

SPIRIT	SOUL
youth	age
novel/newness	commonplace
technology	humanity
future	enhanced present /past
ambition	wisdom
transcend humanity	enter into humanity
action	reflection
fast paced	slow paced
internet	face to face
evidence of vitality	source of vitality
avoids pain	learns from pain
discovery	tradition
often separation	belonging

There is much to be said for the constructive contributions of suffering to the creative and spiritual life; suffering can temper the soul. (Daniel Goleman: "Emotional Intelligence", page 57).

Daniel Goleman, author of the best-selling book, "*Emotional Intelligence*", reiterates some of the same points as Moore. He states that studies show that there is a world – wide trend of children being more lonely, depressed, angry, unruly, nervous, worrying, impulsive, and aggressive. He believes one of the solutions to this situation is to harmonize head and heart in our schooling. He feels that we must learn to use emotions more intelligently. The past over-emphasis on the I.Q must be lanced with focus on E.Q. which is a better indication of success in any category. He goes on to say that E.Q. can be more enhanced than I.Q. Goleman concludes by saying that our humanity is most evident in our feelings.

Our hearts are armed in that an arts education combines heart and head – and body as well as spirit and soul. We know this. An arts education is a full package of learning outcomes which are powerful indeed. As James Hillman explains:

Great philosophical questions turn on the relation of the visible and the invisible....What means are there for transporting the unseen in the seen? Or the seen into the unseen? There are three traditional bridges: mathematics, music and myths. ("The Soul's Code – In Search of Character and Calling", page 94).

The following is a current and further indication of a general restlessness and a thirst for spiritual and soulful experience in life. Davis Foot in "*Boom, Bust and Echo*" points out

in his demographic studies, that in a number of instances the arts are being pursued to a greater degree in Canada in order to instill a more spiritual and soulful dimension into one's life.

John Naisbitt in his book, "*Megatrends 2000*", affirms from research that the real story of the 1990's is not to be found in technology but rather in the arts, literature, and spirituality.

Conclusion

There is considerable risk in even broaching this topic of spirit and soul in education these days. And yet as I said at the outset Robert Moore said that we must focus more on these topics in our teaching. My humble effort in wrestling with this issue is before you. Each of you in your own heart will come to your own conclusions.

I realize that it is difficult to have a perspective of such relatively abstract notions as soul and spirit when we are laboring away in our elementary and secondary classrooms.

Furthermore, I am aware that I have provided little in the way of concrete ideas of what a more soulful classroom looks like. This is deliberate because in your hearts and minds you will vision this differently. We should continue the conversation of this topic, however, in our homes, in our schools, and at conferences. I would suggest that the titles listed in this article are a very good basis from which to begin our transformation.

I close once again with Thomas Moore:

The great malady of the twentieth century, implicated in all our troubles and affecting us individually and socially, is 'loss of soul.' When soul is neglected, it doesn't go away; it appears symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence, and loss of meaning. Our temptation is to isolate these symptoms or to eradicate them one by one; but the root problem is that we have lost our wisdom about the soul, even our interest in it. (Care of the Soul", page xi)

Reading List – suggested titles

1. John Naisbitt and Pat Aberdene: "*Megatrends 2000*", New York, William Morrow, 1990.
2. Walter Truett Anderson: "*Reality Isn't What It Used to Be*", San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1990.
3. Thomas Moore: "*Care of the Soul*", New York, Harper Collins, 1992
4. Thomas Moore: "*The Education of the Heart*", New York, Harper Collins, 1996.
5. George Land and Beth Jarmen: "*Breakpoint and Beyond – Mastering the Future Today*", New York, Harper Business, 1992.
6. Stephen Covey: "*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*", New York, A Fireside Book, 1989.
7. Gloria Steinem: "*Revolution from Within*", Boston, Little Brown, 1987.
8. Gary Zukav: "*The Seat of the Soul*", New York, A Fireside Book, 1989.

9. Mara Krechevsky: “*Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*”, New York, Basic Books, 1993.
10. Howard Gardner: “*Art, Mind, and Brain*”, New York, Basic Books, 1982.
11. David K. Foot: “*Boom, Bust, and Echo*”, Toronto, Macfarlane and Walter Ross, 1996.
12. Daniel Goleman: “*Emotional Intelligence*”, New York, Bantam, 1995.
13. James Hillman: “*The Soul’s Code – In Search of Character and Meaning*”, New York, Random House, 1996.
14. Robert Sylwester: “*A Celebration of Neurons*”, Alexandria, ASCD Publishers, 1995.
15. William James: “*The Will to Believe*”, New York, Dover, 1956.

There are dozens of books that deal with transformation and change of the individual – an inside/out process. The challenge for arts educators is to connect with our art and the students' work and ask ourselves the following questions: Who am I? What is my soul’s journey? What is my spirit calling me to do? How is my soul reflected in my teaching? What is my purpose as an arts educator?

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