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In arts education, input affects output

As an evaluator who labors in the same field as Leslie Scheuler ("Want better test scores? Take band," April 10), I share her concern about the benefits of arts education being missed because of the pressures of standardized testing and competition for resources. I share three more points.

First, research findings are not conclusive. Reliance on small studies and the use of inappropriate methods contribute to a lack of confidence in research efforts. This contributes to confusion about what comprises "quality" arts education. We need a sustained commitment to responsible research and evaluation in the field.

Second, not just any programming will do. Schools and districts may commit to arts education, but unless curriculum and its extracurricular counterparts are developed in an integrated and informed way, results will suffer. Foundation and corporate funding sources can waste their efforts when curriculum issues are inadequately addressed. These efforts often target underserved members of the community, who miss out yet again when outreach programming is not relevant or coordinated with the curriculum.

Finally, the benefits of arts education depend on delivery. For arts learning to reach its potential, we must nurture a dedicated work force of teachers expert in arts content and teaching across disciplines. Arts teachers must get the same respect and support given in math, science and reading areas.

What children take from arts education is directly related to what we put into it. Often, even in schools with arts programs, what our children hear is the equivalent of one hand clapping.

Keith Murray | St. Louis CEO, M.A. Henry Consulting

Up, up and away

To no one's surprise, gasoline prices are going up and up. Experts predicted it. We have been told that market conditions are the cause. Is that true?

As I was driving to an area hospital, I noticed that the service stations had raised their prices to \$2.69 a

gallon. Raising their prices to the same level at the same time sounds like collusion, a deliberate process of avoiding competition by agreeing to a fixed price.

Who will protect the little guy? Is there anyone in government who has not sold out to the oil companies or the distributors of refined products? When will editors of influential newspapers such as the Post-Dispatch speak out to protest the price fixing?

It used to be said that the only inevitable things in life were death and taxes. We can add high gasoline prices.

Werner Strick | Wright City

One price of freedom

I'm sick of hearing everyone squawk about gas prices. I'm not defending the oil companies or the oil-producing countries, but they are not the cause. We are. Why do they charge the price they do for gas and oil products? Because they can, and we'll pay it. We'll gripe and complain, but we'll come up with the money just the same.

Americans are in love with oil. We buy ever-bigger gas-guzzling cars and insist on driving whenever we get the urge. We are selfish and spoiled. We demand freedom to do as we please, but don't want to pay for the privilege.

Also, people gripe about the price of gas, but think of what we get. Somewhere a crew using very expensive equipment, digs a well. Then they pump the oil out of the ground. It gets transported thousands of miles to a refinery, which is a huge, expensive complex where oil is refined and turned into the products we use. It is then transported hundreds of miles to a gas station.

At a convenience store the other day, two people in front of me were voicing their displeasure about the price of gas. Then they happily handed over \$1.25 each for a pint of water. But \$2.50 for a gallon of gasoline to drive an automobile is outrageous.

Mike Stone | Eureka

What, me worry?

Does anyone know the cost to taxpayers of President George W. Bush's trip to Jefferson City last week? These costs include the fuel used to fly the two planes (one for Mr. Bush and his entourage of more than 75 people and a second plane to transport limousines and SUVs) and the fuel used by the limos, SUVs and minivans.

How much would it be per minute? Per pre-selected audience member? The statement made by one audience member about Mr. Bush was right on target: Mr. Bush acts "like he doesn't have a care in the world."

Jacquelyn Roberts | Silex

Close, but no visit

Why, when President George W. Bush was within eight miles of scores of veteran heroes in the Harry S Truman Veterans Administration Hospital in Columbia, Mo., last week, did he choose not to honor them

with his presence? The lobby was abuzz with the rumor that he would walk in unannounced.

Jan Hamilton | Columbia, Mo.

The virgins can wait

Recently, the jury in the trial of Zacarias Moussaoui ruled that he is eligible for the death penalty. Mr. Moussaoui should not be executed. He should receive a sentence of life without parole. The frequently expressed hatred and desire for the death of jihadists is an echo of the mentality found in Mr. Moussaoui's adaptation of the Quran and the Hadith: hatred of enemies.

If he is put to death, we are only creating a martyr for Islamic fanatics to hold up as an example to others they hope to recruit to jihad.

Martyrdom is not just an Islamic thing. All of us know of Joan of Arc because she was burned at the stake. We know of Nathan Hale, who said, "I regret that I have but one life to give for my country." He was just a soldier in the Revolutionary War. No one would know who he was had he been held in a war camp. Once executed, he became a rallying cry, a martyr, and we remember him.

Send Moussaoui to jail and he'll be forgotten quickly by all except those who love him. Kill him, and we've guaranteed him immortality. In the end, if we kill him, we'll allow him to be used twice.

Why should Mr. Moussaoui should get his 72 virgins any sooner than necessary?

This is not a position of weakness but a position of thought. Do we really want more martyrs? At the end of the day, it is about what is best for us. The death penalty, in this case, is not it.

Randy Downs | Washington, Mo.

His wish: Martyrdom

If you condemn to death a man who wants to become a martyr, is it really capital punishment? Or are you actually granting him his greatest wish?

Tom Carr | Salem, Ill.

Big carrot, big demand

Ismail Haniyeh, the new Palestinian prime minister, has called the cut off of European and American foreign aid "blackmail," since the aid is predicated on the Palestinian government's recognition of Israel. In reality, Mr. Haniyeh is confusing blackmail with charity.

The Palestinian people have no legal right or legal demand on the charity given to them by western governments. They have provided no services or goods for the proffered money. Charity is given through the munificence of the donor. The gift is predicated on the wishes of the benefactor, not on the desires of the recipient. Europe and America simply are attempting to steer Hamas to the peace table with a carrot rather than the proverbial stick. Yet the Palestinian government refuses to take the hint. Despite the Palestinian disdain for western culture, perhaps Mr. Haniyeh and the Palestinian people would do well to learn the old American proverb: Beggars can't be choosers.

Sidney Machevsky | University City

Ukulele dreams

"Five foot two, eyes of blue, lips like cherry wine." I think that's how it went. I was only in junior high at the time, so I wasn't sure about all that grown-up stuff.

I was at home sick for a couple of weeks around 1950, when Arthur Godfrey was promoting the ukulele. My parents got me one of Mr. Godfrey's plastic instruments. It worked well -- until I left it out in the sun and it went the way most plastic things did in those days.

I got better, went back to school and lost interest in my shriveled uke. But the story about "Mr. Uke" ("Mr. Uke' can put a melody in your heart," April 11) brought back some nice memories.

Robert A. McKnight | St. Louis

Woo to be cherished

My husband's family owned a Chinese restaurant from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, Shanghai Inn, on Sixth and Pine streets. William Woo and a friend went there regularly and became close friends of our family. I got to know Mr. Woo and had the privilege of corresponding with him before and after his move to California. His column was the first thing I looked at on Sundays. It made my day to read his plain-spoken, heart-felt words.

When Mr. Woo and I first met, he and friends were attending my son's "1-month birthday party" (a very special Chinese tradition given only for the first son or grandson) at the restaurant. Mr. Woo was kind enough to listen to me talk about teaching my children to be proud of their Chinese heritage. Mr. Woo wrote a letter to me shortly after that party and thanked me. He said he admired me for my devotion to my husband's culture and that my words made him rethink some of his life. All of the things people say about Mr. Woo in the coming days will be true but will never do justice to his real persona.

He was someone to cherish, whether you only read his column or whether you were privileged enough to read a personal letter from him. Mr. Woo was the epitome of what we want our own children to be. His passing has made many people sad beyond words.

Lynn D. Shiang | St. Louis

NOTES: YOUR VIEWS OPINION

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