

## **The Story of Data: Subversive Integration of Artistic Knowing**

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**Abstract:** The field of Arts Education is rich in Data. Where qualitative studies fall short when it comes to influencing wide-spread policy decisions, the author calls Educational Agencies, Arts Educators, Community Arts Organizations, and Teaching Artists to ‘reframe’ their communication findings to positively influence sustainability and increased access to the field. Arts Education Practitioners and advocates must increase their education policy literacy to transform into effective agents of change.

**Keywords:** Arts education, advocacy, education policy, data collection, arts assessment, paradigm shift in education practice, Arizona arts standards

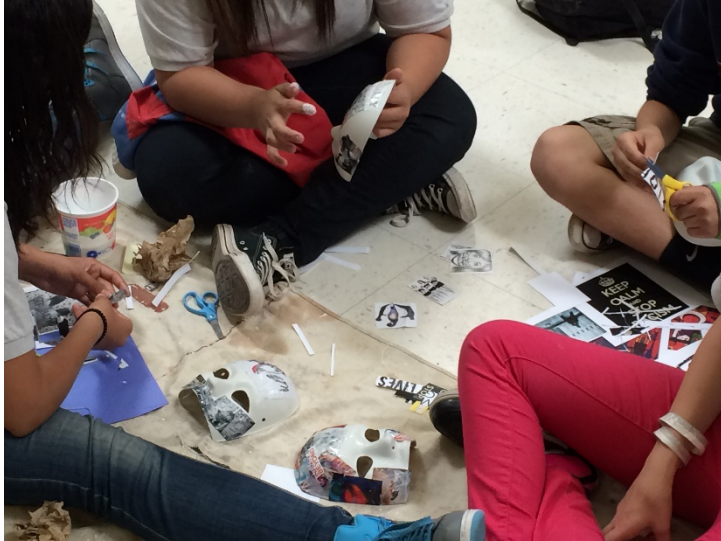
*Dustin Loehr received his Master’s in Humanities with an emphasis in Expressive Arts and Education from Prescott College in 2015. Interested in creating systemic change, Loehr utilizes Arts-based Research to critically examine the transformative benefits of the expressive arts when applied within community and/or educational settings. Dustin is an Arts Administrator, Educational Leader, and performing artist who centers his personal artistry in created spoken-word and tap dance performances exploring social justice issues. The views expressed within this article are that of his own and not in any way a direct representation of department in which he is employed.*



Multiple longitudinal studies line the shelves of our Arts Administrators offices. Collecting dust, these studies have attempted to show, largely through qualitative measures, the benefits of quality arts education for our students. Sprinkled with quantitative points centered around issues such as access to arts programming, number of courses offered at the district/school level, time spent on arts instruction etc., these reports have laid a solid foundation for even the novice advocate to make the case for increased support and funding for the arts in our schools. One does not have to look too far to find, mostly current, arts education census reports, studies showing correlations between arts education and student achievement, and the impact arts education has on economically disadvantaged youth. While meaningful, these studies tend to have limited impact outside the immediate community in which the study commenced, and are often bogged down by processing and distribution delays. Too often, the field of arts and culture circulate these resources amongst themselves neglecting to meaningfully engage outside stakeholders or the public.

The primary challenge facing Arts Education is also one of its greatest assets: the education system in the United States allows for a high level of local control. Whereas some states allow individualized districts or Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to determine curricular decisions, others dictate what must be taught, and how. For Arts Education to take its rightful place within the halls of accepted Arizona pedagogy, we must begin focusing less on what students are doing in the classroom, and more on what/how students are learning. We must leverage quantitative data centered in student outputs to tell the story of Arts Education.

I structure this discussion within the sphere of influence I reside within. Working throughout the state of Arizona, I have been privileged to engage with a wide range of Arts Education stakeholders, and from multiple professional positions and personal perspectives. As a Teaching Artist, I was often charged with implementing before or after school arts residencies where I provided intervention or enrichment services to students. Typically, this work was fiscally sponsored through 21st Century federal grants and occasionally Title I funding; these courses were designed to supplement the educational programming available to students and were often an *extra* only available to specific demographics of students. When I transitioned into working as an Arts Educator at a single school site, I was tasked to: create instruction aligned to the standards, track student achievement, plan and facilitate student performance opportunities, manage differentiated instruction for special student populations, and organize gradebooks for every K-8 grade student- all at a part time hourly basis. Often my students were pulled from my class to receive high-level academic interventions or for academic testing, yet I was still expected to produce aesthetically pleasing products. Eventually my role advanced into that of Arts Administrator where my influence and reach was expanded. Overseeing the curricula of every arts and specials class, I evaluated, trained, hired, and developed our Arts Instructors, all while producing every student artistic showcase and special event on campus, writing grants, and overseeing budgets.



Hung my tap shoes up for policy. Lost in endless postulations.  
Traded my stage for a boardroom where I kick and scream for the mic.  
Once in hand, I discover my lines have been cut.  
The poetry of data fills my veins as I choke on the bureaucracy that snuffs out  
artistry.

I've been cast in the role of expert while continuously seeking out my identity.  
The Administrator's Lament, by Dustin Loehr

These experiences, while not unique, do inform my current ontological perspective. I own the capacity to empathize with the community teaching artist, the classroom arts educator, and the district level arts administrator. I embody these experiences within my current work as the state-level Arts Education Specialist. Lacking a formal degree in education, I had to learn best practice in pedagogy, classroom management, cognitive development, data driven instruction, and authentic performance assessments to effectively work within the education realm. This, I believe, allows for a unique frame in which I organize and communicate the importance and process of Arts Education Data collection.

Arizona is uniquely positioned in the forefront of Arts Education Policy. For years we have had in place Teacher Certifications within the four main recognized disciplines: Visual Arts, Music, Drama, and Dance. Arizona has had Arts Education Standards since the late 90's, and were one of the first states in the nation to align our current 2015 standards with the National Core Arts Standards, effectively recognizing a fifth arts discipline: Media Arts. Switching from "content baseline standards" to performance-based standards that are sequential across K-8, and proficiency-based standards for 9th -12th grades, the current Arizona Academic Arts Standards minimize the dependence of discipline specific jargon while simultaneously highlighting the importance of artistic literacy for all students. No longer are teachers trapped within discipline specific silos, the current standards call for all arts disciplines to focus on the process of making art. The four Artistic Processes: Create, Perform/Present/Produce, Respond, and Connect, are the same across all five disciplines, allowing for increased collaboration across subject areas, and increased access to the arts standards by non-arts instructors. Further separating Arizona from

other states is the requirement that each school offer courses in the arts which may consist of one or more of the following: visual arts, dance, theatre, music or media arts (Arizona, Article 3 R7-2-301). Arizona's current ESSA Plan encompasses Arts Education two separate times, mirroring Federal guidance (Arizona, Title I, Part A, Title IV-A).

It is important to note the disconnect between policy and practice. While the latest census data\* (Arts Education, 3) shows access to arts education in Arizona Public School improving, there are still vast disparities, particularly within our charter school and elementary district schools. According to the latest reports, there are a total of 115,487 students across the state with no access to the arts (Arts Education, 4) despite the policies that are in place. The availability of "access" data is important to help inform and guide advocacy conversation; it is not enough to instill lasting change within the current political landscape, hence the very real need for individual, sequential standard-based student output.

It is time for Arts Educators, Community Arts Organizations, and Teaching Artists to effectively utilize the tools at their disposal. All of us, and I use the term "us" intentionally because regardless of our organizational commitments we all serve within the field of Arts Education, must increase our capacity to tell the story of arts education through the language of standard-based pedagogy and assessment. What at first might seem an extensive task can easily be reframed around the work that Arts Educators are already doing. Think of your typical dance class: students learn technique, they practice and organize skills into artistic products, all the while the instructor is assessing student growth and mastery of educational standards and communicating that assessment with the student to better the final product. The same can be true for the other arts disciplines. The amount of student assessment in the arts is staggering! Students and instructors are continuously reflecting on practice. Authentic performance assessments, National Core Arts Standards cornerstone assessments, student learning objectives, student-centered engagement observations, student self-assessments and reflections; all can be organized and transformed into a powerful story of data. We need to learn to go beyond the *stage*, and speak the language of administrators, politicians and legislatures.

It is necessary to stress again that Art Education data is readily available. It is the rare non-profit arts organization or school that neglects to gather internal data on their students, teachers and programming. The creative work happening across our state is awe inspiring! Many of our Arts Educators and Teaching Artists already have important data indicators in hand, it's packaging this into a meaningful deliverable that is the challenge. By linking course objectives and lesson plans to the current Arts Education Standards the resulting arts curriculum is immediately elevated. By conducting standards-based assessments of student learning and effectively measuring student growth and achievement within those standards, individual student output can be reported and tracked, allowing the arts educator to be effectively evaluated within their own content area. These same types of measures can be applied to our community arts organizations. By centering programming within the standards, conducting standards aligned pre and post tests, the community arts organization can create a portfolio of evidence-based programming that supports the development of well-rounded education for our students.



I am confident in stating that most of our Arts Educators and Teaching Artists know how to teach their art form. I believe that, overall, we as a cohort of teaching practitioners have mastered, or have the capacity to master, the “Art” within the designation of Arts Education. Now we must master operating within and owning the “Education” portion of our career title, and that means playing by the same rules governing academic subject areas. Regardless of how we might individually feel about the current state of our education system, to elevate our work, we must embrace: standards based instruction and assessment, teacher evaluation, the collection of individual student growth and achievement scores, and the consistent utilization of data driven instruction technique. Whereas the arts-for-arts-sake may be an ideal, this approach has not reached the ears of those holding the purse strings. I know many the art educator whom are underpaid, under resourced, and placed under challenging constraints that limit their time with students. Asking these educators to then assess students on top of creating exciting projects and performances is a lot. Asking the Arts Educator to submit to the same parameters of our academic counter parts is almost offensive considering the amount of challenges the arts are forced to overcome; it is your job to learn to shift your teaching practice and focus from that of solely producing quality artistic products to allowing students to fully experience and investigate the artistic process. We must collectively support each other in this paradigm shift if there is hope for Arts Education to become a sustainable form of pedagogy.

The field of Arts Education has been struggling for a long time in this country. Artists and Arts Education advocates have created many innovative strategies designed to communicate the value of the arts within our children’s education: arts integration, STEAM, STREAM, 21st Century Learning, increasing academic results in English and math. While wonderful and meaningful, the education landscape of our times does not allow for justification of non-essential exploration of pedagogical paradigms. It’s time we embrace this. As the old maxim deftly illustrates, one should “Learn the rules like a pro, break them like an artist”. Let us focus our energies not on lamenting on how practice and policy should be, but rather on learning how to best operate within the constraints placed upon us. If our goals are to provide the best arts education possible for every student, while also elevating the importance and recognition of Arts Education, then we must commit to communicating our student products in specific ways. So often I hear the term ‘innovation’ or ‘outside-the-box- thinking’ being carelessly paired with the arts. While liberating in ideology this is beyond our current reality. Arts Education exists in a defined, small, compressed, and often ignored “box”. We have been compelled to think outside of this box for so long, we have allowed ourselves to be lost within these constraints and shelved by the policy keepers. For true sustainable measures to take root, we must operate more effectively within the defined walls of the larger educational system. Arts Education must communicate valid and reliable student outcomes of standards-based instruction. Once we collectively master operating within our constraints and our efforts are recognized by those outside of our field, then we may allow ourselves the luxury to dream larger, more versatile boxes to fill with the richness found within student artistic knowing and innovative educational designs.

It’s time we dust off those reports and use the available data to steer our efforts forward. It’s time we rally our resources, dive into the policies and resources that already exist for us, and learn to produce within these expectations. By focusing inward, we have an opportunity within the new Every Student Succeeds Act to make a lasting change within the education system of our

country. Regardless of how you personally feel about educational arts standards, or arts assessments, or measuring student success, until our education system changes we must learn to communicate in the recognized cannon. I believe the arts may lead to that ultimate systemic change- but not if we continue to go unheard. It's time we get our acts together, or, I recommend you resolve yourself to stay locked up in that box. Without articulating through the accepted language of education, the arts won't be going anywhere.

The poetry of data fills my veins as I choke on the bureaucracy that snuffs out artistry.

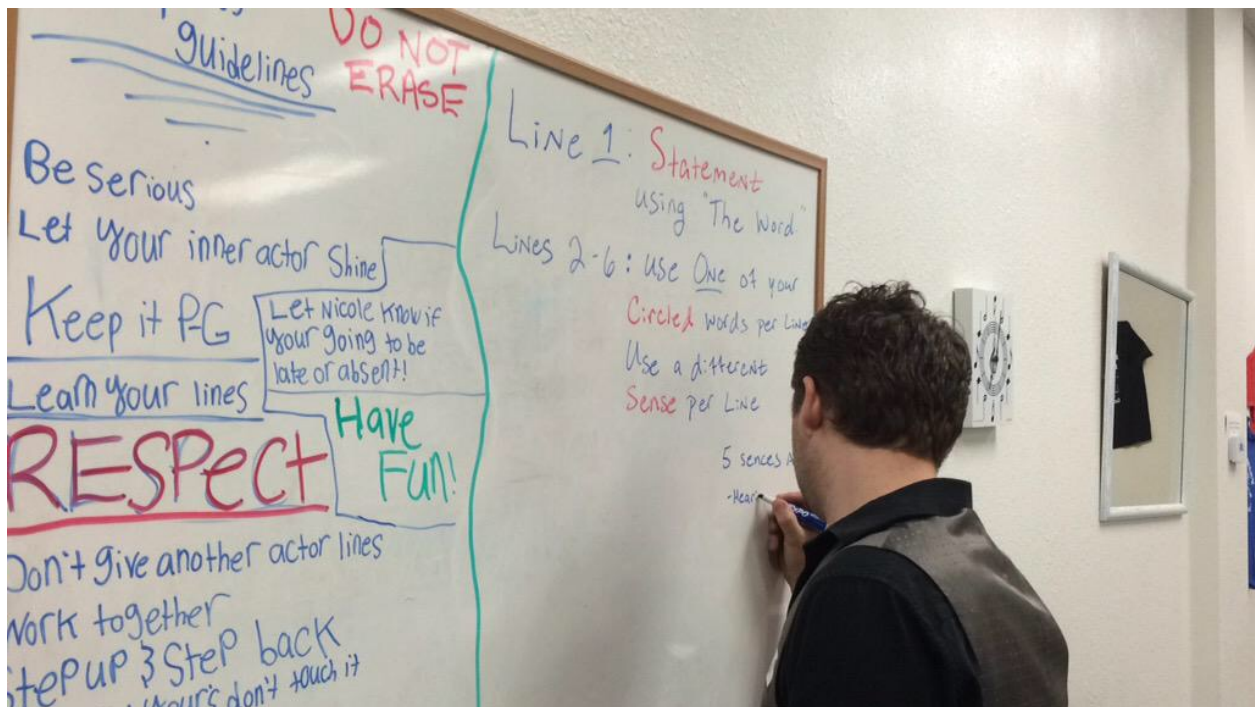
I've been cast in the role of expert while continuously seeking out my identity. And, what I have found... through the hearts of others, the joy and knowledge of the experience.

How to commune the unquantifiable with the imaginable?

The story of the data.

An artful exploration.

The Administrator's Confession: Admission after Lamentation  
Dustin Loehr



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