

# *translations*

*In this Issue*

Counting New Beans:  
Intrinsic Impact  
and the Value of Art



*Counting New Beans: Intrinsic Impact and the Value of Art* is a collection of a report, essays and interviews edited by Clayton Lord. It features *Measuring the Intrinsic Impact of Live Theatre*, the final report of a two-year study commissioned by Theatre Bay Area and conducted by research firm WolfBrown with Alan Brown and Rebecca Ratzkin as principal investigators. All quotes for this Translations piece are taken from *Counting New Beans: Intrinsic Impact and the Value of Art* unless otherwise noted. Copies of the book are available through Theatre Bay Area's website at: <http://theatrebayarea.org/Programs/Intrinsic-Impact.cfm>.

#### ABOUT THE ARTS EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE TRANSLATIONS SERIES

The Arts Education Collaborative is committed to strengthening education by making the arts central to learning through collaboration, research, and advocacy. To that end, the Translations Series provides arts educators with highlights of prominent research pieces in education and ways in which that research can be realized in their classroom, school, district or arts and culture environment in a practical way. Copies of the entire Translations Series can be found online [here](#).

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## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Historically, arts organizations have tried to validate their existence through championing extrinsic values of artistic productions. These corporal values are primarily shared through economic evidence and anecdotes. However, these are not the primary benefits for the individuals attending theatre performances, nor are they what motivates people to continue attending theatre productions. The *Measuring the Intrinsic Impact of Live Theatre* report and accompanying essays demonstrate a way to quantify the intrinsic impact of artistic experiences on audiences, allowing theatres to find “a new way to ask, and answer, a fundamental question, ‘what are we trying to do with this play, with this production, and are we doing it?’” (Brad Erickson 14)

Bringing several pieces of research together to mount the case for this study, Brown and Ratzkin, began with a new understanding of how people make decisions, based on the work of behavioral economist Daniel Kahneman and a distinction he makes between the “experiencing self” and the “remembering self”. While most arts organizations currently use metrics that focus on the experiences patrons have (e.g. comfortable seats, long lines for the bathroom), it is the memory of these collective experiences that is held onto by the “remembering self.” While the distinction is slight, attending an artistic event includes several experiences for patrons, each one contributing to what the “remembering self” actually takes away. Psychologically, this is significant because people choose or do not choose to repeat an activity based on the abstract feelings and impressions that are packaged together in a memory. (38-39) Arts organizations must consider ways to measure and affect the complete memory of the combined experiences patrons have relating to the performance, beginning with the level of anticipation they have coming to the performance, while also including how they felt and interacted with people around them after the show is over and the reflections they do together or independently as they disperse.

Brown also used his reflections on the work of RAND Corporation as published in *The Gift of the Muse* in 2004 to inform this study. *The Gift of the Muse* describes a distinction between extrinsic impact and intrinsic impact of arts experiences, and that while much of what arts organizations measure is part of extrinsic impact (e.g. economic impact, political dialogue, tolerance), it is intrinsic impact (e.g. emotional resonance, aesthetic growth, intellectual stimulation) that makes the arts distinctive and where all impact starts – with the individual’s experience of the art. Armed with this information, Brown conducted the first study on impact assessment in 2006 with Major University Presenters. (43)

In subsequent work, Brown found that participants in this initial study were continuing to face challenges with a hesitation to move from economic and abstract conversations to concrete conversations about the impact of the arts because of a lack of a common vocabulary among departments within organizations and across organizations. To address these issues, *Counting New Beans* includes qualitative support through essays, interviews, and a glossary, which provide context and clarity around this new level of quantitative work, particularly as regards the audience/artist relationship and the question, “What is the role of the audience in the artistic process?” (44)

With this guiding question, Theatre Bay Area and WolfBrown set out to find more answers, with the goal of creating a tool for theatres to use to measure the intrinsic impact of the work they do. In using this tool, theatres would have new information to use among artistic and administrative staff, funders, and policy makers. This information would provide a common ground for organizations to validate their work based on previously unavailable audience feedback with meaningful and specific descriptors. In developing the tool, the researchers recognized that the tool needed to be versatile enough to use across organizations with different strengths while also being accessible, affordable, standardized, understood, and able to become routine for this diverse group of organizations. (50-51)

These goals were the basis for WolfBrown’s planning for this study. The research phase of *Measuring the Intrinsic Impact of Live Theatre* was conducted from December 2010 to September 2011 and involved eighteen theatres in six cities across the United States. Each theatre surveyed audiences of three or four productions at each site for a total of fifty-eight productions, which resulted in nearly 60,000 questionnaires distributed, with a return of nearly 19,000 questionnaires. Questionnaires were customized for each theatre, with input from artistic, managing, and marketing staff members, though they were based on a common template that included a wide range of questions covering buyer behavior, “readiness to receive,” intrinsic impact, summative impact, post-performance engagement, loyalty, and artistic quality. Of these questionnaire components, “readiness to receive” and intrinsic impact questions were considered foundational to the investigation. Additionally, questionnaires included nineteen mandatory questions to allow for analysis by certain subgroups, which were a combination of demographic questions and content questions. (69)

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Questionnaires focused on patrons' "readiness to receive" (a patron's ability to be open to an artistic experience) and intrinsic impact (the core benefits that can accrue in individuals by virtue of experiencing an exhibition or live arts performance), based on Brown's former work. (452-3) Information gathered can be used by theatres to "gauge the success at attracting first-timers, and to assess the need for educational work and interpretive assistance." (81)

The three constructs of "readiness to receive" are:

- 1 **Context** – the overall level of preparedness an audience member has for the experience (450)
- 2 **Relevance** – the extent to which the arts activity in question is relevant to the participant (453)
- 3 **Anticipation** – an audience member's psychological state prior to the experience, especially the degree to which they are looking forward to the event (449)

The five constructs of intrinsic impact are:

- 1 **Captivation** – the extent to which the audience member is absorbed in the performance or exhibition (450)
- 2 **Aesthetic growth** – the extent to which an audience member is exposed to a new style or type of art or a new artist; one component of aesthetic enrichment (449)
- 3 **Intellectual stimulation** – the degree to which the performance or exhibition triggers thinking about the art, issues or topics, or causes critical reflection (452)
- 4 **Social bridging** – connectedness with the rest of the audience, new insight on one's own culture or a culture outside of one's life experience, or new perspective on human relationships or social issues (454)
- 5 **Emotional resonance** – the extent to which the audience member experiences a heightened emotional state during or after the performance or exhibition (451)

Because of the desire for this questionnaire to be effective for a diverse group of organizations beyond those in the study, it is important to note that both the artistic and administrative staffs of each organization are to provide responses to the questionnaire first. These results are then used as a basis for comparison against audience responses. Any set of scoring is acceptable—the goal is alignment between audience and staff rather than comparison across productions or theatres. Using the survey in this way allows for differences of mission and artistic goals of a specific show.

The findings of the study are broad. From the high response rate (45%), the researchers note that audiences want to engage with the work they are seeing by providing comments and responses following a performance. They encourage this kind of "audience feedback loop" where staff is checking actual audience impact against the assumptions they have made about how the audience will be impacted. Further, this kind of engagement enriches the audience's experience by educating the audience about how to engage with the art, prompting deeper engagement, and directing conversation to make the memory more powerful, embedding it as part of the "remembering self". (45-46) Because of this, the authors point out that, "In future efforts it will be important to provide respondents with immediate feedback on how their results compare to those of other patrons, in order to complete the circle of learning and encourage future cooperation with surveys of a similar nature." (71)

Results of the study indicate that summative impact, how much a person was affected or deeply moved by a performance, is the greatest predictor of a patron's likelihood to recommend a performance or an organization to another person, which implies loyalty. The assumption is that loyalty will lead to repeat attendees in the future. (75)

In considering post-performance engagement, the study shows that whether reflection is done privately or communally, formally or casually, it is effective in increasing the summative impact of a performance. This prompts the question of how theatre companies (and by extension, other arts organizations) can encourage private reflection following a performance or exhibition.

The essays and interview transcripts included in the book provide a number of additional insights, including powerful testimonies to the power of the arts, and theatre in particular. There is wide range of perceptions held by artistic directors regarding the direction theatre is going, what audience engagement looks like, and what they, as artistic directors, need to do about it, which is intriguing and demonstrates the tension of an evolving artistic field. Remarkable are stories of those who are experimenting and finding new ways of bringing audiences into the art-making process, and addressing three components of interaction: seeing, responding, and doing.

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## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE ARTS EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE AND ITS CONSTITUENTS

The Arts Education Collaborative is excited by this new research because it provides fodder for conversation and dialogue, and also affirms some current practices. A clearer understanding of memory, motivation, and impact will be beneficial in reviewing current marketing and evaluation practices. Particularly considering the emphasis of good questions, and the importance of summative impact, perhaps the first change will be including an additional question in evaluation materials:

“When you look back on this experience a year from now, what do you predict will be your lasting impression(s)?”

In working with our constituents, discussing the role of the audience is an important piece to consider, both with them as the audience, and when they work with audiences of their own. When planning for experiences where our constituents are the audience, we will continue to find new ways to engage them both as participants in the experience and as a part of the audience feedback loop.

When working with organizations as they focus on their audiences, the AEC will work to educate others about this new way of describing the value the arts have and building a common language with which to talk about it. The AEC will work to explain why intrinsic impact can be a more meaningful measurement than how many seats were sold, in an effort to help the arts community get on the same page, able to move forward together. This will be especially significant as we use this work to continue the discussion about the definition of student achievement. If we have reliable and valid ways of measuring intrinsic impact, we can define student achievement more broadly than scores on standardized tests. As the authors emphasize, additional materials are needed to provide context and understanding to build, share, and reinforce a common vocabulary for the work to move forward effectively.

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EDUCATORS

Educators need to be aware and a part of the conversations that are going on in the arts to be able to articulate the discussion succinctly to those around them, to advocate for the pros and cons of a given direction, and to prepare students for the diversity of artistic experiences they may encounter. In their schools, and organizations, educators are the main voice in the conversation to define student achievement more broadly.

Since students currently engage with the arts both in and outside of school as audience members, the information from this study can be used to help students understand their role as audience members. Educators can use the five constructs of intrinsic impact as a basis for conversation or assessment with students to capture the learning that takes place in the classroom.

Educators also should consider building their students’ critical thinking skills by having them verbalize or write out questions that they have following an event, and then to explore answers, allowing them to make meaning from their experience. While some questions are likely to focus on the “why” of a production and others on the “how” of a production, both contribute to helping students understand the “moment of curatorial insight” – how the intent and the realization of a production work together to create a particular result. (73) These questions can be a great method of formative assessment, as the depth of questioning is often an indication of comprehensive knowledge and understanding.

Through this work, we may be reminded about the arts and their importance and the reason the impact of the arts must be properly conveyed.

We have accidentally convinced people that art is primarily a transactional good: a luxury, not a necessity. We may have even convinced ourselves to a degree. We have encouraged ourselves, our organizations, our funders, to lose focus, to miss the true impact of art: empathy, intellectual stimulation, artistic growth, emotional resonance, social connection, escape. (30-31)



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