

## Visual and Performing Arts Regional Forums

### Vision

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Luis Valdez, the famous playwright, once said: “To whom does the future belong? It belongs to those who can imagine it.”

There is no doubt that through the arts, our students can give their imaginations life, and in doing this, they create something that never was before. They are fully capable, with our guidance and support, of designing a future that is richer because of their contributions. And that is one of the reasons why we cannot, we must not, leave the arts behind.

The arts should be at the center of our efforts to improve our schools and our society.

This regional forum is our way of continuing to spread the word of a new and emerging vision of arts education for California’s students that says that the visual and performing arts are an integral part of a comprehensive curriculum and are essential for learning in the 21st century.

The demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century call for us to transform our schools and communities for today’s creative age so that our students can live a rich and rewarding life. This call has particular meaning for us as educational leaders, and we sense the urgency to respond not only from our minds but from our hearts as well. After all, at heart, the vision we hold of arts education for every student in every school every day is one of hope, not just for our students, but for us and our communities as well.

The hope we hold in our hearts is verbalized in our Vision --- which is our anchor, our keystone, that both guides our work and holds us together in difficult and challenging times. It reminds us of why we’re in this business; why we do the work we do. It’s a statement of our passion and our commitment, and it paints an incredibly powerful picture of student success, by being clear in a public way about the outcomes we expect our schools to produce. This is the two-fold promise we make:

- That every California student--from every culture and language, geographic region, and socio-economic level—will experience quality arts learning in dance, music, theatre, and visual arts as part of the K-12 core curriculum, particularly in today’s challenging times.
- That through a comprehensive and rigorous arts education program, every student we teach will develop the confidence, competence, and capacities needed to thrive in the 21st century, a time of unprecedented demand for creativity, imagination, and innovation in every sphere of our life as Americans and citizens of an increasingly global world community.

This vision statement has at its core ensuring that we prepare our students to be actors in the 21st century world. That is what the visual and performing arts can make possible, and today, you’ll hear about the resources available to help achieve this vision in your county.

Across the world, an astoundingly diverse array of business, government, and social leaders are pointing to the power of artists and other creative types to add value to business and social enterprises, even to be essential to the success of those enterprises.

What do they know that we should know? Increasingly, research in neuroscience suggests that the arts have a significant impact on students' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Recent developments in neuroimaging technologies have added an important dimension to our knowledge, by allowing scientists to observe how various processing systems in the brain collaborate. Not only do the arts have inherent value -- new technologies demonstrate a significant link between artistic and cognitive development.<sup>1</sup>

And of course, creativity is not purely an intellectual process. It is enriched by other capacities and in particular by feelings, intuition, and a playful imagination. The term "flow" has been used to describe peak creative performances. There are times when we are immersed in something that completely engages our creative capabilities and draws equally from our knowledge, feelings, and intuitive powers.

We need languages of feeling to express these perceptions, and this is one of the functions of the arts, and one of the reasons for needing a new balance in the way we educate and prepare students. Arts techniques can be powerful ways of unlocking creative capacities and of engaging the whole person.<sup>2</sup>

Schools that want to create a culture of creativity have two related tasks. The first is to unlock the creative abilities in each student. All students have creative abilities, and they all have them differently. Creativity is not a single aspect of intelligence that only emerges in particular activities, in the arts for example. It is a systemic function of intelligence that can emerge wherever students' intelligence is engaged.

Creativity is also a dynamic process that draws on many different areas of a student's experience and intelligence. Creativity and innovation must be harnessed and not just released. It is not just an individual performance. It arises out of students' interactions with ideas and achievements of other people. It is a cultural process.<sup>3</sup>

Economic data tell us that one of the fastest-growing areas of the economy is the creative industries. Recent studies make the case that the arts make a significant contribution to the national economy and are serious forms of employment for very many people. These new forms of work are creating a demand for new sorts of skill and aptitude. Unlike many other industries, the creative industries continue to benefit from high growth rates, in part because they build on and interact with innovations in science and technology.

As Pink, Peters, and others underscore, the theme of 21st century skills is becoming more prominent as the realization dawns that something fundamentally different is happening in our learning spaces. We need to augment our analytical skills with right-brained skills.

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<sup>1</sup> Steven T. Webb, "Educating Children in the New Millennium: Child's Play." *Education Week*, Vol. 27, Issue 07, PP 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> Ken Robinson, *Out of Our Minds*

<sup>3</sup> Ken Robinson, *Out of Our Minds*

Daniel Pink suggests that we need to extend our learning approaches by focusing on:

- Not just function, but also design
- Not just argument, but also story
- Not just focus, but also symphony
- Not just logic, but also empathy
- Not just seriousness, but also play
- Not just accumulation, but also meaning
- Not just knowledge, but also learning.

He calls these necessary skills for people to thrive in the “conceptual age.”<sup>4</sup>

What does this have to do with us in education? Well, for one thing, employers are complaining that schools and universities simply don’t teach what people need to know and be able to do. They want people who can think intuitively, who are imaginative and innovative, who can communicate well, work in teams, and are flexible, adaptable, and self-confident. The traditional academic curriculum is simply not designed to produce such people.

Yet young people have creative abilities, powers of communication, and adaptability in abundance. The arts have the power to unlock, grow, and refine these abilities in ways that benefit not only the students themselves, but their families and communities, and our nation and world as well.

Almost a year ago, the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce released a blueprint for rethinking American education from pre-K to 12 and beyond to better prepare students to thrive in the global economy. While that report includes some controversial proposals, there is remarkable consensus among educators and business and policy leaders on one key conclusion: we need to bring what we teach and how we teach into the 21st century.

Today’s economy demands not only a high-level competence in the traditional academic disciplines, but also what might be called 21st century skills. Not surprisingly, among these key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills is that of “thinking outside the box.” Jobs in the new economy -- the ones that won’t get outsourced or automated -- “put an enormous premium on creative and innovative skills, seeing patterns where others see only chaos,” says Marc Tucker, a lead author of the skills-commission report and president of the National Center on Education and the Economy. Students need to develop their capacity for flexibility, adaptability, creativity, and self-confidence.<sup>5</sup> How better to do this than through the arts?

That’s a problem for us, because we’ve become less daring in the back-to-basics climate of NCLB. Kids also must learn to think across disciplines, since that’s where most breakthroughs are made. It’s interdisciplinary combinations -- design and technology, math and art -- “that produce YouTube and Google,” says Thomas Friedman, the bestselling author of *The World Is Flat*.

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Pink

<sup>5</sup> “How to Bring Our Schools Out of the 20th Century” by Claudia Wallis and Sonia Steptoe, in *Time Magazine* (12/9/2006)

What all of this has to do with us is that there is an urgent need to rethink some of the underlying assumptions of our educational systems if we are to seriously tackle the development of creative resources in all our students.

We know that it's innovation, a blend of intellect and imagination, that has catapulted and sustained America's place as the dominant economic force in the global economy. Of course, we must pay attention to rigor and world-class standards in mathematics and science, but not at the expense of those disciplines that develop and nurture creativity. Innovation and entrepreneurship will sustain America's leading role in the world.

Schools and what happens in them, are vital to our children's future success. We must design schools that will prepare young people to thrive in the 21st century, to master rigorous literacy, math, and science standards and have the ability to think critically, be creative, and respond to new challenges with agility. Those are the keys that will unlock doors for our young people.<sup>6</sup>

One of our problems is that we completely underestimate the intellectual capacity and giftedness of most of our students, and because we don't tend to associate the arts with high intellectual performance, we often don't see the necessity of developing these related capacities as an essential part of students' academic preparation.

We can look at language as just one example. Consider that if children are born into multilingual households, they learn all the languages they are regularly exposed to. Parents don't teach children to speak in the way they're taught language in school. Mothers and fathers don't teach their babies the principles of grammar. They prompt and guide and teach particular words.

But learning a language is so complex that teaching it formally to an infant would be impossible. Teaching them three or four languages would be unthinkable. Yet infants do learn three or four languages and more if necessary. They don't reach a point of saturation, or as Ken Robinson says, ask for their grandmothers to be kept out of the room because they can't handle another dialect. They absorb them all.

This is because they have a language instinct. Their capacity for languages means that they absorb all the languages they're exposed to. It isn't that multilingual households give birth by good luck to linguistically gifted children. All normal children have this capacity. But if a child is born into a home where only one language is spoken, that is the language they learn. Learning a second language in adolescence is much more difficult. One of the reasons is that by then our latent language capacities are no longer so accessible.

From birth and during infancy the child's brain is tremendously plastic. How the brain develops, the networks that are created, depend on how it is used. If the language capacity is not used, it may fade as the brain's neural capacities are turned to other uses. The same can be true of music or mathematics or whatever. As children grow, their

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<sup>6</sup> Steven T. Webb, "Educating Children in the New Millennium: Child's Play." Education Week, Vol. 27, Issue 07, PP 24-25

brains are customized, hard-wired, around the uses they make or do not make of them. This may apply to language, music, whatever.<sup>7</sup>

We tend to see as “intelligent” those of our students who are good at reasoning verbally and mathematically. But this isn’t all there is to intelligence. If human intelligence were limited to the abilities measured in IQ tests, most of human activity would stop or would never have started. The fact is that we can think in many ways.

For example, we not only perceive the world in vision, we think visually, too. We not only hear things, we can think in sound. Many of our thoughts occur as visual images. Visual artists think and communicate in images. They aren’t trying to express ideas that would be better put into words. They are having visual ideas. Musicians think in sound. Dancers think physically. It isn’t that they begin from a verbal proposition and try to dance it. Rather, choreography evolves in the making.

We think about our experiences in all the ways we have available. And there aren’t two types of students, academic or non-academic, but many, and rather than seeing our students as more or less intelligent on a single scale, we should think of all students as having an array of intellectual capacities. If we fail to promote a full sense of students’ abilities through education and training --as we have done for generations--, some --perhaps most-- of our students will never discover what their real intellectual capacities are. In a crucial sense, they will never really know who they are or what they might become.

We need to ask what we must do at a systems level in order to create a culture of creativity and innovation. We can start with three key actions.

First, we can systematically identify and develop the creative strengths and abilities of every student in our system. This means looking for both generic and domain-specific creative ability.

Second, we can provide the conditions within our districts as a whole through which creative processes are actively supported and encouraged. This includes facilitating student interaction across the conventional boundaries between disciplines and ways of thinking so that students are able to make unusual connections, see analogies, and identify relationships between ideas and processes that were previously not related.

It means intentionally bringing together students with different creative strengths and expertises to share with and learn from each other. It means as well creating opportunities and structures for bringing together older and younger students with different levels of expertise and experience. It involves loosening hierarchies that can stifle innovation through pressure to deliver the wrong sort of results over the wrong timescale, by demands for the wrong sort of accountability.

In describing a creative organization, David Liddle of Interval Research says:

*It is first and foremost a place that gives people freedom to take risks; second it is a place that allows people to discover and develop their own natural intelligence; third it is a*

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<sup>7</sup> Ken Robinson, *Out of Our Minds*

*place where there are no “stupid” questions and no “right” answers; and fourth, it is a place that values irreverence, the lively, the dynamic, the surprising, the playful.*

Couldn't we say the same thing about creative schools?

Third, we can harness creative outcomes to our district core objectives. It isn't enough to develop individual creative abilities, or for a school here or there to nurture creativity. As a district, we need to encourage a culture where creative abilities are valued and harnessed to our district objectives across the entire district. This means recognizing and rewarding creative output in appropriate ways and avoiding an atmosphere of accountability that discourages taking risks or that stifles exploratory activities in the interest of short term gain.<sup>8</sup>

So, what will be your role in transforming our schools into creative communities that use the arts to identify and nurture each student's talents, curiosities, and potentials?

How will you commit to being and acting as arts leaders with students and communities such that this transformation is not just possible, but likely?

Within your sphere of influence, how will you NURTURE this type of leadership behavior in others at every level in order to sustain creativity, innovation, and learning among students and adults alike through powerful arts education?

Today, you'll have a forum for sharing and finding answers both.

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<sup>8</sup> Ken Robinson, *Out of Our Minds*