

**Innovation and Integrated Arts Education:
How to Create the Workforce America Needs**
By Stacey Wagner and Scott Cheney

Back in ancient times – the 1960s and 70s when we went to school – art and music classes, and participation in the school musical, were considered important to the development of a well-rounded student. The infusion of a little culture – if you can call the high school production of *Bye Bye Birdie* culture – was not only deemed important to students’ personal development, but it was also a lot of fun. Kindergarten’s hand-outlined Thanksgiving turkeys, elementary school’s plays about our forefathers, band practice in high school, and after school dance classes gave students a sense of the interconnectedness between the study of subjects such as mathematics and history and the study of music, painting, and dance that, together, has shaped human intellect and culture over time.

What we didn’t realize when we were having all that fun, was that the inclusion of artistic thinking and discipline into our everyday lives and education might have provided us with a cognitive boost – a way to process information and apply ourselves to study in such a way as to inform, and possibly enhance, the way we analyzed problems and devised solutions. A way to be creative and innovative while enhancing left brain strength.

Fast forward to 2008, and we see a burgeoning movement taking place in education that hopes to inspire creative thinking and innovation in America’s future employees – integrated arts education. Following years of educational budget cuts that have, in many cases, decimated school art programs in favor of a focus on “the basics”, integrated arts education seeks to combine the rigor of a STEM-focused education with the imaginative potential of an arts education to create students who are proficient in technical disciplines, and also creative. The value to business of employees with these skills is substantial. Consider the following:

A new classification of “human talents” (offered by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas) has identified three categories of right brain occupations:

1. People Skills/Emotional Intelligence (nurses, lawyers, education counselors, recreation workers).
2. Imagination/Creativity (designers, architects, actors).
3. Analytic Reasoning (legal assistants, electronic engineers, medical scientists).

This new approach also offers three classifications of left brain occupations:

1. Formulaic Intelligence (health records technicians, bookkeepers, secretaries).
2. Manual Dexterity (tool and die makers, typesetters, sewing machine operators).
3. Muscle Power (garbage collectors, fishing workers, timber cutters).

Nationally, between 2000 and 2005, **jobs requiring imagination and creativity rose more than 10 percent**. Overall, jobs in the all the categories increased, with the exception of jobs requiring manual dexterity, which dropped by 25 percent.¹

Over the last year, our research into the business interest in hiring creative and imaginative employees has yielded some surprising and not-so-surprising findings. Not surprisingly, we found that the business community believes that school graduates need to be more creative and innovative if they

¹ http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/trends_detail.aspx?id=31686

are to be highly valued and successful in the workplace. In fact, 97 percent of employers in a Conference Board study said that creativity is of increasing importance and 72 percent stated that hiring creative people is a primary concern.² Our own initial survey of employers yielded a more nuanced picture: the vast majority of employers surveyed wanted motivated, resilient, and analytical employees, but they also valued imagination, creativity and symbolic understanding.³

Surprisingly, we found a few states really committed to arts education as the basis for moving their old-line economies to the new, creative economies advocated by Daniel Pink and Richard Florida.

“Increasingly,” says Steven Webb, Deputy Superintendent of the Vancouver, Washington public schools, “research in neuroscience suggests that the arts (and play) have a significant impact on students’ cognitive, social, and emotional development....Not only do play, the arts, and physical education have inherent value, new technologies demonstrate a significant link between artistic and cognitive development.”⁴

If we think about integrated arts education as a mechanism for stimulating imagination and creativity, while still providing a sufficient focus on math, reading, science, etc., the case for it looks promising. An instructive example of an interesting integrated arts education program is Artful Thinking, developed in 2003 by Harvard’s Project Zero in collaboration with the Traverse City, Michigan Area Public Schools (TCAPS). This program, as a component of a larger TCAPS grant from the U.S. Department of Education, developed a model approach for integrating art into regular classroom instruction. The Artful Thinking Program helps teachers regularly use works of visual art and music in their curriculum in ways that strengthen student thinking and learning.

At the state level, a few states are currently engaged in legislative action and educational reform with the express intent of transforming their state economies from industrial to creative. They are doing so with the combined support of employers and educational institutions, so that future workers with the skills employers need will be in abundance and their states will remain competitive in the global economy.

In 2007, Ohio Governor Ted Strickland signed legislation providing over \$200 million for STEM-related education initiatives and encouraging art education as a mechanism to support STEM outcomes. To address the integration of art education with STEM education, the Ohio Department of Education established the Committee for the Arts and Innovation (CAIT) to promote and advance the arts for all Ohio students through strategic actions, communications and policy recommendations. “CAIT’s mission is to institute statewide education restructuring through international benchmarking, extend the arts in our schools, and use the STEM initiatives to foster imagination and innovation across disciplines in every level of our educational system,” reports Susan Tave Zelman, Ohio superintendent of public instruction.

In Oklahoma, their “State of Creativity” coalitions began coalescing in 2004. Under the guidance of the Kirkpatrick Foundation and Creative Oklahoma Inc., they have convened stakeholders including their Governor, legislators, state agencies heads, businesses, educators, and cultural institutions, building from the top down, as well as creating a grassroots effort. They are now defining what a “creative” curriculum looks like in their schools, and they have 52 A+ schools (<http://www.aplusok.org/>) that are transforming into integrated arts education schools.

² Meris Stansbury. *Study: Creativity is Important but Neglected*. eSchoolNews. May 30, 2008.

³ NAM/NCAW survey of NAWB employers conducted April-May 2008.

⁴ Steven Webb, Deputy Superintendent, Vancouver, WA public schools, Ed Week. Oct 2007. The Dana Arts and Cognition Consortium has published studies such as “Arts and Cognition: Findings Hint at Relationships” by Michael Gazzaniga at the University of Santa Barbara and “How Arts Training Influences Cognition” by Michael Posner, et al at the University of Oregon, that describe how the study of music and art can improve students’ thinking.

Our research will, we think, help provide an opening for further discussions about how our nation can increase the number of technically proficient, imaginative and creative employees who are so much in demand, and will provide instructive examples of how to engage businesses and other state-level stakeholders in this critical movement. Much is still to be learned and we hope readers of this article will weigh in with their own insights and examples so, together, we can strengthen America's workforce pipeline and ensure that its citizens have the skills they need for success in the 21st century economy.

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