

## ARTS AND EDUCATION

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“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” proclaimed Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*, raising ambivalence to new literary heights. Curiously, Dickens’s uncertain description of revolutionary-era Paris is an apt one for the current state of public education in the United States, where rising expectations battle declining test scores for space on the front pages of the nation’s newspapers. Curiouser still, it is precisely *because* these are the worst of times, with more pressure than ever before on our schools to pull themselves out of a prolonged downward spiral, that these are also potentially the best of times for arts education. Since nothing else has worked, the arts and humanities are poised to become leading contenders in the school-reform sweepstakes and to re-establish themselves in the basic K-12 curriculum.

Many Americans over the age of 40, ironically, can recall a time when the arts were a part of that curriculum. Routinely during the first half of this century, students received at least a smattering of arts education, and many received much more than that. If the arts were never part of the “3 Rs,” various assortments of music, drama, painting, and crafts were a regular part of the school curriculum for many years. Eventually, specialists in music and the visual arts were assigned to schools, and field trips to museums and symphony orchestras (later facilitated by Young Audiences and similar nonprofit organizations) were common. However uneven their implementation across the country, the arts at least had a place in most children’s schooling.

The first significant setback for the arts came with the heightened emphasis on science and math following the launch of Sputnik in 1957, when the country, nervous about its standing in the Cold War, asked a generation of students to “buckle down.” That ominous phrase didn’t automatically signal an end to arts education, but more often than not, when school boards enumerated the “frills” that might be sacrificed in the interests of competing with the Soviets, the arts were among the first to go.

Conversely, just a few years later, the pendulum began to swing back in the other direction, with the establishment of the Arts and Humanities Endowments in 1965. Among those offering testimony on behalf of the new program, for example, was Glenn T. Seaborg, chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission. “If we are to achieve humanity in terms of its greatest fulfillment, we need to share deeply in the varied experience that can be reached only through the arts and humane letters.”<sup>1</sup>

Equally important was the passage that same year of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title III of which pumped millions of dollars into public schools for a variety of curricular innovations, including cultural enrichment programs. But these were three-year funds, for add-on programs. Thus despite the flurry of activity in the 60s, 70s and 80s—a period in which artists-in-the-schools programs proliferated, when alliances between schools and arts organizations flourished, and when an advocacy movement rallied around the often competing causes of hands-on arts training, exposure to practicing artists, and systematic instruction in the history, theory, and criticism of various “high art” traditions—the arts did not have a secure place in the basic curriculum.

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“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain  
an artist once he grows up.”

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PABLO PICASSO

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, National Arts and Humanities Foundations. Hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, 89th Cong., 1st Sess. (1969) pt. 2, 404.

A variety of factors, actually, have conspired against arts education in recent years. At the top of everyone's list, obviously, are budget constraints. When it became necessary for school districts to cut back on their offerings to students, arts programs were often included in the list of dispensable items. But other pressures played a role, too, including the need to accommodate a much more diverse, and constantly evolving, student population, one that often required increased attention to basic language and other remedial skills. The curriculum itself, in other words, has taken on new concerns over the years, reflecting social, economic, and psychological issues directly related to the complex times in which we live. A lot more has changed than the one-room schoolhouse itself in the long history of public education in this country. Life outside that schoolhouse has changed radically, too, and our curricular values have shifted accordingly.

*"THE ARTS ARE A DEFINITE PART OF THE TURN-AROUND PROCESS"*

The arts' tenuous relationship with our schools was a major part of the American Canvas inquiry. If there was one thing on which all participants in the American Canvas could agree, in fact, it was the importance of arts in the classroom, not simply for the arts community, but also for the public at large. Although only the forum in Salt Lake City was intended to address educational issues specifically, the topic came up again and again at all of the meetings. The arts, both as subject matters themselves, and as an enhancement of other areas of the curriculum, were regarded as central to a sound education. The arts are a natural way for children to learn a wide variety of subjects, Kendis Marcotte pointed out at the forum in Los Angeles. "They may not even know that they are learning grammar and spelling when they are writing a play..." explained the director of the Virginia Avenue Project, a theater that brings children together with professional artists to create original plays and build long-term mentoring relationships. "And even more than that, [the children learn] a creative way of thinking, a creative way of problem solving—a creative process that can be translated later into virtually any endeavor they go into."

In that connection, several forum participants cited the relevance of arts education to the findings of Department of Labor's Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), in which the arts lend themselves to devel-

oping those cognitive, interpersonal, and strategic skills that are judged essential to success in the modern world.<sup>2</sup>

The value of the arts in nontraditional educational settings, especially in reaching those who have not succeeded in formal school programs in the past, was also noted at the forums, as were the arts' many contributions to family unity and growth. Speaking of the former issue in Los Angeles, Tom Stang of the Phoenix Academy, a part of the Phoenix House drug rehabilitation center, described the benefits of an arts-based curriculum in his work with troubled youth. "I have been in the classroom on a daily basis for 20 years," Stang explained, "and if there is one thing I have learned as a teacher, it is that the arts are the soul of the education program.

*...The arts are a way of getting the students back on the education track. Some of them come to us as early as 12 or 13 years of age and stay for 14 to 18 months. In this time we are able to repair a lot of holes in their past education, give them the confidence necessary to feel success in an academic setting so they can continue their education at a regular public school when they graduate from the drug rehabilitation program. Some are now aspiring to enter the Los Angeles High School of the Arts at California State [University] Los Angeles or enroll in art programs at the college level when they leave us. This is a very positive legacy for students who come to us with nothing but a series of F grades on their report cards together with a lot of absenteeism. The arts are a definite part of the turn-around process.*

"DO WE WONDER WHY THE ARTS ARE  
A LOW PRIORITY IN THE CURRICULUM?"

"The statistics on the number of arts specialists are appalling," reported Joan Boyett, vice president for education at the Music Center of Los Angeles, at the American Canvas forum in that city. "There are 45 million students, grades K-12, in the United States and more than 15,000 school districts. However, the responsibility for reinforcing the teaching of the arts at the district level rests in the

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000* (Washington, DC: Department of Labor, 1991); *Learning a Living: A Blueprint for High Performance* (Washington, DC: Department of Labor, 1992).

hands of only 114 music supervisors and 59 art supervisors—nationwide. No separate figures are available for the number of theater or dance supervisors: is it possible that there are none? Do we wonder why the arts are a low priority in the curriculum?”

It is not for lack of trying that the arts have failed to establish a stronger foothold in the nation’s schools, however, and several of the American Canvas participants described a number of existing programs that are working to ensure that the arts will enjoy a more central place in the nation’s schools in the future. That’s one of the objectives of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, certainly, although the inclusion of the arts in that legislation was by no means a certainty when the reform process began in 1989. That was the year in which President Bush and the governors of the 50 states agreed on a set of “National Education Goals,” including a call for all students to demonstrate competency in “challenging subject matter,” namely, math, science, reading, writing, and geography. Conspicuous in its absence was any mention of the arts in the listing of core subjects, an oversight that was rectified only after considerable lobbying on the part of the arts and education community, which made a significant breakthrough.

That curriculum, in the final analysis, reflects social values, and the arts, for better or worse, have not always fared so well in that regard. The landmark *Nation at Risk* report of 1983, for example, signaling the start of an educational reform movement that continues, in one form or another, to this day, did not even mention the arts.<sup>3</sup> Neither a part of the problem nor, apparently, a viable solution either, arts education had become more a matter of local circumstance than of national consensus. Fortunate were the students in those school districts that employed specialists in the arts, or in those schools that maintained working relationships with local arts organizations, or in those classrooms in which the teacher, perhaps recalling her own experience as a child, insisted that the arts be a part of the basic curriculum. But overall, the situation was grim, as the Arts Endowment made clear in *Toward Civilization*, its 1988 report on arts education: “The arts are in triple jeopardy: they are not viewed as serious; knowledge itself is not

<sup>3</sup> National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk* (Washington, DC: Department of Education, 1983).

viewed as a prime educational objective; and those who determine school curricula do not agree on what arts education is.”<sup>4</sup>

If that analysis found the low point for arts education in this country, the picture has improved markedly in several respects since then, including a much clearer sense of “what arts education is.” Internecine battles pitting proponents of “discipline-based arts education” (encompassing art production, history, criticism, and aesthetics) against those who favored less rigorous “arts exposure” programs have largely subsided, with more interest today in tending to the larger task of ensuring that the arts assume their rightful place within the basic K-12 curriculum. Arts education, according to the National Coalition for Education in the Arts, should be defined broadly, as “the process of teaching and learning how to create and produce the visual and performing arts and how to understand and evaluate art forms created by others.” At a minimum, according to this consortium of 28 national arts organizations, the ideal curriculum “encompasses four basic aspects with the expectation that students will:

- Create and perform the arts;
- Understand the role and importance of the arts in culture and history;
- Perceive and respond to the qualities of the arts; and
- Make sound judgments about the arts and understand the bases upon which those judgments rest.”<sup>5</sup>

Admittedly, that definition does little to address the other two parts of arts education’s “triple jeopardy”—the perception of the arts as electives rather than as essentials, and the more recent preoccupation with making schools “safe and orderly”—but progress is being made on these fronts, too.

#### “...THE TRANSFORMING POWERS OF THE ARTS”

In addition to developments within the private sector—of which the work of the Getty Education Institute for the Arts is among the most significant—arts education has made strides in the public-policy arena as well.<sup>6</sup> First, in 1992, former Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander established the America 2000 Arts Education Partnership

<sup>4</sup> *Toward Civilization* 19.

<sup>5</sup> Arts Education Partnership Working Group, *The Power of the Arts to Transform Education* (Washington, DC: John F. Kennedy Center for the Arts, 1993) 5.

in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts, charged with recommending ways to integrate the arts into the larger educational reform movement. The Partnership's Working Group, co-chaired by James Wolfenson, then chairman of the Kennedy Center, and Harold Williams of the J. Paul Getty Trust, issued *The Power of the Arts to Transform Education*, a 1993 report that helped solidify the arts' claim to an array of benefits for students, teachers, and the general "learning environment" alike. "Experienced observers tell us, and data increasingly support claims," the report declared, "that schools with strong arts programs regularly incur such benefits as:

- Intensified student motivation to learn;
- Better attendance among students and teachers;
- Increased graduation rates;
- Improved multicultural understanding;
- Renewed and invigorated faculty;
- More highly engaged students (which traditional approaches fail to inspire);
- Development of a higher order of thinking skills, creativity, and problem-solving ability; and
- Greater community participation and support.

The report concluded:

*The arts contribute to an overall culture of excellence in a school. They are an effective means of connecting children to each other and helping them gain an understanding of the creators who preceded them. They provide schools with a ready way to formulate relationships across and among traditional disciplines and to connect ideas and notice patterns. Works of art provide effective means for linking information in history and social studies, mathematics, science, and geography. A work of art can lead to many related areas of learning, opening lines of inquiry, revealing that art, like life, is lived in a complex world not easily defined in discrete subjects.<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Elliot W. Eisner, *The Role of Discipline-Based Education in America's Schools* (Los Angeles: Getty Center for Education in the Arts, 1988); *Discipline-Based Arts Education and Cultural Diversity: Seminar Proceedings*, August 6-9, 1992, Austin, Texas (Los Angeles: Getty Center for Education in the Arts, 1993); *Perspectives on Education Reform: Arts Education as Catalyst* (Los Angeles: Getty Center for Education in the Arts, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> *The Power of the Arts to Transform Education* 7.

More significantly, the working group's recommendations managed to find a home in the legislation that was soon proposed by the new secretary of education, Richard Riley, as the arts became one of the core subjects in the Goals 2000 legislation, and the working group's sense of "the transforming powers of the arts" was incorporated into the Improving America's Schools Act, reauthorization legislation for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The field has also found success in the area of assessing the proficiencies of students in various basic subjects. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, popularly known as "The Nation's Report Card," had not included the arts within its analysis for over two decades. But in the Spring of 1997, at selected eighth-grade sites, student proficiencies have been measured in dance, music, theater, and the visual arts. The NAEP "Report Card" on what American eight-graders know and can do in the arts will be released by the Department of Education in May, 1998. Eventually, using standards developed by a consortium of national associations in arts education and supported by the Department of Education and the arts and humanities endowments, student competency in the arts will be routinely measured at the completion of grades 4, 8, and 12.

The National Standards for Arts Education stipulate that, by the time they have completed secondary school, students should be able to:

*Communicate at a basic level in the four arts disciplines*—dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts. This includes knowledge and skills in the use of the basic vocabularies, materials, tools, techniques, and intellectual methods of each arts discipline.

*Communicate proficiently in at least one art form*, including the ability to define and solve artistic problems with insight, reason, and technical proficiency.

*Develop and present basic analyses of works of art* from structural, historical, and cultural perspectives, and from combinations of those perspectives.

*Have an informed acquaintance with exemplary works of art* from a variety of cultures and historical periods, and a basic understanding of historical development in the arts disciplines, across the arts, and within cultures.

*Relate various types of knowledge and skills within and across the arts disciplines*. This includes mixing and matching competencies and understanding in art-making, history and culture, and analysis in any arts-related project.



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“As a result,” the standards conclude, “students can arrive at their own knowledge, beliefs, and values for making personal and artistic decisions. In other terms, they can arrive at a broad-based, well-grounded understanding of the nature, value, and meaning of the arts as a part of their own humanity.”<sup>8</sup>

“...THE ARTS ARE INDISPENSABLE TO EDUCATION REFORM”

Such standards, in the arts as in all other areas of the K-12 curriculum, are voluntary, and they may be supplemented or modified by content standards developed by some states or ignored entirely by others. And just as a partnership effort was required to get to the point at which the arts are “on the table” of educational reform, so will keeping the arts at the forefront of that reform movement demand a similarly united effort. That’s one of the reasons Secretary Riley and Chairman Jane Alexander convened the planning group that produced *The Arts and Education: Partners in Achieving Our National Education Goals*, an action plan subsequently endorsed by representatives from more than 100 national organizations in the fall of 1994. The report offered the clearest rationale to date for the importance of the arts to a sound education. “Three broad arguments—cultural, educational, and economic—about the value and power of the arts for education serve as the foundation for an argument for their integral part in helping our children achieve challenging education goals and high standards:

*As part of the heritage of our culture, the arts are forms of understanding that are fundamental to what it means to be an educated person. They are the richest and most far-reaching expressions of human creativity, achievement and communication—from people to people, culture to culture, and age to age. To lack an education in the arts is to be profoundly disconnected from our history, from beauty, from other cultures, and from other forms of expression. The arts are basic, as well, to securing a humane future for our children....*

<sup>8</sup> Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, Dance, Music, Theatre, Visual Arts: *What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts* (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference) 18-19.

“More particular to the educational aims of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act,” the report continues, “the arts are indispensable to education reform. The very idea that we can change our schools and make them more effective centers of learning without educating children in the arts is simply false....” The report offers four reasons for placing the arts at the heart of the broader reform movement, citing the variety of ways that children learn (based on Howard Gardner’s pioneering research into “multiple intelligences”), the range of analytical and problem-solving skills that students will have to master, the diversity of students that must be served by schools today (including those who have often been “disempowered and disenfranchised” in more traditional educational settings), and the connections that need to be made among the several academic areas themselves as well as among events and activities outside of the classroom.<sup>9</sup>

In light of those connections, especially, the economic implications of a sound arts education also become much clearer. “As part of their preparation for productive work,” the Arts and Education report concludes, “the arts help students build the specific workplace skills needed to ensure their own employability and their ability to make a solid economic contribution to our communities and to the nation. The arts teach and enhance such skills as the ability to manage resources, the interpersonal skills of cooperation and teamwork, the ability to acquire and use information and to master different types of symbol systems, and the skills required to use a variety of technologies.”<sup>10</sup>

The fall 1994 meeting of national organizations that endorsed this report also produced the Goals 2000 Arts Education Partnership, a Washington-based organization designed to implement the action plan and to facilitate communication and advocacy at the national, state, and local levels. This partnership of arts, education, business, advocacy, and funding organizations is administered by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, through a cooperative agreement with the Arts Endowment and the Department of Education.

<sup>9</sup> Gardner identified seven distinct intelligences: musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. See Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York, Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> *The Arts and Education: Partners in Achieving Our National Goals* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 1995) 21-22.

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PHOTO COURTESY PYRAMID ATLANTIC

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At Pyramid Atlantic in Maryland, community members of all ages participate in arts programs designed to ensure that creativity and imagination remain part of lifelong learning.

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“THE ARTS... MUST BE POSITIONED AS EQUALLY ‘TOUGH.’”

The director of that organization, Richard J. Deasy, participated in the American Canvas forum in Salt Lake City, and he presented cogent arguments that the arts community will have to marshal in its effort to ensure that arts education moves beyond the good intentions of Goals 2000 and into the nation’s classrooms.

“The fundamental problem we confront in making the arts an unquestioned part of the learning required of students and teachers,” Deasy observed, “is the position of the arts in the broader culture.” No one at the American Canvas forums, certainly, needed to be reminded of the losses the arts have sustained in the political arena, and by extension in the public mind, in recent years; but even in the absence of these setbacks, the arts have long suffered in comparison to other, more valued aspects of American life. Deasy suggested the term “muscularity” as a

general description of what is most valued in America: “toughness (tough mindedness, competitiveness, triumph over pain in its various forms), physical prowess as good itself and as a preferred means of settling affairs (war, violence, no-holds-barred argument) and, lately, muscular bodies as signs of health and equality. Success at work and life is thought to flow from this kind of toughness.” Certain parts of the curriculum, Deasy pointed out, including math, science, reading and writing, are associated with that kind of toughness, as are sports programs among extracurricular activities. “Displacing these values is virtually impossible,” Deasy conceded. “The arts, therefore, must be positioned as equally ‘tough.’ Toward this end the research evidence on the developments they produce in the growing brain and body of the child and young person should be continually documented and presented.”

Recent research on the development of the brain demonstrates the power of training in music and other art forms to improve spatial reasoning and similar cognitive skills of the very young. Writing in the February 1997 issue of *Neurological Research*, psychologist Frances Rauscher of the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh and physicist Gordon Shaw of the University of California at Irvine report that pre-schoolers who were given piano keyboard lessons scored 34 percent higher on tests measuring spatial-temporal ability (useful in math, science, and engineering) than did other preschoolers. Other researchers, as reported in the May 1996 issue of *Nature*, have demonstrated similarly positive effects of music training on young children. Concerning a group of first-graders in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, those children in the more active music program, the study found, performed significantly better in both math and reading.

Studies such as these, Deasy believes, should be more widely publicized, not the least because they have the cachet of “scientific research” attached to them. Yet as a recent Department of Education publication points out, there’s also an element of common sense to these studies: “Children naturally sing, dance, draw and role-play in an effort to understand the world around them and communicate their thoughts about it. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that when their caretakers engage them in these activities early in life on a regular basis, they are helping to wire the children’s brains for successful learning.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> “Arts Education Contributes to Early Childhood Brain Development,” *Community Update* (April 1997): 1.

“...THE BASIS OF SELF-ESTEEM THAT IS ESSENTIAL  
TO ALL LEARNING”

As in so many other conversations, then, especially those that take place in the civic and political realms, the value of the arts needs to be “translated” into terms that educators and parents understand. “The arts are all we say they are when we talk of profundity, joy, delight and inspiration,” Deasy observes. “But these terms and perspectives do not render them ‘muscular’; [the arts] are, therefore, wonderful but dispensable to those who manage the central cultural institution of our society: the school.”

Making arts education “indispensable,” Deasy argues, is a matter of demonstrating the importance of the arts—to all students—in terms that extend well beyond the intrinsic aesthetic qualities of the arts themselves. More than mere embellishments to the “real work” that schools have to carry out, the arts are a part of those basic tasks, and they require the same dedicated study that other parts of the basic curriculum demand. “Mastery of the arts,” Deasy insists, “requires rigorous, substantive and disciplined study and practice of their forms, principles and methods—a study that demands and rewards excellence: the basis of self-esteem that is essential to all learning.”

If these are the arguments that need to be made in order to ensure the inclusion of the arts in our schools, what are the conditions in which the arts will flourish in that setting? Deasy suggests four critical factors:

- well-trained and skilled teachers and/or teaching artists who have a command of an arts discipline and/or a deep understanding of its forms, principles and methods and its history and tradition;
- a well-designed and planned program that takes into account child and adolescent development and the multiple ways in which students learn;
- an institutional and community belief in the value of the arts in education and stable policies and resources; (sustaining these beliefs, policies and resources requires a network of education, arts and cultural leaders and institutions orchestrated in support of arts in schools.)
- an entity or institution external to the school, but linked to it, that develops knowledge through research and makes it available in meaningful ways to school personnel and decision makers. Entities can include a higher education institution, a research center, or an arts funder or institution with a substantial understanding of education. Long term commitment by these entities is essential.

“Efforts should focus on creating these conditions in every community,” Deasy concludes. “Three sets of interlocking relationships should be fostered: systematic collaboration among the arts and cultural institutions, a formalized compact of cooperation between these collaborating institutions and the elementary and secondary education system, and a formalized arrangement between and among these sectors and the higher education/research institution or institutions. A nurturing of these relationships should be provided by governmental bodies and by the business and corporate sector.”

“ACADEMICS + ARTS = ACHIEVEMENT”

Too often in the past, however, that “interlocking relationship” has been more of a house of cards, based largely on the desire of well meaning arts organizations to embark on educational ventures, and to generate additional earned and contributed income in the process by furnishing educational services to local schools. Much less evident in these alliances is the kind of thoroughgoing commitment, on the part of the schools themselves, that an arts education program requires if it is to succeed. Richard Bell, executive director of Young Audiences (which presented more than 60,000 arts programs to 6.5 million children through the U.S. in 1995) and a member of the American Canvas committee, has written of these old-style arts partnerships that, for all of their good intentions, generally failed to take root in the schools.

“Historically,” Bell observes, “most arts partnerships have been designed from the perspective of individual arts organizations. For example, a symphony would form a partnership with several schools to bring students to the concert hall or a local arts-in-education program would join in partnership with a museum to create a visual arts residency.” In most cases, Bell notes, these partnerships were built to specifications defined by the arts organizations rather than by the schools, with most funding coming from the private sector, and with project coordination, fiscal responsibility, and programmatic continuity vested in individuals outside of the school system itself. “The problem with these partnerships has not been a matter of artistic quality or effectiveness in meeting the goals set out for them,” Bell concludes. “Rather, the goals have not fully met the needs of students and schools. No matter how well designed and executed these programs may be, providing worthwhile arts experiences for the benefit of a few students has suddenly become

passé because there is little opportunity or motivation to integrate these programs into the general curriculum and school budgets.”<sup>12</sup>

Ralph Burgard believes he has a better idea. He, too, is well aware of the hit-and-run programs that Bell described. “There have been, here and there,” he concedes “some interesting efforts in arts education across the country, but I still tend to think of them as ‘enhanced enrichment programs.’ Basically, they are coming of necessity from the outside into the system. It’s not the school system rushing out to embrace these programs, it’s the insistent advocacy on the part of cultural institutions, with the assistance of individual artists, who try and infiltrate this huge bureaucracy and say ‘pay attention to us, we are more valuable than you think.’ By and large most school systems view those efforts as outside efforts.”

Since 1987, Burgard has been working instead on the inside, helping to set up what he calls the “A+ School Program,” which designates the program’s basic approach: “Academics + Arts = Achievement.” There are now 39 A+ schools operating in five states, all based on the same basic principles. First, the school faculty must vote to undertake, for a minimum of four years, a program of daily arts instruction and interdisciplinary teaching for all students in the school. Second, that instruction will consist of at least one full period of arts daily, covering at least four disciplines each week (usually visual arts, music, dance, theater, or media arts). Third, to meet this commitment, a sufficient number of arts teachers will be hired to fulfill the arts instruction duties. Fourth, all teachers will use interdisciplinary, hands-on instruction, where appropriate, to teach the course of study mandated by state and local education authorities. Interdisciplinary units, often based on particular themes, will be phased in over the first three years, using teams of classroom teachers. Fifth, participating schools are expected to develop strong, two-way partnerships with their communities and regions—with parents, with local cultural agencies and individual artists, with schools of education that train their teachers, and with the media. Sixth, these schools will participate in continuing staff and administration development, including a five-day summer institute before the program begins. Additional staff development workshops in each school throughout the year will further support the transition into more extensive interdisciplinary teaching, reflecting the different learning styles of both teachers and students.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Bell, “Building Continuity and Systemic Change: A Primer on the New Arts Partnerships,” in *Beyond Enrichment: Building Effective Arts Partnerships With Schools and Your Community*, ed. Jane Remer (New York: ACA Books, 1996) 147.



PHOTO COURTESY THE HEARD MUSEUM

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Children peek through a doorway of a Tsimshian longhouse, native to the Pacific Northwest Coast, at the “Old Ways, New Ways” exhibition at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona.

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“I think that what has helped A+ more than anything else,” Burgard explains, “is the sense of teachers and administrators that this is an ‘inside’ program, because it is adding teachers to their roster everyday—full-time teachers—and it starts in the classroom every single day, and then is supplemented, as it must be, by those outside experiences that we’ve been trying to get in for so many years. But essentially it starts first within the schools and in the school community...” That “school community,” Burgard adds, “is an enormously powerful and sometimes defensive unit because of all this [public] pressure, and they close ranks. Anything that is new, there is a good percentage of teachers that will wait until it goes away. They won’t actively oppose it, but they just wait it out, and by and large they always win.”

By securing staff and faculty support before the program even begins, and by learning what each school and community hope to accomplish, Burgard has managed to find an environment conducive to his experiment in arts and education. “My feeling is that if we are trying to approach or...infiltrate a huge bureaucracy... Once it’s in, I have great confidence in the power, the eternal power, of the



arts to completely change and ‘corrupt’ the school building, the way we think it should be. But where we usually falter is in the process of getting in, and with most of the enrichment programs...the bulk of the money usually comes from outside sources. It’s very seldom that a school board will put up the full funding or even 50 percent of it. So as a result, we are continually dashing around and trying to raise money for it.”

Burgard has been much more successful with the funding of A+, earning commitments from both within the school system as well as from outside sources. In North Carolina, for example, where 27 schools are part of the program, the Kenan Institute for the Arts has been the primary sponsor since 1993. For the four-year evaluation period (1995-99), a number of foundations and corporations have joined in the funding, as has the North Carolina General Assembly, which provided \$500,000 annually over the past two years. These state funds match the commitments by the school districts and their private funders, and if the program proves effective over the four-year evaluation period, it is expected that the schools will adopt A+ as their core education program and support it through their regular school budgets.

The evaluation, in addition to measuring academic achievement, will also assess other indicators of school improvement, including the level of satisfaction for students, parents, and teachers, the level of parent involvement, as well as changes in drop-out rates, attendance, and the need for disciplinary actions. The early returns, Burgard reports, are promising. After using the A+ Schools Program for just one year, Sunset Park Elementary School in Wilmington, NC, (a school with 84 percent of its students participating in the free and reduced-cost lunch program, and in which 62 percent of the students are minority) saw student disciplinary actions drop from 130 to 50 and suspensions from 32 to 3. At the end of the second year, writing tests administered by the state saw the fourth-grade students improve some 30 percentile points, jumping all the way from the 35th to the 65th percentile in a single year.

But academic improvement is only a part of the puzzle, Burgard points out. “Typically,” he writes, “Americans ask their public schools to fulfill other missions as well as educate their children. Recent polls show that parents want their schools to be safe, orderly and productive. In effect, they want schools to become more vital communities where students acquire the social skills to work together and respect one another. The outcomes could strongly affect the nation’s social, economic and educational health.” Programs such as A+, he

believes, can serve these very ends, reflecting the social and cultural functions that the arts have traditionally played. “For thousands of years,” he points out, “the arts have provided shared experiences that bring people together in places of worship, weddings, festivals and other celebrations. When taught daily in American schools they can and are creating small and large communities of students and teachers in the classroom and throughout the school. By working in groups to prepare performances and exhibitions, students gain respect and appreciation for one another. They create what used to be called in simpler times ‘school spirit,’ a sense of shared purpose that is the basis for all vital communities.”<sup>13</sup>

“A SURVIVAL IMPERATIVE IN OUR SOCIETY”

In simpler times, of course, our communities were in better shape, too, which is one of the reasons arts organizations have extended their educational activities into the community itself. The mere existence of an institution known as the “Museum of Tolerance” is suggestive of the larger educative role that the arts often play, and of their value in bridging some of the larger, more treacherous gaps that separate Americans from one another. Gerald Margolis, director of this Los Angeles-based museum, part of the Simon Weisenthal Center, participated in the Los Angeles forum, described the social and cultural pressures of that region. “Los Angeles exemplifies American diversity in microcosm,” Gerald Margolis explained. “...From the Los Angeles Riots to the Simpson trial, intergroup tensions have rocked Southern California, unleashing centrifugal forces. The varied communities of Southern California need opportunities to speak—not at—but to each other. And alienated communities will never thrive unless they are reconnected and learn to live in harmony in our ‘global village.’”

Margolis’s museum has come up with a variety of means to promote that kind of harmony, such as “Investing in Diversity,” a program that brought in 92,000 students last year alone. “This is a primary program of the museum that deals with incipient prejudices before they grow into ingrained hatreds,” Margolis explained. Targeting older citizens, “Tools for Tolerance for Professionals” is an all-

<sup>13</sup> Ralph Burgard, *Schools as Communities: Public Education and Social Cohesion*, 1997.

day seminar in diversity issues for front-line service providers in the fields of education, social work, health care, and law enforcement. Reaching out more broadly still, "Confronting the Nineties: Critical Issues in America" is a series of public forums that has addressed such issues as media coverage of minorities, sexual harassment in the workplace, the future of affirmative action, the First Amendment in the electronic age, the educational needs of the physically challenged, women's issues, and gay and lesbian rights. Film and exhibition programs, finally, further incorporate the arts in the museum's efforts to serve the multiplicity of ethnic and racial communities that make up Southern California.

"Both in its permanent hi-tech installation on tolerance in America and the history of the Holocaust," Margolis elaborated, "as well as in the changing exhibits program, the Museum of Tolerance addresses the multi-ethnic fabric of the American Canvas, and how valuing diversity is no longer simply an ideal but a survival imperative in our society. With all of its challenges and problems, Los Angeles and Southern California will remain a testing ground for new possibilities of social accord and understanding. The threat to this engagement will be in a retreat into ethnic insularity, tribalism, and distrust. Art can move us beyond boundaries by communicating on the commonalty of human experience and the valuing of difference."

The Museum of Tolerance is just one of a growing number of cultural organizations whose educational activities reach directly into the community. More than 200 of these programs are profiled in *Coming Up Taller: Arts and Humanities Programs for Children and Youth At-Risk*, by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.<sup>14</sup> The Lied Discovery Children's Museum in Las Vegas, for example, in response to the needs of its immediate neighborhood (which is 59 percent minority, with over one-third of the households living below the federal poverty line), has established arts programs to serve young people. Suzanne LeBlanc, executive director of the museum and a participant at the American Canvas forum in Salt Lake City, described one of those programs, ArtSmarts. This program, she explained, "provides young people from 10 to 18, particularly those in the community with the least access to artistic experiences

<sup>14</sup> Judith Humphreys Weitz, *Coming Up Taller: Arts and Humanities Programs for Children and Youth At Risk* (Washington, DC: President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 1996). See also Nancy Welch and Paul Fisher, *Working Relationships: The Arts, Education and Community Development* (Washington, DC: National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, 1995).

and methods of expression, the opportunity to work alongside a professional artist for an extended period of time on a group art project. The artist and the participants work together to develop an idea, investigate different ways of carrying it out, and create a finished artwork or performance, which is presented to the public. ArtSmarts not only provides young people artistic training, but also gives them experience using the artistic process as a method of problem-solving and learning about oneself and the world at large.”

With major support from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund (part of its national YouthALIVE! initiative), ArtSmarts projects have included a large, portable mural based on Jacob Lawrence’s Migration Series (with artist Dennis Angel), a documentary video entitled “Street Talk,” (with filmmaker Amie Williams), and “Earthscapes,” a performance piece based on local environmental issues (with dance and choreographer Maria Medina). “These projects have been incredible,” says Sue Fink, ArtSmarts coordinator. “The kids involved have gotten a whole new perspective on how much hard work an artist puts into a project. They’ve also gotten a lot of terrific information about the many professions available to artists, like architecture, graphic arts, and teaching.”

“...ART IS STILL AT THE TOP OF THE LIST FOR CUTTING...”

Arts education programs such as these, whether operating in the classroom or in the community at large, didn’t come about without a considerable amount of effort, and they’re unlikely to be sustained without equal amounts of advocacy. The basic message, concerning the importance of the arts to a sound education, has been promulgated widely at the national level in recent years, by the Arts Endowment and by Secretary of Education Riley among others. Yet that same message has not always been translated successfully at the state and local levels, where art is still at the top of the list for cutting in a budget crunch. Nor is it simply a matter of economics, Larry Williams, chairman of the executive board of the Western States Arts Foundation, pointed out in Salt Lake City. “You’ve never heard the school board sit and debate whether or not we’re going to have mathematics in the curriculum.” The debate over the inclusion of the arts won’t be settled satisfactorily, he predicted, until we have a generation of graduates, themselves the beneficiaries of an education that includes the arts, who have entered society

and assumed positions of leadership.

In the meantime, Gerald Yoshitomi pointed out at the Los Angeles forum, arts educators and their advocates will need to learn the same lesson that the larger arts community has learned in recent years, looking beyond the main streets of American culture to some of the less prominent thoroughfares. “There has been actually a growth, a tremendous growth in arts education for young people,” the director of the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center observed, “...[but] it hasn’t been in the public schools, and it hasn’t been in western European forms. It’s been in church basements, in ethnic cultural halls, and people’s living rooms.”

Regardless of the focus of arts education advocacy, whether it’s the classroom, the community, or the church basement, the arguments marshaled on behalf of the arts will have to be carefully crafted. “Utilitarian arguments in support of the arts are understandable in these difficult, distrustful times,” writes playwright and director Alan Brody, responding to the recent research on the positive effects of arts training on the development of a child’s brain. “They serve as weapons in the political and ideological battles raging in the school districts of America, but they ultimately subvert the very meaning of art. In the end, that could prove even more dangerous than the loss of government support.”

Brody worries that some of the handiest arguments of the moment, designed to convince skeptics of the value of the arts, may, in the long run, prove counter-productive. “Arguments that can serve up the arts as a teaching tool or a source of revenue are tempting expedients,” he concedes. “But if we depend on those we may one day find ourselves making and teaching something that is not art at all, only something that helps students read and count—or someone else to get rich. The very thing we were hoping to protect will be once again held in contempt.”

Brody, for one, has a happier ending in mind. Writing with the optimism that perhaps only an artist in the midst of a campus full of scientists and engineers can muster, the associate provost for the arts at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology looks forward to the next scientific study that underscores the importance of art: “If...we refind our voices and our faith in the necessity of artistic practice, if we are able once more to celebrate the lasting value of the journey into the human heart and imagination, then perhaps one day we will hear the news that researchers have shown how the study of reading and mathematics can make us all better artists.”