

Quality in the Arts Requires Creativity

By John Abodeely, arts education manager, Americans for the Arts

The value of creativity cannot be underestimated. America has built much of its cultural and economic leadership around creativity. From the invention of modern democracy to mass production and modernist art, America has been the site of innovation that has propelled global quality of life upward.

In his book *A Whole New Mind*, writer Daniel Pink, suggests the future of American success will be based on creativity. He suggests that left-brain skills—literal, textual and analytic—will be increasingly outsourced to countries with cheaper labor or will be automated in software. Right-brain skills—metaphorical, aesthetic and contextual—cannot be outsourced or automated so easily. They'll stay in-house, and the individuals with the best right-brain ability will command the highest salary.

Even barring this projection, the myth of the arts as an economic black hole has been shattered. Careers in the for-profit arts industry are lucrative, from sound engineers to advertising executives. Americans for the Arts' annual study on employment in the arts reports some 612,095 art businesses in the United States. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 2.1 million people work as artists. Meanwhile, the nonprofit segment of the arts industry generates \$166.2 billion in economic activity and creates 5.7 million art jobs.

Administration, employers stress creativity

A new report by the Conference Board and Americans for the Arts, in partnership with the American Association of School Administrators, found that an overwhelming majority of the surveyed superintendents (99%) and employers (97%) stress the importance of creativity, and believe that arts training is crucial to developing creativity.

On the national poll commissioned by the Arts Education Partnership, 80% of the respondents said it was important or extremely important for schools to develop the imaginations and innovative and creative skills of students. And, 88% said the arts were essential for doing so and were a sound educational investment.

Bolstered by all of this evidence, local leaders are bucking educational trends put in motion by No Child Left Behind and other test-based judgments. They are providing the arts in their schools. They are meeting standards, passing tests and engaging the whole child at the same time. How are they doing this? Through leadership, coalitions and, of course, creativity.

Lincoln Center Institute

The Lincoln Center Institute (LCI) is based on philosophy, but its impact is visible. Based on the advanced thinking of John Dewey and Lincoln Center Institute philosopher-in-residence Maxine Greene, LCI puts teachers in direct touch with the arts, fostering imaginative thinking that can be shared with students across the curriculum.

Through the creative process, pre-performance study and understanding multiple perspectives, students seek connections between “the story that the artwork tells” and their own lives. LCI trains teachers to teach inquiry-based study that involves questioning, reflection and multimedia research. The process is both artistically and academically rich for the students, imparting imaginative thinking as a habit. Students practice imaginative thinking in other subjects, such as language arts, math, science and social studies.

LCI is a model for arts education organizations on four continents. In the New York City metropolitan area alone, it works with more than 4,000 educators in 130 public schools annually, as well as with 10 schools of education.

LCI is now officially available to all. Lincoln Center can share its strategies for teaching and imagination with anyone through its accessible consulting services. They're sowing seeds around the world.

Movies in Montana

Working with Montana public schools, Peter Rosten, a retired Hollywood producer, local rancher and now high school media mogul, is on the front line of Montana's economic strategy. What is that strategy? Movies.

In 2005, Montana passed precedent-setting legislation that established deep tax incentives and other enticements for on-location filming. The state doubled its encouragement with another law in 2007. Rosten's organization, Media Arts in the Public Schools (MAPS), founded in 2004, gives filmmakers the artists, techs and other talent they need to take advantage of those incentives.

MAPS' mission is job-related. Rosten knows the employment power of the movie industry and that Montana, with its incentives, will compete for location dollars. With this opportunity, his expertise and the thousands of potential filmmakers sitting in Montana's high schools, MAPS was born.

Through filmmaking—building something both artistic and marketable—students learn teamwork, leadership, critical thinking and problem solving. About 40% of its revenue comes from fee-based client services. MAPS students are already working and providing sustainable funds for the organization to reach others.

Is it working? Definitely. Montana's Tobacco Use Prevention program granted funds to MAPS students to create anti-smoking spots. These advertisements, made by three students aged 13, 16 and 19, at Darby High School, were ultimately purchased for national broadcast by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Overall, Americans for the Arts has witnessed growing quality in arts instruction—and growing quality in the leaders who champion it in their own communities. True innovation and formidable savvy have propelled some communities forward in the challenge to provide an education for the whole child. Now, we just have to figure out how to bring along the rest of America's 53 million school children.

John Abodeely is the arts education manager for the Americans for the Arts, a nonprofit organization that has worked for 45 years to advance the arts in the United States. For more information, visit www.americansforthearts.org.