

## A Balancing Act: Intelligence, Equity, and the Arts in Education

**Delane Ingalls Vanada**

*University of Denver  
Monument, Colorado*

### Abstract

This article expands on social justice in education through the lens of equal access to the arts. Claims for an equitable and quality education stand in tension with whether such ideals can exist without access to a balanced education, including the arts. It sheds light on educational practices and policy decisions that, if transformed, hold power for cutting through pluralistic lines toward success for all students. The arts are essential partners in a quality and socially just education, for morally practical reasons involving learning capacity, equal access, and overall well-being. Although recognized as essential to a quality 21st century education, the arts remain on the margins of educational and academic policy, leading to the need for balanced thinking and learning approaches. In actuality, to not consider the implications of educational decisions affecting the rights of the future leaders of our society for a quality education, including the arts, is a social injustice (Bumgarner, 2007; Gadsden, 2009). Narrow definitions of intelligence as well as inequitable subsets of valued skills serve as witness to how power plays a role in establishing curricular content in schools. Evidence is given for the cognitive, social, and dispositional capacity-building role of the arts in learning.

*Keywords:* arts education, arts in learning, capacity, successful intelligence, equity, social justice, creativity, critical thinking, brain research, neuroscience, equal access, critical pedagogy, whole-brained

*Yet the inalienable  
and civil right  
for every child  
to learn-  
and to do so in  
a quality manner-  
stands  
in tension with  
whether these ideals  
can exist  
without access to a  
balanced education,  
including the arts.*

**Correspondence regarding this article  
may be sent to:**

Delane Ingalls Vanada, Ph.D. Candidate  
email: Delane.vanada@du.edu

**Vanada/A Balancing Act**

---

*It is often easier to become outraged by  
injustice half a world away  
than oppression and discrimination half a  
block from home.*

*- Carl T. Rowan*

A recent visit to the *Brown v. Board of Education* national historic site in Topeka, Kansas served as a stark reminder of the 50 years that have passed since this U.S. Supreme Court landmark case. The halls of the old Monroe School portray the excruciatingly slow progress of eradicating faulty societal norms and discrimination in this country. Equal access has not led to equal achievement levels for all students, however, especially for students of color. Ongoing rhetoric such as that promulgated by national policy statements (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a), have not led to realizations that all can learn and that a college education will assure the American Dream.

Cycles of poverty in the U.S. indiscriminately affect the achievement and potential of our young, with over 40 percent of minorities living in poverty in the U.S. compared to 14 percent of white children (Portes, 2007). Each day more than 7,000 students drop out, totaling about 1.3 million students each year (Ruppert, 2009). In 2007, only 58 percent of Hispanic, 55

percent of black and 51 percent of American Indian students completed high school (College Board Advocacy, 2008). These issues point to forms of inequities which negatively affect students' rights to a quality education.

Meanwhile, the arts in education have been cited in several national studies over the past decade as a major reason for students staying in school, improving truancy, and deterring delinquent behavior while also increasing overall academic performance (Center for Arts Education, 2009). A two-year study in New York City public schools released in 2009 reported that schools with the highest graduation rates correspondingly offered the most access to arts education, while those with lower graduation rates offered less access to arts classes and resources. Unequal access to the arts based on socioeconomic background, race, and ethnicity were also reported (Center for Arts Education, 2009).

In the discussion to follow, the arts are considered to be essential partners in a student's inalienable right to a quality education, for morally practical reasons involving learning capacity, improvement of general cognition, and overall well-being. Also purported is the need for more balanced pedagogical and curricular approaches in schools, without which an

equitable and sufficient education still lies outside our grasp.

### **Issues of Disparity in Curriculum**

The U.S. Secretary of Education has promoted that a quality education for all is “a fight for social justice”, an “economic imperative and a moral imperative... the civil rights issue of our generation” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009b, p. 6). W.E.B. DuBois commented centuries before, that “Of all the civil rights... the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental” (in U.S. Department of Education, 2009a). Yet the inalienable and civil right for every child to learn—and to do so in a quality manner—stands in tension with whether these ideals can exist without access to a balanced education, including the arts.

Intelligence has been narrowly defined by scores on tests that primarily measure memory-based and analytical skills, leaving out the full balance of cognitive abilities that students possess. By focusing solely on closing achievement gaps within a few subjects, education has “run the risk of substituting one form of inequality for another, ultimately denying our most vulnerable students the full liberal arts curriculum our most privileged youth receive as a matter of course” (von Zastrow, 2004, p. 11).

Education policy has also looked to the wrong subjects to foster the kinds of intelligence that our students need most. Past efforts to highlight science and math education have not made our students significantly better at thinking, caused higher

test scores, or positioned our nation in a more competitive light. In 2006, U.S. students scored lowest on problem-solving in the International PISA test (Program in International Student Assessment); out of 40 countries U.S. ranked 35th in math and 31st in science (Darling-Hammond, 2008) indicating that a more-of-the-same, industrial-type education and increasing the number of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) graduates has not prepared our students for the balance of synthetic, creative, and culturally competent thinking needed for the 21st century. Compared to other high-performing countries, the U.S. has failed to foster a nation of inquiring minds with the higher order thinking and performance skills necessary to deep understanding (Darling-Hammond, 2008). These are capacities fostered through (but not exclusive to) the arts and humanities, yet school leaders and policy makers have failed to seriously consider their merits (Ferrero, 2007; Nelson, 2009; Ruppert, 2009).

Quality, 21st century art programs have the potential for producing “tenacious, team-oriented problem-solvers who are confident and able to think creatively” (The U.S. Dept of Education, 2009a, p. 1). The arts in education hold an essential key for educating 21st century problem-solvers and innovators (Ruppert, 2009; Shauck, 2009). Quality art programs teach students how to think and creatively solve complex problems, look at multiple viewpoints of an argument, and reflect on and revise their own views (Ferrero, 2007). If learning in the arts can deliver these

claims and prepare students with the kinds of expanded abilities and habits of mind needed for success in 21st century life, then education in and with the arts cannot be ignored.

### **Narrowing of Intelligence and Curriculum**

Not only has a political and corporate agenda favored a narrow definition of what constitutes academic achievement and intelligence, equally the types of thinking that are valued fit into a small category (Eisner, 2002). The skill sets which are tested, funded, and esteemed are primarily analytical and memory-based skills, serving as a witness to how power plays a role in establishing curricular content in schools (Ferrero, 2007; Noddings, 1997, 2007). Delpit (2006) blamed the imbalance in content knowledge, including access to subjects known for building creative and critical thinking for all students, on policy-driven determinations for testing.

Increased emphasis on mandated testing has led to a growing bipartisan discontent with curriculum narrowing and desensitization toward a 21st century imperative for developing balanced intelligence (Gardner, 2007, Sternberg, Torff & Grigorenko, 1998). Chapman's research (2004) exposed that 82 percent of parents in public schools and 80 percent of the general public were concerned that an intense focus on more tested subjects had meant less time for art, music, history, and other subjects. Sternberg (2006) also stated that the "increasingly massive and far-reaching use of standardized tests has been one of the most effective, if unintentional,

vehicles this country has created for suppressing creativity" (p. 47).

Despite the inclusion of the arts as one of the core academic subjects in national education goals (U. S. Department of Education, 2009c), the core has narrowed primarily to tested content areas; the arts being one of its inadvertent victims (Chapman, 2004). In 2004, the Academic Atrophy survey revealed that the arts, foreign language, and elementary social studies suffered drastic cutbacks because of high-stakes testing mandates, with the greatest erosion occurring in schools with high minority populations; 36 percent reported decreases in arts education (Chapman, 2004; von Zastrow, 2004).

School leaders often fail to recognize higher-level thinking in the arts and their impact on cognitive and affective growth, as well as the empowerment and success they provide to a broader diversity of students—not just the privileged or talented (Nelson, 2009). Continued inequalities in access to the arts for our most marginalized students also lead to more limited development of higher-order thinking skills as developed in those classes (Delpit, 2006).

Kozol (2005) claimed it is the shame of our nation that current high-stakes tests have narrowed the aims of education for the poor and minorities—those who may benefit most from a more balanced, liberal arts curriculum. The lack of equity in curriculum and content knowledge for minorities has led to "important questions of educational equity" (NASBE, 2003, p. 9). Delpit (2006) believes that it provides

tragic evidence of the existence of a culture of power.

Minority and low-income students have less access to arts instruction and are less likely to have highly qualified arts instructors (Ruppert, 2009). The arts are often cut back during school hours in classrooms with a high percentage of at-risk students to make room for more remedial classes, further perpetuating achievement gaps (Delpit, 2006; von Zastrow, 2004). These same students generally lack the resources to engage in the arts outside of school, creating a further opportunity gap (Ruppert, 2009). When denied the right to a well-rounded education including the arts, high-poverty students lose out on the important educational advantages realized by their more privileged counterparts (von Zastrow, 2004).

As a matter of social justice, we must be concerned when students are denied access to learning in and through the arts as a part of a balanced curriculum simply because of their socioeconomic status or their testing ability. Freedom and choice should not only be for those who can afford them (Apple, 1993). Empirical research surrounding these issues and the return investment of an education in and through the arts must be considered.

### **The Role of the Arts in Equitable Education**

The arts have been found to influence the cognitive and affective growth of a broad diversity of students (Sternberg 2008). Howard Gardner (2007) asserted that the arts develop particular cognitive

abilities that enable students to think in synthetic and symbolic ways, and to omit the arts from the curriculum would be shortchanging the mind. While some art education researchers report that arts-rich environments have little causal effect on academic achievement (Winner & Hetland, 2000), other cognitive scientists are finding new evidence linking the two (Posner, Rothbart, Sheese & Kieras, 2008).

Recent research findings in cognitive neuroscience support longstanding correlations between the arts and cognitive development and subsequent improved academic achievement, due in large part to connections between sustained and focused attention in the arts and improved overall thinking (Perkins, 2001; Posner et al. 2008). A three-year study by seven leading U.S. universities regarding “Learning, Arts, and the Brain” investigated whether the arts attracted smart people or whether arts training makes people smarter (Dana, 2008). Neuroimaging studies of students’ anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) revealed that sustained attention in arts activities strengthens the brain’s attention networks and leads to improved general cognitive capacity and transference (Gazzaniga, 2008; Posner et al. 2008). Another team in the study—Winner, Schlaug, and colleagues (in Posner et al. 2009)—found evidence of near transfer through improved motor and auditory skills of students who received music training. Previous research had found evidence of significant far transfer to improved overall IQ after a one-year music program.

Posner and his colleagues’ work

(2008, 2009) in this area focused on executive attention networks: neural pathways in the brain dedicated to attention and control of one's emotions and thoughts. Training in the arts appears to improve cognition by strengthening these networks through the intense focus required during arts activities, driven also by motivation and related to self-regulation of cognition and emotion.

Arts training influences cognition, in part because learning an art form involves resolving a conflict or solving a problem (Posner, 2009). In his study arts students were engaged in conflict-related tasks that required choice among competing possible responses. Examples of conflict-related tasks in the arts are numerous, such as choosing the correct note to play in music or the most appropriate colors, media, or themes for the communication of a particular emotion or thought in the visual arts. This implies that the incorporation of choice, a level of autonomy, and self-direction are important in arts environments.

Brain research in the arts adds to former studies that investigated the impact of the arts on learning, which indicated that the arts reach marginalized students, enhance learning environments, and provide greater academic and personal success regardless of students' color or socioeconomic status (Fiske, 1999). Students who studied the arts, particularly those from low income situations, were found to score higher on standardized tests (i.e. SAT), and have better attendance rates in schools than their peers who did not have

access to the arts (Fiske, 1999). Students involved in arts programs also show stronger self-efficacy and self-agency, dispositions which will equip them for success in life and work (Education Week, 2007; Gude, 2009; Shauck, 2009).

Despite these findings, the status of the arts status remains on the fringes at the policy level in budget and curricular priorities (Gadsden, 2008). A pervasive attitude persists—as evidenced in public opinion, education policy, distribution of funds, and subsequent cuts in arts programs in schools—that the arts do not constitute serious, academic study. In general, visual arts programs are not considered for their ability to increase students' capacities to learn, improve overall cognition, or better equip students for academic success.

Questioning these inequities brings us face to face with controversial issues of justice in the uniformity versus diversity debate. Is equality of instruction synonymous with equity of educational opportunity for all? Is the purpose of public schooling to create a *melting pot* or a *salad bowl* (Guild, 2001, p. 3)?

### **The Inequality of Equal Treatment**

It is a moral imperative for education to recognize a multiplicity of human capacities and interests (Gardner, 1961; Noddings, 1997). In order to develop each person's highest learning capacity, considerations must be made for individual learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and personal interests, while not failing at necessary high standards regarding

what all students can learn and do (Delpit, 2006; Guild, 2001; Resnick, 1999). Equal consideration must be given for challenge to high-performing students as well as advancement of all students' analytical, creative, and practical powers. This is an education that truly promotes equity through diversity in the broadest sense.

As Thomas Jefferson once said, "There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequal people." Noddings (1997) added:

Must we declare everyone equal in all things in order to cherish each child and nurture his growth? By trying so hard to pretend that all children are equal in all things, we destroy the very possibility of promoting their real, unique talents. (p. 27)

Research has shown that teaching to a balance of student's intelligences increases individual student performance (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004), in large part because learners do not fit a single mold. A key problem for policy and practice is how to accommodate for differences while maintaining a deep concern for improving student achievement. Pat Guild (2001) provided some necessary clarification at this point:

Attention to diversity does not mean 'anything goes.' Honoring diversity does not imply a lack of clear beliefs and strong values. There are indeed some absolutes in education. Every learner benefits from an outstanding teacher and an engaging learning experience... Every student should

have an opportunity to reach his or her individual potential. Every student should master specific basic skills. The challenge is to identify what should be the same in schools and what should be different. We need appropriate uniform standards but not standardization. (p. 1)

In order to make the "all can learn" slogan a reality, policy makers must be willing to make decisions from a "deeply-rooted desire to want to change schooling and society for the better" (Koschoreck, 2006, p. 10). In these issues, Rawls' theory of justice (1971) would suggest the need for a collective intent toward addressing inequities that hinder students from taking hold of their full capacity to learn. Critical questions must be asked, such as: How is curriculum narrowing, unfair testing, and inconsideration of personal and cultural learning differences creating social injustices? In what ways does inaccessibility to a balanced curriculum hinder students' full learning capacity?

### **Aims for 21st Century Education: Capacity and the Whole Child**

Philosophies and research underlying the belief systems that all can learn and ideals that human potential should and can be cultivated, force additional questions as to the aim of 21st century education, what it means to be an educated citizen in today's world, and what constitutes intelligence. The current narrow characterizations of student development and success as based on mathematical and

analytical indicators alone (Gardner, 1999) are pressured to give way to more balanced definitions of intelligence. Academic achievement can no longer be defined by proficiency in producing a right answer (Gadsden, 2008).

An approach focused on individual potential and balance professes that perhaps our society does not need to make its children first in the world in mathematics and science. Some argue that to cultivate a more well-rounded and caring citizenry would come closer to a “morally defensible mission for schools in the 21st century” (Noddings, 1997, p. 27). In policy and practice, a broader conceptualization of accountability would allow for definitions of achievement and student success that go beyond academic standing to include students’ social, emotional, and spiritual development (Claxton, 2007; Guild, 2001; Rendón, 2006). Policy priorities aligning with aims for education which view students as human capital alone must be transformed in order to realize the true potential and capacities for students’ learning and success in life.

Centuries ago, Pestalozzi (1894) claimed that education systems were responsible for balancing the three major dimensions of human nature: body, mind, and heart toward the realization of one’s individual potential. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD, 2007) also called for educating the whole child. ASCD’s platform builds on cognitive science research that views students as whole human beings—body, mind, and spirit—with expandable and

various ways of demonstrating their knowledge (Gardner, 2007; Sternberg, 1997). Rather than narrowing the curriculum and testing only a few subjects, it is asserted that the achievement gap could be lessened through improved curricular equity and balance, including an education in the arts.

Instructional leaders have been challenged to publicly promote the arts for their contribution to the success of the whole child (Nelson (2009). Proactive support for the arts in practice and policy requires educational leaders to rethink the concept of how time is spent in schools and the true aims of education.

### **Aims for Balance in Education**

While knowledge proficiency in reading and writing are needed for success in life, Sternberg and Grigorenko (2004) asserted that schools test for the wrong intelligences, and the ones which are tested do not matter most for success in life. Resnick (1999) believed that a “persistent belief in the importance of inherited aptitude” have hindered achievement for more students (Resnick, 1999, p. 38), as evidenced in agendas of research, policy, and practice. Research regarding the nature of intelligence and learning that acknowledges the social and emotional aspects of learning and understanding must be considered (Bransford et al. 2000).

Research indicates that individual student potential could be better realized with the provision of a balanced curriculum and pedagogies that addresses students’ needs to think critically, cre-

atively, and in practical ways and with wisdom (Gardner, 2007; Sternberg et al. 2004). Balanced education environments have been shown to benefit a larger percentage of children, enabling them to learn better, perform better on tests, and thereby demonstrate their capabilities. Sternberg's research (2008) revealed that many students "actually have abilities that, under traditional systems of testing and instruction, remain hidden and ultimately go to waste" (p. 288).

In the search for a more meaningful and equitable education, even 50 years ago, art education was thought to "become the catalyst for change, in which the individual and his creative potentialities are placed above subject matter and in which the child's inner equilibrium may be considered as important as scientific achievements" (Lowenfeld, 1957, p. 11). Equitable access to a rigorous, well-rounded, curriculum that provides multiple ways for students to succeed is the right of every student. It is crucial for policymakers and educational leaders to reconsider the role of the arts in increased capacities to learn as well as current definitions of intelligent behavior. As Gadsden (2008) commented,

To the degree that the questions are posed about the effects of the arts on student achievement, they may need to be reconceptualized and rewritten to ask what constitutes a well-educated student, a successful learning and teaching experience, successful schooling, or educational success." (p. 34)

### **Expanded Definitions of Intelligence**

Old paradigms of intelligence continue to dictate current models of education. Individual, discriminate subjects learned in a linear fashion stand in obvious dichotomy to research indicating that learning is a complex, interdisciplinary process (Bransford et al., 2000). Cognitive science research, including neuroscience, continues to confirm that cognitive ability is expandable and integrative (Caine & Caine, 1997; Gardner, 2007; Gazzaniga, 2008; Perkins; 2001; Sternberg, 2008).

Intelligence and the capacity to learn are not fixed entities that fall along a bell curve as some have claimed in the name of racial prejudice (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Rather, one's intelligence continually adapts to new information and expands as one learns and grows; it is shaped by a synthesis of one's experiences and new information (Gardner, 2007). Critical and creative thought work in tandem, possessing integrated and synergistic properties (Paul & Elder, 2006).

Sternberg (1997) defined intelligence as the critical, creative, and practical skills and dispositions required for achieving personal goals within one's sociocultural context by capitalizing on their strengths and compensating for, or correcting, their weaknesses. Abilities are not fixed; they can be adapted, shaped, or selected from various combinations of one's analytical, creative, and social/emotional skill sets. Sternberg's theory of successful intelligence (1997) says that it is not enough to memorize and analyze ideas; students also need creative abilities to generate good

ideas, and the practical and positive social skills to persuade others of their value and follow them through with wisdom. Sternberg believes that those who are successfully intelligent use their “intelligence, creativity and knowledge in combination for a common good” (Sternberg, 2004, para. 7).

Cognitive science research identifies that intelligent thinking is accompanied by the inclination or disposition to use one’s skills. Dispositions are the attitudes, motivations, and habits of mind that work together with cognitive ability to assure one’s quality of thinking (Perkins & Ritchhart, 2004; Ritchhart, 2002). Belief systems also come into play. Aptitude is no longer considered equal to cognitive abilities alone; people’s intellectual capacity and development also includes motivational and affective facets (Perkins & Ritchhart, 2004; Posner et al. 2008). Dai and Sternberg (2004) asserted that an education which does not take into account these personal factors is an incomplete education. Since study in the arts is strongly linked to motivation, affective development, as well as improved cognition, it can be projected that learning without the arts in an incomplete education as well (Posner et al. 2008).

### **Balance in the Arts**

This paper espouses the need for a balanced view of art education and curriculum for the building of all students’ learning capacities. The arts can no longer be known as only “right-brained”; they require whole-brained intelligence. As revealed

through brain research and neuroimaging, right/left brain thinking should be replaced by the knowledge that all of the brain is activated, developed, and utilized in all arts processes—more than can be said for some sciences (Jensen, 2001).

Infusion of best practice research toward the development of balanced thinking and overall cognitive development in the arts is necessary (Darby & Catterall, 1994; Luftig, 2000). Today’s art programs must cultivate balanced thinking (analytical, creative, and practical with wisdom) and deep cognitive engagement (Dai et al. 2004; Jensen, 2001; Perkins, 2001).

Craft, Gardner, and Claxton (2007) called for an education in the arts which enables students to creatively think for themselves and synthesize problem solving with creativity and quality craftsmanship, while not apart from wisdom. Inquiry-based approaches in art and design education have been found to enhancing a balance of students’ thinking in areas of creative problem-solving, justifying choices with reasoning, and making connections, taking advantage of the arts’ whole-brained capacities (Burnette, 2005; Burnette & Norman, 1997; Marshall, 2005). This shift in focus from product to thinking does not need to diminish the value of skill and craftsmanship, but rather provides deeper avenues for engagement and meaning.

### **Critical Pedagogy in Art Education**

In the pursuit of a equitable and balanced education, perhaps one of the strongest assets inherent in the arts are

their potential for opening up possibilities for understanding other students' points of view and connections between individual lives and larger social issues (Gnezda, 2009). It is not enough, according to Gude (2007), to pass on historical or technical knowledge in the arts; art curricula must also include "a wide range of technical, theoretical, and cultural perspectives" toward the development of community and shared meaning (p. 14). Domain knowledge in visual arts is essential for high levels of critical and creative thinking (Bransford et al. 2000), but it should not stop there. Exploring alternative points of view and focusing more on inquiry and "authentic topics for artmaking" (Gnezda, 2009, p. 49) rather than the media and

*... it is a moral imperative  
for student success  
in the  
21st century  
to provide balanced  
and equitable learning  
environments with the  
arts at  
their core.*

methods, may encourage deeper learning.

For students marginalized by narrow definitions of intelligence, the arts can serve as a voice for social justice (Gadsden, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2006). In this immigrant nation, filled with rich histories, stories, and myths, the arts build critical skills as citizens of a participatory democracy (Gude, 2007). Student's individual cultures are elevated without promoting color blindness (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings,

2006; Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2003).

Delpit (2006) however, warned against shallow multicultural education experiences which can promote stereotypes and generalize cultures and backgrounds. Instead, art and design classrooms in which students critically question issues, social conditions, cultural attitudes, belief, and values offer opportunities for nurturing aesthetic abilities and invite personal and social awareness (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002).

Critical pedagogies (Freire, 1973) call for teachers to be co-learners and co-inquirers toward the construction of knowledge and force shifts in teacher/student roles: students become co-investigators, seekers, and problem-solvers and teachers become facilitators and guides (Dewey, 1910; Bransford et al. 2000). Students learn to think for themselves and greater autonomy and individual choice leads to greater self-determination and more meaningful, personal, and permanent learning (Dewey, 1916; Resnick, 1999). Arts education has long been known for such relevant and active approaches to learning (Dewey, 1910; Eisner, 2002; Gardner, 2007; Lowenfeld, 1957).

### **Critical Cultures of Inquiry**

Cultures of equity promote an engaged, democratic community of learners who do not "shy away from social issues or difficult questions" and make a commitment to listen with understanding and empathy (Perry, 2000, p. 182). Art education serves as an agent of social change as students discuss, analyze, create artworks,

and confront social issues with critical knowledge and a democratic point of view.

Twenty-first century students must be encouraged—not just allowed—to think critically about modern life issues in an open exchange of ideas and values and to “learn to love the questions” (Greene, 2001, p. 2). Nel Noddings (1997) asserted that an education that “stands the best chance of achieving a meaningful equality” is one that is organized around students’ “broad talents and interests, augmented and filled out by serious inquiry into common human problems” (p. 29).

Inquiry-based, thinking approaches to study in the arts invite a critical theory perspective and synergistic, critical, creative, and practical ways of thinking (Walker, 2001). Student voice is honored rather than “silencing” (Fine & Weis, 2003). An education in the arts that incorporates cultural, ethnic, and inter-cultural inquiries allows students to develop a more critical lens in a world where only one correct solution to problems rarely exists.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has reported on disturbing effects of educational practices and policy decisions involving unequal access in curriculum and narrow definitions of intelligence. A broader reform agenda is needed that values all students’ balanced thinking skills—one that cuts across ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic lines toward the greater realization of their success in life and learning.

It is proposed that a just and equitable education cannot exist apart from the

infusion of more balanced teaching and learning environments that validate students’ individual and unique abilities and dispositions (Sternberg, 2008). The arts in education are considered as key and equitable contributors to students’ balanced and expanding capacities to learn, beyond the current narrowly tested subset of their overall potential. As an issue of social justice, static and passive views of intelligence are challenged to give way to flexible and expandable epistemologies that address one’s whole being—mind, body, and spirit (Gadsden, 2008). At a deeper level, it requires that surface level reform efforts be replaced with transformed cultures of learning that value multiple and engaging pathways to student success, especially for those students marginalized by narrow definitions of intelligence.

A strong research base now indicates that a sufficient 21st century education cannot be provided apart from addressing students’ synthetic, higher-order capacities in pedagogical practice and policy (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Gardner, 2007; Sternberg, 2008). More of the same in educational practice will not produce the kind of minds for the future that our children will need for success in life and work (Gardner, 2007). As a nation, closing the achievement gap is not success enough if our most disadvantaged students do not have access to an education that does not exclude the arts as a basic domain of human experience, inquiry, and literacy.

The arts are promoted for their ability to build critical cultures of thinking and to affirm students’ cultural, ethnic, and inter-

cultural proficiencies (Nelson, 2009; Lindsey et al. 2006). The arts in learning continue to hold promising potential in this aim, requiring informed leaders who can reframe and align educational policy with practice toward sustainable goals. It is also projected that the arts' status in the education community (Luftig, 2000) may be bolstered through alignment with best practice research and purposeful development of students' critical, creative, and practical capacities as wise citizens in a democratic society (Dewey, 1916; Sternberg, 2008).

Not only do our children deserve a "radically new way of approaching learning" (Fullan, 2001, p. 269), it is a moral imperative for student success in the 21st century to provide balanced and equitable learning environments with the arts at their core. To do less, is a social injustice.

---

## References

- Apple, M. (1993). The politics of official knowledge: Does a national curriculum make sense? *Discourse*, 14(1), 1-16.
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2007). *The learning compact redefined: A call to action*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Bransford, J., Brown, A., & Cocking, R. (Eds.). (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience and school*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Bumgarner, C. (2007). Valuing the arts on their own terms? (Ceci n'est pas une pipe). *Arts Education Policy Review*, 3(10), 3-12.
- Burnette, C. (2005). *IDESIGN: Seven ways of design thinking, A teaching resource*. Retrieved from <http://www.idesignthinking.com/main.html>.
- Burnette, C. & Norman, J. (1997). *Design for thinking DK-12*. Tucson, AZ: Crizmac Art and Cultural Materials.
- Caine, R. & Caine, G. (1997). *Education on the edge of possibility*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Center for Arts Education (2009). *Staying in school: Arts education and New York city high school graduation rates*. New York: The Center for Arts Education. Retrieved from <http://caenyc.org/arts-education-report>.
- Chapman, L. (2004). No child left behind in art? *Arts Education Policy Review*, 106(2), 3-15.
- Claxton, G. (2007). Expanding young people's capacity to learn. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 55(2), 115-134.
- College Board Advocacy (2008). *Facts for education advocates: Demographics and the racial divide*. Retrieved from [http://www.connection-collegeboard.com/08oct/pdf/adv\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.connection-collegeboard.com/08oct/pdf/adv_fact_sheet.pdf).
- Craft, A., Gardner, H., & Claxton, G. (2007). *Creativity, wisdom, and trusteeship: Exploring the role of education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Dai, D. & Sternberg, R. (Eds.). (2004). *Motivation, emotion, and cognition: Integrative perspectives on intellectual functioning and development*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Dana Foundation (2008). *Learning, arts, and the brain*. Retrieved from [www.dana.org](http://www.dana.org).
- Darby, J. & Catterall, J. (1994). The 4th r: The arts and learning. *Teachers College Record*, 96(2), 299-308.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2008). What does it mean to be internationally competitive?: High performing nations integrate curriculum instruction and assessment to improve both teaching and learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90 (4), 263-271.
- Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom* (2nd ed.). New York: New Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: McMillan, Free Press.
- Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. Boston: Heath.
- Education Week (2007). *Tough choices: Preparing students for global competition*. Live chat with Marc Tucker and Thomas Payzant, March 14, 2007. Retrieved from [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org).
- Eisner, E. (2002). *Arts and creation of mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Fine, M. & Weis, L. (2003). *Silenced voices and extraordinary conversations... Re-imagining schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ferrero, D. (2007). W(h)ither liberal education?: A modest defense of humanistic schooling in the 21st century. In C. Finn & D. Ravitch (Eds.), *Beyond the Basics: Achieving a Liberal Education for All Children*. Thomas P. Fordham Institute.

## Vanada/A Balancing Act

- Fiske, E. (Ed.). (1999). *Champions of change: The impact of the arts on learning. Arts Education Partnership and the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities*. Retrieved from [www.aep-arts.org/PDF%20Files/ChampsReport.pdf](http://www.aep-arts.org/PDF%20Files/ChampsReport.pdf).
- Freire, P. (1973). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gadsden, V. (2008). The arts and education: Knowledge generation, pedagogy, and the discourse of learning. *Review of Research in Education*, 32(1), 29-61.
- Gardner, H. (2007). *Five kinds of minds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Gardner, H. (1999). *Intelligence reframed: Multiple intelligences for the 21st century*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gardner, J. (1961). *Excellence: Can we be equal and excellent too?* New York: Harper.
- Gaudelius, Y., & Speirs, P. (Eds.) (2002). *Contemporary issues in art education*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Gazzaniga, M. (2008). *Learning, arts, and the brain: The Dana consortium report on arts and cognition*. New York: Dana Press. Retrieved from [www.dana.org](http://www.dana.org).
- Gnezda, N. (2009). The potential for meaning in student art. *Art Education*, 62(4), 48-52.
- Greene, M. (2001). *Variations on a blue guitar: The lincoln center institute lectures on aesthetic education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gude, O. (2009). Art education for democratic life. *Art Education*, 62(6), 7-11.
- Gude, O. (2007). Principles of possibility: Considerations for a 21st-century art & culture curriculum. *Art Education*, 60(1), 6-17.
- Guild, P. (2001). *Diversity, learning style and culture. New Horizons for Learning*. Retrieved from [newhorizons.org](http://newhorizons.org)
- Herrnstein, R., & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve*. New York: Free Press.
- Jensen, E. (2001). *Arts with the brain in mind*. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Koschoreck, J. (2006). Teaching social justice in educational leadership: An interview with James W. Koschoreck (interviewed by Gerardo R. López). *UCEA Review*, Summer, 10-11.
- Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12.
- Lindsey, R., Robins, K., & Terrell, R. (2003). *Cultural proficiency: A manual for school leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Lowenfeld, V. (1957). *Creative and mental growth* (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan.
- Luftig, R. (2000). An investigation of an arts infusion program on creative thinking, academic achievement, affective functioning, and arts appreciation of children at three grade levels. *Studies in Art Education*, 41(3), 208-227.
- Marshall, J. (2005). Connecting art, learning and creativity: A case for curriculum integration. *Studies in Art Education*, 46(3), 227-241.
- National Association of State Boards of Education (2003). *The complete curriculum: Ensuring a place for the arts and foreign languages in America's schools*. The report of the NASBE study group on the lost curriculum. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Nelson, H. (2009). *Arts education and the whole child*. Principal, January/February, 14-17.
- Noddings, N. (2007). *Philosophy of education* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Westview Press.
- Noddings, N. (1997). A morally defensible mission for schools in the 21st century. In Clinchy & Evans (Eds.), *Transforming Public Education: A New Course for America's Future* (pp. 27-37). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Paul, R. & Elder, L. (2006). Critical thinking: The nature of critical and creative thought. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 30(2), 34-36.
- Perkins, D. (2001). Embracing babel: The prospects of instrumental uses of the arts for education. In E. Winner & L. Hetland (Eds.), *Beyond the soundbite: Arts education and academic outcomes* (pp. 117-124). Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust.
- Perkins, D. & Ritchhart, R. (2004). When is good thinking? In D. Dai & R. Sternberg (Eds.), *Motivation, Emotion and Cognition: Integrative Perspectives on Intellectual Functioning and Development* (pp. 351-384). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Perry, M. (2000). *Walking the color line: The art and practice of anti-racist teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Pestalozzi, J. H. (1894). *How gertrude teaches her children*. Translated by L. Holland & F. Turner. London: Swan Sonnenschein.
- Portes, P. (2007). A cultural approach to establishing equity and closing the educational achievement gap. *Penn State GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 5(1). Retrieved from <http://www.urbanedjournal.org/>.
- Posner, M. & Patoiné, B. (2009). *How arts training improves attention and cognition*. The Dana Foundation website. Retrieved from [www.dana.org](http://www.dana.org).
- Posner, M., Rothbart, M., Sheese, B., & Kieras, J. (2008). How arts training influences cognition. In C. Asbury & B. Rich (Eds.), *Learning, Arts, and the Brain: The Dana Consortium Report on Arts and Cognition*. New York: Dana Press.

- Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rendón, L. (2006). *Reconceptualizing success for underserved students in higher education*. National Postsecondary Education Cooperative. Iowa State University. Retrieved from [nces.ed.gov/NPEC/pdf/resp\\_Rendon.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/NPEC/pdf/resp_Rendon.pdf).
- Resnick, L. (1999). Making America smarter. *Education Week Century Series*, 18(40), 38-40.
- Ritchhart, R. (2002). *Intellectual character: What it is, why it matters and how to get it*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Ruppert, S. (2009). The arts education effect: Why schools with arts programs do better at narrowing achievement gaps. *Education Week*, 29 (5).
- Shauck, B. (2009). National Art Education Association: Message from the president. *NAEA News*, 51(1).
- Sternberg, R. (2008). Increasing academic excellence and enhancing diversity are compatible goals. *Educational Policy*, 22(4), 487-514.
- Sternberg, R. (2006). Creativity is a habit. *Education Week*, 25 (24), 47-64.
- Sternberg, R. (2005). A model of educational leadership: Wisdom, intelligence, and creativity, synthesized. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 8(4), 347-364. Retrieved from <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals>.
- Sternberg, R. (2004). Interview with Robert Sternberg, July 29, 2004. *Human Intelligence*. Retrieved from [http://www.indiana.edu/~intell/sternberg\\_interview.shtml](http://www.indiana.edu/~intell/sternberg_interview.shtml).
- Sternberg, R. J. (1997). *Successful intelligence*. New York: Dutton.
- Sternberg, R. & Grigorenko, E. (2004). Successful intelligence in the classroom. *Theory into Practice*, 43(4), 274-280.
- Sternberg, R., Torff, B., & Grigorenko, E. (1998). Teaching triarchically improves school achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90, 374-384.
- U.S. Department of Education (2009a). *HBCUs and higher education: Beyond the iron triangle. Remarks of Arne Duncan to 2009 national historically black colleges and universities conference*. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2009/09/09022009.html>.
- U.S. Department of Education (2009b). *Partners in reform: Remarks by Arne Duncan, secretary of education to the national education association on July 2, 2009*. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2009/07/07022009.pdf>.
- U.S. Department of Education (2009c). *August 2009 letter: U.S. secretary of education Arne Duncan*. Retrieved from [www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2009/08/08182009a.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2009/08/08182009a.pdf).
- Walker, S. (2001). *Teaching meaning in artmaking*. Worcester, MA: Davis Publications.
- Winner, E. & Hetland, L. (2000). The arts and academic achievement: What the evidence shows. *Double issue of Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 34(3-4).
- von Zastrow, C. (2004). *Academic atrophy: The condition of the liberal arts in America's public schools*. Washington, DC: Council for Basic Education. Retrieved from <http://www.ecs.org/html/Document.asp?chouseid=5058>.