

# The Transformative Power of the Arts In Closing the Achievement Gap

*"The arts are not just a nice thing to have....  
(They) define who we are as a people.... My husband  
and I believe strongly that arts education is essential for  
building innovative thinkers who will be our nation's  
leaders of tomorrow."*

— Michele Obama, *New York Times*, May 19, 2009,  
on visiting the American Ballet Theatre  
and the Metropolitan Museum of Art

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**ARTS INITIATIVE**



*“Arts learning experiences play a vital role in developing students’ capacities for critical thinking, creativity, imagination, and innovation. These capacities are increasingly recognized as core skills and competencies all students need as part of a high-quality and complete 21st-century education. And, as a matter of social justice, we must be concerned when students are denied access to a high-quality education—one that includes learning in and through the arts—simply because of where they live or go to school.”*

— Sandra Ruppert,  
from *Critical Evidence of How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement*

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## Executive Summary

This paper focuses on arts' transformative power — its ability to spark and maintain engagement, academic achievement, and 21st century success outside of school, particularly for students marginalized by traditional curriculum and instructional practice, narrowly focused standardized assessments and institutionalized biases.

For these students, arts education and arts educators can provide positive, life-enhancing experiences, skills and direction. It can help eliminate demographic predictability, which says that these students will become alienated from educational efforts and will surely fail.

The following provides the essential background parents and educators need to understand the relationship between the achievement gap and arts education. Key issues include:

- What do the arts have to do with the achievement gap?
- What are benefits of the arts for students?
- What does research say about the arts and student academic and personal growth?
- What are the gifts of the arts for individuals and society?
- How do we artfully redefine the achievement gap and those trapped in it?

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## The Transformative Power of the Arts in Closing the Achievement Gap

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## Introduction

All of our students, especially those who aren't succeeding academically, need and deserve a quality education that includes the arts — dance, music, theatre and visual arts. That belief aligns with the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) Arts Initiative: Reinvigorating Arts Education in California.

The core principles of CCSESA's visual and performing arts consider the arts “an integral component of a comprehensive curriculum . . . [that] play an essential role in the daily lives of California citizens and influence expression, creativity, and imagination as they relate to the human experience. An understanding and appreciation of the arts, as well as the ability to participate in the arts, are key attributes of an educated person.”

The core principles apply to all students, who should have access to:

- Rich, affirming learning environments
- Empowering pedagogy
- Challenging, culturally responsive, relevant curriculum
- Quality instruction
- Valid, comprehensive assessments of their progress
- Teachers who receive quality professional preparation and support
- Powerful family and community engagement
- Administrations and leaders who will advocate for them

This paper focuses on arts' transformative power — its ability to spark and maintain engagement, academic achievement, and 21st century success outside of school, particularly for students marginalized by traditional curriculum and instructional practice, narrowly focused standardized assessments and institutionalized biases.

For these students, arts education and arts educators can provide positive, life-enhancing experiences, skills and direction. It can help eliminate demographic predictability, which says that these student will become alienated from educational efforts and will surely fail.

When school districts analyze student data by ethnic group, socio-economic status, and classification as English Learners and special education students, it's readily apparent which students are making it academically and which are falling farther behind in school every year. Reading and math scores and high school graduation rates reveal stark, persistent differences among students. Socio-economic disparities in a school district also reflect access disparities — certain students have more or less access to arts programs and other educational services.

**Nazaury Delgado** is a 20-year-old learning-disabled digital artist in New York City who was accepted to the Fashion Institute of Technology on a full scholarship and was featured in a *New York Times* story. “At 11, he had found his father dying of a drug overdose in the bedroom,” wrote Jennifer Lee in the January 9, 2010 story. “He fell in with the wrong circle of friends, had run-ins with the police and straddled the line of failing classes. He suffers from a learning disability that makes reading difficult.”

“My illustrations come through a creative process that I have custom made and that I hope to be able to perfect over the years,” Delgado says. “The process begins with me taking a digital photo of others or myself. Then I gather images from various sources that represent something or grab my attention and infuse them into the photograph, overlaying and fading them together to make the final product, the digital picture. Through this process, I play with complex patterns, rich color combinations and the fascinating features of the human face. My ultimate goal is to make these pictures look abstract. I love working/creating with Adobe Photoshop, a powerful program that has the tools I need to manipulate these photographs.”



“Faces” by Nazaury Delgado

His art can be seen at [webdesignerdepot.com/2010/02/the-many-faces-of-nazaury-delgado/](http://webdesignerdepot.com/2010/02/the-many-faces-of-nazaury-delgado/)

## What Is the Achievement Gap?

The term “achievement gap” appears frequently in public dialogue on student achievement disparities, and it is a phenomenon that education leaders explore in research projects and reform measures. Here are some commonly raised issues:

- Despite overall student progress on statewide standards, persistent gaps remain in achievement among student groups.
- Within any school district are groups whose history includes discrimination, access to fewer resources and lack of political power.
- Within any school district, a disaggregation of student achievement data reveals persistent patterns of low performance and high school completion rates.
- African American, Latino, English Learner, special education, low-income, and continuation and court school students are most likely to underachieve on standardized tests.
- Reasons for low test scores may include poor instruction, poverty, limited meaningful parental participation in schools, narrow focus of tests, test discrimination, district institutional bias, low teacher expectations, poor student self-concept and socio-economic factors.
- Making changes in schooling without addressing other societal factors will not profoundly change achievement.
- The national pressure to close the achievement gap by raising test scores often results in poorly performing students having even less access to subjects other than basic reading and mathematics.
- Achievement gaps in schools reflect social stratification, discrimination and power relations in the society.

EdSource’s *The Achievement Gap in California* follows the general list of lamentations:

“On the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and California’s own standards-based tests (CSTs), poor students, African Americans and Latinos, and English Learners are over-represented among students scoring at the lowest levels and under-represented among the highest scoring. Other measures of student achievement—including dropout and graduation rates, completion of the a-g courses required for eligibility to the state’s four-year universities, and college admissions—reveal similar achievement patterns between these groups of students and their peers. These results are important because they predict later success, including students’ ability as adults to secure jobs that pay a living wage.

“These achievement gaps between poor and non-poor, among various ethnic groups, and between non-English speakers and their English-speaking peers have over several decades been the catalyst for many laws, initiatives, and education reforms.

“. . . . The achievement gap stems from both home- and school-based factors. It exists before students ever cross the school threshold, and this disadvantage can greatly affect their educational progress and success.

“. . . . Risk factors have a synergistic effect on school performance—children with one risk factor typically do not fare as well as those with none. Children with two or more of these factors generally lag far behind those with only one.”

While researchers may differ about the causes of the achievement gap, they agree on the issue’s complexity. Temple University professor Laurence Steinberg has found that although Asian students associate negative life consequences with poor school performance, African American and Hispanic students do not.

University of California, Berkeley, Professor John Ogbu argues that community-based “folk theories” contribute to self-defeating behaviors. One example of a folk theory would be that because of the history of discrimination against African Americans, even those who work hard will never reap the rewards that whites do. Another is that teens’ need for peer approval will undermine the efforts of even the most supportive parents and communities.

In *Young, Gifted and Black*, Theresa Perry offers a compelling theory of action about marginalized and alienated students’ poor academic performance. For Perry, to constantly discuss the achievement gap and lagging test scores without exploring the historical context of minority groups’ status merely perpetuates an “inferior intellectual status” based on systemic oppression. Lacking innovative proposals, students continue to feel inadequate and think, “Why bother?” Perry proposes to supplement the school program by forming communities of scholars in which marginalized students transform their identities into capable, self-assured learners. Other major steps that schools can take, she says, are to value students’ language and to fill the curriculum with the literary and artistic traditions of the marginalized population.

“A driving force in education reform for decades has been optimism that schools can help students overcome the disadvantages they bring with them into the classroom. For more than 40 years, researchers have conducted extensive investigations to determine which school factors influence student achievement. However, results of this research point to complex interactions among multiple factors, indicating that the solutions are neither simple nor straightforward.

“The state and federal movement toward a standards-based approach to school improvement begins with the assumption that all students can meet high academic expectations. Based on that assumption, a fundamental strategy has been to shed light on the achievement gaps that exist between groups of students. Evaluating what combination of educational strategies, resources, capacity building, and incentives can contribute to better academic performance among low-performing students continues to be a focus for educators and researchers. Meanwhile, policymakers have crafted accountability systems that put increased pressure on the schools and school districts that are currently falling short in helping all their students meet rigorous new achievement goals. (EdSource, “Achievement Gap in California”)

According to *Gauging the Gaps: A Deeper Look at Student Achievement*, educators and policymakers must examine gap data from at least four different perspectives:

- Are gaps in performance between student groups decreasing?
- Are all groups of students improving in performance?
- How big is the gap between groups?
- How is each group of students performing relative to similar groups in other schools, districts or states?

Added to the examination of what causes the achievement gap is the search for responsibility. In *Who’s Responsible for Closing the Achievement Gap?* Jean Snell sets up a framework of inquiry. After looking deeply into causes, school leaders must craft deliberate actions that will dismantle inequitable schooling practices and sustain school or system wide improvement in instruction. School leaders then must model a consistent sense of urgency about resolving the problem.

Most school districts continue to view the achievement gap strictly in terms of academic performance and the need to provide underperforming groups with more intensive, focused instruction. Despite intensified programs and before- and after-school additions, the gap persists. Also, the increased time for basic skills generally results in eliminating other curricular areas for underperforming students.

A February 2010 California Department of Education publication, *Workbook for Improving School Climate & Closing the Achievement Gap*, gives teachers and school leaders step-by-step guidance on how to interpret and respond to the results of their state-sponsored school climate surveys. Armed with that information, they can make changes that help close the achievement gap between higher- and lower-performing groups of students.

"I want to tell you about **Margaret Cape**, an exceptional 14-year-old artist student of mine," wrote Burnt Ranch School visual arts teacher Sandra Sterrenberg for this paper. "[Margaret] is a special education student and has participated in an early childhood education program in our district that provides language arts, mathematics, and Navajo tribe-specific activities in visual and performing arts. Her interest in and skills in the visual arts has continually enhanced her self-confidence and academic performance.

"She said she was proud of her Navajo heritage and learns about it from the schools Indian education program and also from her grandparents, who live next door to her. Each year, her grandfather goes to the Four Corners in Arizona to help his tribal people shear sheep.

"She is very into her art and says she plans to continue it in high school and beyond. This is her favorite school subject and the area where she does best. She likes being in the GATE [Gifted and Talented Education] program because she gets extra time and access to art materials. She has an interest in other cultures, and especially enjoys the Japanese manga images, characters and stories.

"Her STAR scores have risen dramatically and her self-confidence and self-esteem are enhanced by her involvement with her art projects."



"The Secret" by Margaret Cape

## What Does All of This Have to Do with the Arts?

Even a casual review of the day's news reveals the popular belief that the arts can help us reach our unrealized potential as citizens, workers, dreamers and creative human beings. Interest has grown, too, in the idea that the arts can transform students alienated by formal schooling. Here are a few examples:

- “He was transformed by this experience (acting in a film) and continues to follow an actor’s path. During times of incredible hardship, I watched him use this as a focus to transform his feelings of hurt and anger. Giving kids a chance to articulate and work through their emotions without taking it out on the street or another person is the most important reason to teach any art form. It is life-changing for many young people.”  
— Anonymous teacher’s comment on “Forum,” KQED Radio, April 12, 2009
- Some business schools are teaching their students how to get to creative solutions. “Innovation, of course, is a business buzzword. So some business schools are embracing an innovation-oriented approach known as ‘design thinking’ in which students take their understandings of the world and use them on the path to creativity.”  
— “Multicultural Critical Theory. At B-School?” *New York Times*, January 10, 2010
- *Oprah Winfrey*: “You’ve said that the new Master of Business Administration is the Master of Arts.”  
*Daniel Pink*: “After that statement, I’m sure I’ll never get invited to speak at business school! Here’s the point: Financial firms are sending their back-office jobs overseas. But what do artists do? They create something new, unexpected and delightful that changes the world. Masters in Fine Arts’ abilities are harder to outsource and more important in an abundant world.”  
— From Winfrey’s conversation with Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind* in *O, The Oprah Magazine*, November 11, 2008
- “Even if all you test is math and reading, then there’s a lot of evidence that a well-rounded education, everything from science to art to recess, is helpful.”  
— Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education  
“Profile of U.S. Secretary of Education,” *New Yorker*, February 1, 2010
- “The arts can help students become tenacious, team-oriented problem-solvers who are confident and able to think creatively,” [Duncan] stated. “These qualities can be especially important in improving learning among students from economically disadvantaged circumstances.”  
— Press release, “U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan Reinforces Importance of the Arts in Schools,” U.S. Department of Education, August 2009

Moving beyond the standardized test scores and dropout rates, a number of researchers and practitioners have begun to seriously consider what factors affect the achievement gap. They focus on student identity, sense of agency and expectations — in other words, are the students developing the confidence they need to become confident, independent learners, aware of their future possibilities and potential?

In “Closing the Racial Achievement Gap,” New York University professor Pedro Noguera writes: “Missing from the research and policy debates on the racial gap in student achievement is an understanding of the ways in which children come to perceive the relationship between their racial identities and what they believe they can do academically. For many children, schools play an important role in shaping their racial identities because they are one of the few social settings where they interact with people from different backgrounds. To the extent that a school’s sorting process disproportionately relegates Black and Brown children to spaces that are perceived as negative and marginal, it is likely that children will come to perceive certain activities and courses as racially defined and therefore either suitable or off limits for them.

“For example, in schools where few minority students are enrolled in advanced placement courses, even students who meet the criteria for enrollment may refuse to take such courses out of concern that they will become isolated from their peers. The same is true for the school band, newspaper, debating team or honor society. To the extent that these activities are perceived as the domain of White students, non-white students will be less likely to join. This occurs because peer groups play a large role in determining the academic orientation of students. The peer group with whom a student feels a sense of affinity can influence their style of clothes, manner of speech, and future career orientation. For middle-class African American and Latino students, this may mean that, despite receiving encouragement from their parents to do well in school, the peer group with whom they identify with may have stronger influence and push them in a different direction.

“Finally, racial images rooted in stereotypes that diminish the importance of intellectual pursuits limit the aspirations of young African American and Latino students. Such images permeate American society and have an impact on attitudes toward school. Despite the odds of success in professional sports and entertainment, many young people believe that they have a greater chance of becoming a highly paid athlete or rap artist than an engineer, doctor or software programmer. Moreover, with the advent of rollbacks on affirmative action policies at colleges and universities, there is little doubt that students who possess entertainment value, who can slam-dunk or score touchdowns, will always be admitted regardless of their academic performance — even as aspiring doctors and lawyers are turned away.”

Noguera adds that in schools where all children are achieving, regardless of race or class, several strategies typically are in place, including: 1) a commitment to engage parents as partners in education with explicit roles and responsibilities for parents and educators laid out; 2) strong instructional leadership focused on a coherent program for curriculum and instruction that teachers support and follow; 3) a willingness to evaluate interventions and reforms to ensure quality control; 4) a recognition that discipline practices must be linked to educational goals and must always aim at reconnecting troubled students to learning; 5) a commitment to finding ways to meet the nonacademic needs of poor students.

These are the main strategies identified in the research literature. If they can be brought together on a sustained basis, the outlook for poor and disadvantaged children will improve greatly.

In *Cultural Responsiveness, Racial Identity, and Academic Success*, Mary Stone Hanley and George W. Noblit view stigmatized students' poor performance in school tasks as the result of their floundering in school environments that have little cultural relevance to them. These students often are alienated and need to develop a voice, express their experiences and opinions, and develop channels for communication within their communities and the larger society. Schools need to acknowledge and celebrate cultural differences by providing diverse forms of artistic expression.

Given the complexity of the achievement gap, concerned educators and families must assess all the ways to support, energize and connect marginalized students to the learning process, society, and their roles in the world of work, study and community. The power of the arts to transform these students' lives has been underappreciated because of the laser-like focus on test scores in math and reading and the narrowing of the curriculum, excluding anything outside those two subjects.

"You cannot make the arts the handmaiden of good school performance. You cannot make the arts the handmaiden of good citizenship. Or the handmaiden of reforming a juvenile delinquent," writes Shirley Brice Heath in *Champions of Change*. But, she adds, "It's true that when kids get into the arts there's a certain transformance of things that happens." She adds the caveat: "Don't forget there also is 'art for arts sake.' "

Transformance, and nothing short of that, will bring change. In response to Brice Heath's comments, parents students, and educators respond: "Of course," for they have seen struggling, alienated students transform their lives, general outlook and schoolwork through a sustained involvement with the arts.

**Chuy Ballote** is a high school senior who has turned his interest in the arts into two business ventures: a silk screening business and fashion design. His company, called M Squared refers to his Mayan heritage, Mente Maya, or Mayan Mind. "My art keeps me from getting involved in the violence all around me," Ballote says. He employs other students and has developed a business plan through his participation in a university-sponsored program called the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, headquartered in New York with offices nationwide.



## What Does Research Have to Say About the Arts and Student Academic and Personal Growth?

An extensive body of research affirms the arts as transformative, but the research derives from two powerful, complementary perspectives. One looks to the arts for what the arts can do to help students in other subjects in the curriculum. It usually presents the arts as the helpmate, orphaned subject or poor cousin that must prove its worth if it's to keep its place among required subjects. This research might be tagged the "Maze Model for Arts Education." The other body of research views the arts in the schools for what they offer students in terms of personal, social, artistic and academic development — what might be called the "Pinball Model of Arts Education."

Think of the models this way: You have two toys, one a maze, the other a pinball machine. The ball in both represents the student as he or she moves through the display box, which represents a rich, affirming arts education.

In one case, the ball passes randomly through the maze. At the end of the maze is an exit marked "accelerated academic achievement." How much time the ball will spend in the maze and which sides of the maze it will touch are unknown, random events. No one pays much attention to the maze structure. Everyone's focus is on the exit — the perceived student benefits. The maze represents what arts educators present, to the public, as a path to improved student achievement. How much time is spent in the maze and the quality of the arts experiences are less important than getting to the exit.

In contrast, the pinball machine's cushions, flippers and other parts represent what can be learned through the arts. The ball touching and illuminating the parts of the pinball machine's display box are the equivalent of students having arts experiences that develop their abilities within the arts and beyond. The more time they spend in this environment, the more valuable skills they acquire — the more points they earn.

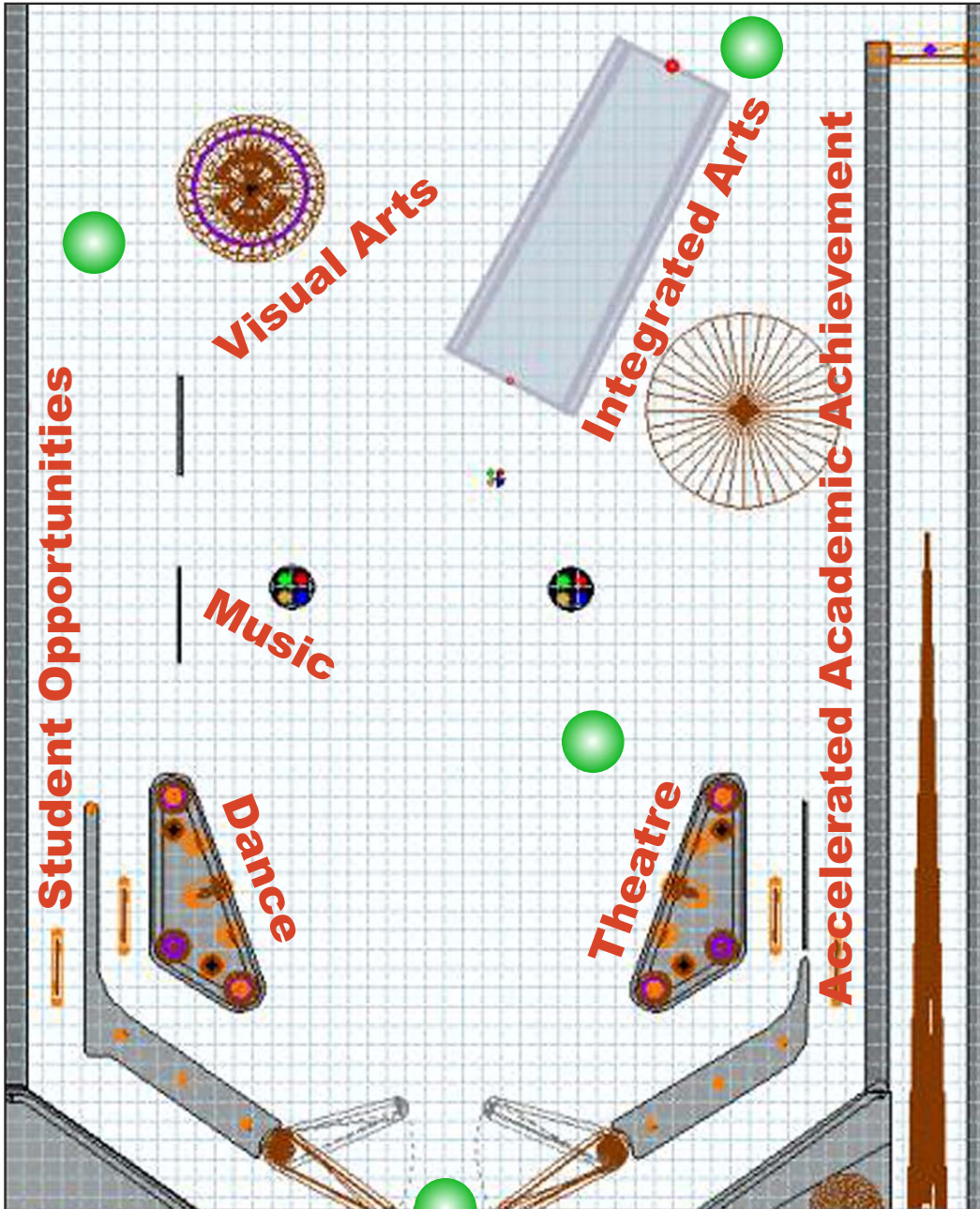
As students try to keep the pinball machine lighting up and ringing with action, they are likely to touch the wall of the glass box marked "accelerated academic achievement." Reaching the exit is less important; it's the time spent in art that is valuable. While the maze has just one ball — one chance at the arts experience — the pinball machine has many chances. In a maze, we try to get out quickly and not get lost; in a pinball game, we try to stay as long as possible to earn more points.

In "The Arts and Academic Achievement: What the Evidence Shows," Ellen Winner and Lois Hetland caution that "even in cases where arts programs add value to non-arts academic outcomes, it is dangerous to justify arts education by secondary, non-arts effects. Doing so puts the arts in a weakened and vulnerable position. Arts educators must build justifications based on what is inherently valuable about the arts themselves,

# Maze Model for Arts Education



# Pinball Model of Arts Education



even when the arts contribute secondary benefits. Just as we do not (and could not) justify the teaching of history for its power to transfer to mathematics, we must not allow policy makers to justify (or reject) the arts based on their alleged power to transfer to academic subject matters.”

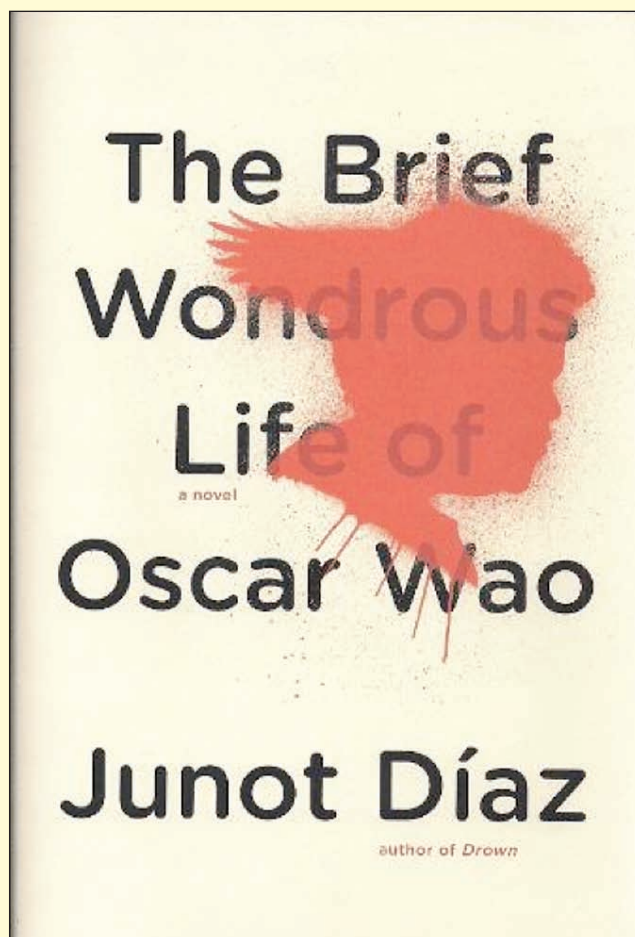
The authors add: “The arts have typically played a relatively unimportant role in American schools. Arts educators have tried to strengthen the position of the arts in our schools by arguing that the arts can be used to buttress the 3Rs. The arts, they said, could help children learn to read and write and calculate and understand scientific concepts. The reasoning was clear: perhaps schools under pressure would value the arts because the arts strengthened skills in ‘valued’ areas. This approach became a favored strategy in the United States for keeping the arts in the schools and for making sure that every child had access to arts education.

“There is a danger in such reasoning. If the arts are given a role in our schools because people believe the arts cause academic improvement, then the arts will quickly lose their position if academic improvement does not result, or if the arts are shown to be less effective than the 3Rs in promoting literacy and numeracy.

“Instrumental claims for the arts are a double-edged sword. It is implausible to suppose that the arts can be as effective a means of teaching an academic subject, as is direct teaching of that subject. And thus, when we justify the arts by their secondary, utilitarian value, the arts may prove to have fewer payoffs than academics. Arts educators should never allow the arts to be justified wholly or even primarily in terms of what the arts can do for mathematics or reading. The arts must be justified in terms of what the arts can teach that no other subject can teach.”

**Junot Díaz**, a former English Learner who immigrated from the Dominican Republic, now is a professor at MIT and won a Pulitzer Prize in 2008 for his first novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

“No award will ever drown out my father’s cruel voice in my head,” Díaz says in “A Conversation with Dave Eggers” (*Panorama Book Review*, January 11, 2010). “The applause means very little because I just want to do some very weird things. The thing that drove me more than anything was being totally undervalued. ‘I’m not stupid!’ If you can stop being afraid for long enough to discover who you are, you will achieve so much. Art is not the messiah. But society must confront its failings. Our work can report those failings. If people could see my grades you would be horrified. I was ‘push-graduated’ [forced out] from high school...art is not about sameness. Who would have guessed that a book about an overweight Dominican nerd would win a Pulitzer? Well it did, so the monolithic media is beginning to crack.”



## **What Are the Collateral Benefits of the Arts Within the School Curriculum?**

The following is a review of what the literature says about the collateral benefits of the arts in the school curriculum. Several studies stand out for their comprehensiveness, pointing out the connections between arts education, academic achievement and improved school environments for children from all cultural, racial and socio-economic backgrounds. The most prominent sources of information are grouped below under four characteristics: the benefits for all students, participation in the arts and growth in other areas, one program's success story, and benefits for marginalized populations.

### *1. Benefits for all students*

Most of the research cited attempts to show the collateral benefits of arts education for all groups of students. It's assumed that if a case can be made for the arts benefiting students in other areas of the curriculum, the arts will be more accepted as a fundamental part of core subjects. Colorado's "The Arts, Creative Learning, and Student Achievement" effort is typical: It asserts that arts education results in higher scores on statewide reading, writing and science tests; lower dropout rates; better student preparation for future education and the workplace; enhanced parental involvement; and strengthened workplace skills of creativity and imagination.

Most literature reviews cite cases where student participation in the arts correlates with growth in other areas. For example, the term "transference" is used frequently, suggesting that time spent in the arts is not wasted on students but teaches them skills useful in other areas. That idea is conveyed by merely reviewing the 62 titles cited in *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development*, the U.S. Department of Education and the National Endowment of the Arts publication. Among the titles are "Teaching Cognitive Skill Through Dance Evidence for Near but Not Far Transfer," "Music and Mathematics: Modest Support for the Oft-Claimed Relationship," and "Reading Is Seeing: Using Visual Response to Improve the Literary Response of Reluctant Readers."

In "Making a Case for the Arts," the Arts Education Partnership reports the benefits it found in its three-year study of 10 elementary, middle and high schools: higher standardized test scores, greater student motivation for school work, greater student roles in their own learning, and improved student behavior and attendance.

## 2. *Participation in the arts and growth in other areas*

The majority of research articles cite cases where there is a relationship between student participation in the arts and growth in other areas. For example, a study may show that the more years of instrumental music a student takes, the better her achievement in mathematics is likely to be. Although it is difficult to prove that one experience causes the other, advocates for the arts often assume or wish for causality. Few literature reviews cite cases where the study of the arts is proven through an experimental design to cause positive growth in other subject areas.

“Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art” bears two subtitles, “A 12-year national study of education in the visual and performing arts” and “effects of achievements and values of young adults.” It reports positive correlations between a student’s involvement in the arts and academic success, instrumental music and mathematics achievement, and his or her sustained involvement in theatre arts and development of a student’s empathy, self-concept and motivation. These findings held for low-income students.

Regarding the reasons for these positive relationships, Catterall, in his essay in *Critical Evidence*, concedes that there is no proof that participation in the arts causes these changes. Rather, he writes, there is “no shortage of plausible reasons to support such connections.... Students involved in the arts are demonstrably doing better in school than those who are not — for whatever constellation of reasons” (page 2002).

Advocates for including arts in all curriculum, from kindergarten through higher education, commonly cite studies that link taking more art courses students with higher SAT scores. It’s unclear why this occurs. Self-selection of the arts by these students is one possibility, or the students may be attending schools that are more likely to offer comprehensive arts programs.

“The Arts and Academic Achievement: What the Evidence Shows” includes three areas where reliable causal links were found.

**“Listening to Music and Spatial-Temporal Reasoning** Based on 26 reports (36 effect sizes), a medium-sized causal relationship was found between listening to music and temporary improvement in spatial-temporal reasoning. However, there was wide variation in the studies, with some showing the effect clearly and many not showing the effect at all. Moreover, the existing research does not reveal conclusively why listening to music affects spatial-temporal thinking. For education, such a finding has little importance, since it is temporary and not consistently found. Scientifically, however, this finding is of interest because it suggests that music and spatial reasoning are related psychologically (i.e., they may rely on some of the same underlying skills) and perhaps neurologically as well (i.e. they may rely on some of the same, or proximal, brain areas). Further

research is needed to understand the mechanism by which certain types of music influence spatial skills.

**“Learning to Play Music and Spatial Reasoning** Based on 19 reports (29 effect sizes), a large causal relationship was found between learning to make music and spatial-temporal reasoning. The effect was greater when standard music notation was learned as well, but even without notation the effect was large. The value for education is greater here, since the effect works equally for both general and at risk populations, costs little since it is based on standard music curricula, and influences many students (69 of every 100, 3- to 12-year-old students). Of course we must still determine the value of improved spatial skills for success in school. Spatial skills might or might not be of benefit to students, depending on how subjects are taught. For example, mathematics or geography might be taught spatially, and if they are, then students with strong spatial abilities should have an advantage in these subjects. Sadly, many schools offer few chances to apply spatial abilities.

**“Classroom Drama and Verbal Skills** Based on 80 reports (107 effect sizes), a causal link was found between classroom drama (enacting texts) and a variety of verbal areas. Most were of medium size (oral understanding/recall of stories, reading readiness, reading achievement, oral language, writing), one was large (written understanding/recall of stories), and one was small and could not be generalized to new studies (vocabulary). In all cases, students who enacted texts were compared to students who read the same texts but did not enact them. Drama not only helped children’s verbal skills with respect to the texts enacted; it also helped children’s verbal skills when applied to new, non-enacted texts. Thus, drama helps to build verbal skills that transfer to new materials. Such an effect has great value for education: verbal skill is highly valued, adding such drama techniques costs little in terms of effort or expense, and a high proportion of students are influenced by such curricular changes.”

In two areas, equivocal support was found — reliable causal links based on very few studies.

**“Learning to Play Music and Mathematics** Based on 6 reports (6 effect sizes), a small causal relationship was found between music training and math. However, while three of these studies produced medium effects, three produced either very small effects or none at all. If the two studies measuring pre-school math rather than school math had not been included (because these were measures of spatial recognition and perception), a reliable effect would have resulted. However, more studies are needed before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

**“Dance and Nonverbal Reasoning** Based on 3 reports (4 effect sizes), a small to medium-sized causal relationship was found between dance and improved visual-spatial skills. Again, however, more studies are needed before any firm conclusions can be drawn.”

### 3. *One program’s success story*

Many studies focus on single, promising arts programs; they use a range of measures to evaluate program effectiveness. In some ethnographic studies, the researcher observes the participant, reviews documentation and interviews everyone involved in the project. One example, “The Make-Believe Solution,” asks: “Can imaginary play teach children to control their impulses — and be better students?” Author Paul Tough, who observed a dramatic play program in a preschool that included “complex, extended make-believe scenarios, involving multiple children,” saw positive results in child behavior and attention to academic work (New York Times Magazine, pp 30-35, September 27, 2009). Another study — of seventh-grade boys in special education — found they went from being passive readers to actively interpreting what they had read after a nine-week experience in using visual forms of expression (Wilhelm 2002).

### 4. *Benefits for marginalized populations*

Fewer literature reviews specifically highlight arts programs and their benefits for marginalized student populations. The assumption seems to be that if all students benefit, marginalized groups also will benefit. Still, several writers take on this issue directly. Ruppert, in *Critical Evidence of How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement*, writes, “Arts learning experiences play a vital role in developing students’ capacities for critical thinking, creativity, imagination, and innovation. These capacities are increasingly recognized as core skills and competencies all students need as part of a high-quality and complete 21st-century education. And, as a matter of social justice, we must be concerned when students are denied access to a high-quality education—one that includes learning in and through the arts—simply because of where they live or go to school.”

Further, Ruppert argues in “The Arts Education Effect” in *Education Week* that minority students and those from low-income households have less access to instruction, are less likely to attend schools that have a state or district curriculum, and are less likely to receive instruction from a full-time or part-time arts specialist, take field trips or have visiting artists in their schools.

“Put simply, we provide students who are likely to benefit from arts instruction most with the least of everything.... We must take seriously our commitment to close achievement gaps and keep all students on the path to high school graduation and beyond. Arts learning opportunities—both as stand-alone classes and integrated with other

subjects—must play an integral role in providing them with the complete education they need to succeed. “

Catterall, as cited in *Critical Links*, also highlights two effects on economically disadvantaged students participating in the arts: “One is the set of effects related to reading skills-basic reading comprehension for children who have been left behind. An added set of effects for these children is increased achievement motivation.”

Mary Stone Hanley and George W. Noblit’s landmark work, *Cultural Responsiveness, Racial Identity and Academic Success*, consolidates the connections among culturally responsive arts programs, racial identity and academic achievement. The authors present 70 studies that demonstrate how the arts can be “academically transformative” for African American students and English Learners.

“The arts provide pathways of expression and understanding that come directly from the students’ experiences; they are ways for teachers to gather information about learners and their cultures,” they write. “The arts are our history and our vision. They record, are shaped by, and reflect culture, and in turn, transform culture by providing a focus for reflection.... When students are actively engaged in creatively thinking, they focus on ways that call for flexibility in thought and integration of emotionality, rationality, and meaning that is necessary for success in academic settings and elsewhere.”

Stone Hanley and Noblit believe that the arts allow students to own the process and content of learning. Through their arts-integrated projects, students make meaning, communicate their life experiences and reinterpret their lives. “Thus, student voice, which is often ignored particularly for disfavored ethnic and racial groups is empowered,” they write. “Engagement in the arts may provide a means of redirecting the anger, anxiety, and alienation reported by numerous students of color.”

Their massive study helps guide educators in creating a culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, one that:

- Uses culture to promote positive racial and ethnic identity.
- Uses that identity as an asset in learning and development.
- Educates about racism and group advancement to encourage high achievement and resilience in the face of oppression.
- Employs the arts to produce a wide range of competencies.
- Develops caring relationships as an initial step to inspire students to work academically.
- Builds on student strengths and assumes academic and personal success.

## What Are the Intrinsic Benefits of the Arts Within the School Curriculum?

*“The arts are fundamental to children’s education and they are fundamental because the arts are fundamental to human nature, to the human being, so I do not see art as an instrument to teach something else. The primary reason why we need strong arts programs in the schools is that human beings are artists. One way we grapple with ideas is through the arts.... A school that has ignored the artist in us has done damage.”*

— Deborah Meier,  
Interviewed in the film *Small Wonders*, 1995

A growing number of researchers and arts educators agree with Meier’s comments and with the beliefs of Shirley Brice Heath — that the arts offer not only a “hook” for improved school attendance and attitude toward school, but also skills that carry over from art activities into all phases of study, personal life and career choices.

Brice Heath’s work revealed that the kids in arts-based organizations exhibited strong motivation, persistence, and critical analysis and planning abilities. When she compared them with students nationwide in the National Educational Longitudinal Survey, she found that youth in arts programs are 25% more likely to report feeling satisfied with themselves, twice as likely to win awards for academic achievement, and 23% more likely to feel they can make plans and successfully work from them.

“We’re definitely not saying to forget the athletics and go for the arts,” Brice Heath writes. “Every group has its own special push.” She considers athletic activities generally less verbal and less cognitive than the arts activities that she studied, which included drama, music, dance, visual and media. Kids involved in athletics will work to get better so that the team gets better, she says, while the arts demand more personal determination and self-evaluation.

Kevin McCarthy et al in *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts* point out that art holds the potential for both personal and societal transformation.

The following figure from *Gifts of the Muse* illustrates how intrinsic personal benefits of the arts have “public spillover” and clear public benefits.

**Figure 4.2**  
**Many Intrinsic Benefits Are of Both Private and Public Value**

<i>Private benefits</i>	<i>Private benefits with public spillover</i>	<i>Public benefits</i>
Captivation	Expanded capacity for empathy	Creation of social bonds
Pleasure	Cognitive growth	Expression of communal meaning

RAND MG218-4.2

Source: *Gifts of the Muse*

“Captivation” means becoming absorbed in what we see, feel, hear and touch in a work of art, and focusing our attention on the product. Captivation lets us engage in the art, leads to wonder and sparks inquiry about the experience. “Some have described this sensation (imaginative flight in captivation) as an escape from our ordinary lives into a fantasy world...and can foster a deep involvement with the concerns and insights of others,” writes McCarthy. This extended capacity for empathy can lead to reaching out to others and establishing bonds of understanding and collaboration. Students discussing a scene from a student-produced play, for example, may find that they share experiences, emotions and opinions.

Similarly, what we learn from art experiences gives us a deeper understanding of others’ artistic expression. “With experience, we become increasingly more capable of noticing and appreciating the details that make up the aesthetic whole and seeing how these details compare with those in other works and/or performances,” McCarthy writes. Sharing private feelings and tastes about art experiences can create a new sense of community: From reading the public comments book at a museum exhibit, we learn if others share our opinions and tastes, thus forming a social bond. Taking part in a debate about the design for a public memorial to a fellow student who died in an accident can lead to a sense of communal meaning.

## Language for Appreciating the Gifts of the Arts

Among the many policy recommendations *Gifts of the Muse*, one has special importance here: the call to develop appropriate language for discussing the arts' intrinsic societal and personal benefits — language about moving from quantifiable to qualitative benefits that educators and the general public can understand and use. In this paper, we recognize these intrinsic benefits of the arts as the “gifts of the arts.”

Below are four attempts to establish that language, three by arts educators and one by a popular social commentator.

1. California's five component strands from the Visual and performing Arts Framework for California Public Schools, K-12 (2004) name the areas around which curriculum, materials and programs are planned for all of the state's public schools.

“Standards-based instruction in dance, music, theatre, and visual arts is designed to ensure that students reach the proficient level of achievement in each of the five strands of the content standards: artistic perception; creative expression; historical and cultural context; aesthetic valuing; and connections, relationships, and applications“ (California Department of Education 2004).

2. Elliot Eisner's summary of what the arts teach reveals some unique contributions to children's personal and skills development.

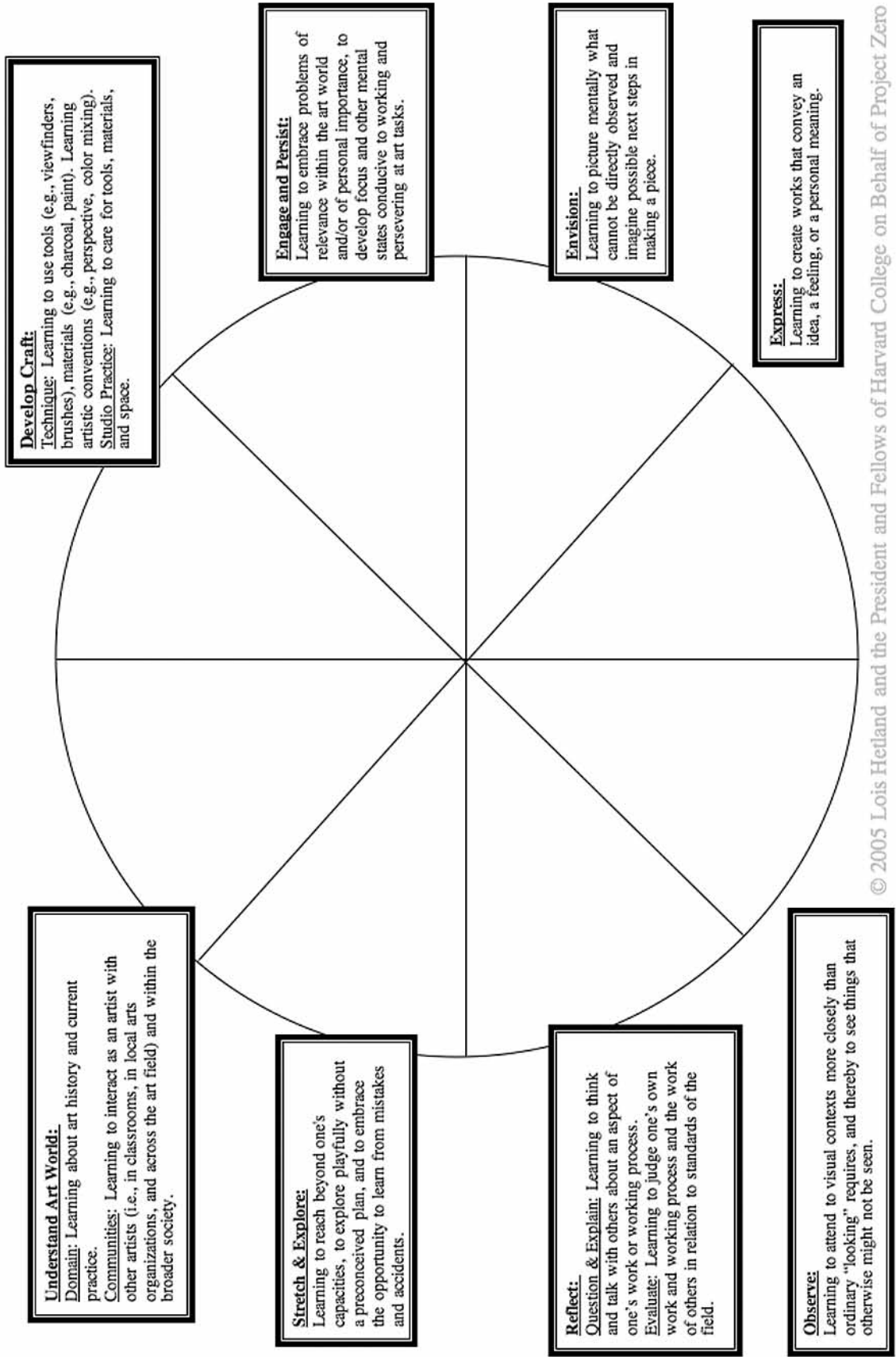
- The arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships. Unlike much of the curriculum in which correct answers and rules prevail, in the arts, it is judgment rather than rules that prevail.
- The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer.
- The arts celebrate multiple perspectives. One of their large lessons is that there are many ways to see and interpret the world.
- The arts teach children that in complex forms of problem solving purposes are seldom fixed, but change with circumstance and opportunity. Learning in the arts requires the ability and a willingness to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities of the work as it unfolds.
- The arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what we can know. The limits of our language do not define the limits of our cognition.
- The arts teach students that small differences can have large effects. The arts traffic in subtleties.

- The arts teach students to think through and within a material. All art forms employ some means through which images become real.
- The arts help children learn to say what cannot be said. When children are invited to disclose what a work of art helps them feel, they must reach into their poetic capacities to find the words that will do the job.
- The arts enable us to have experience we can have from no other source and through such experience to discover the range and variety of what we are capable of feeling.
- The arts' position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults believe is important."

Source: Elliot Eisner. *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, in Chapter 4, "What the Arts Teach and How It Shows" (pp. 70-92). Yale University Press, 2002. Available from NAEA Publications. Reprinted with permission.

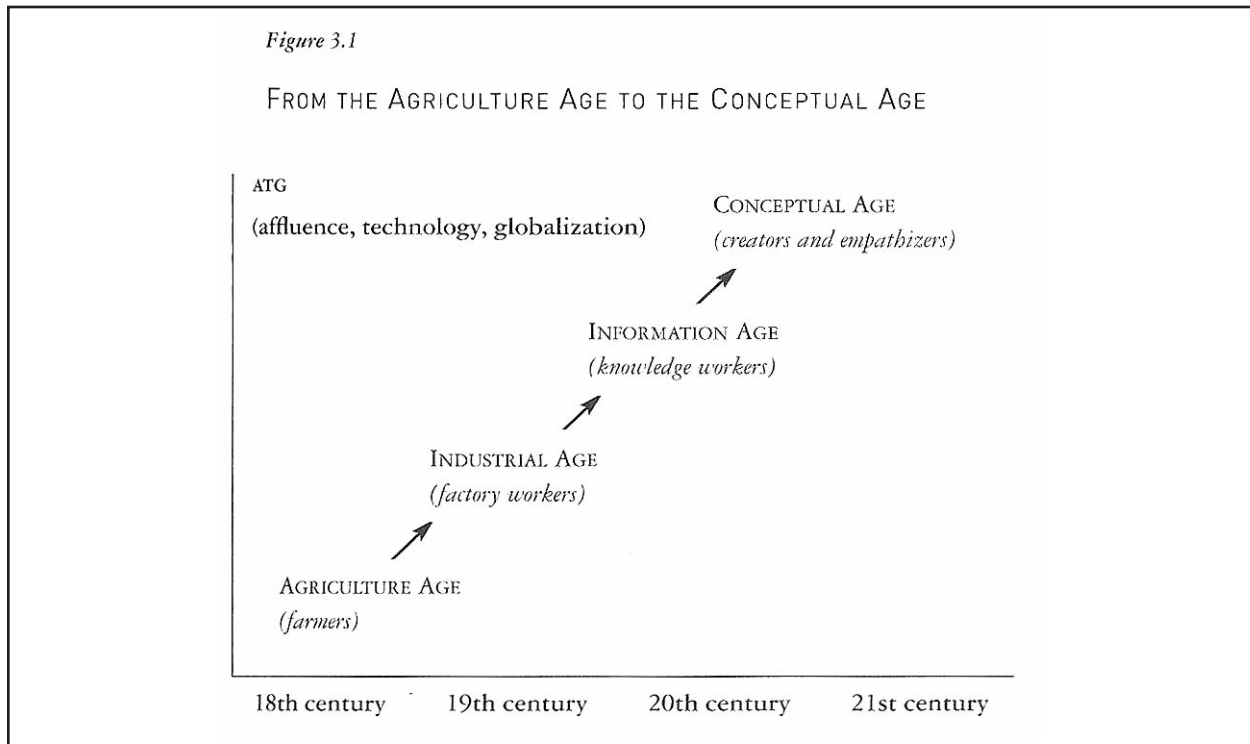
3. *Studio Habits of Mind* lists eight cognitive dispositions of mature artistic thinking and practice in the visual arts. Students who develop these habits become more alert to the world, more skilled at thinking about it, and more able to generate the commitment to act mindfully upon the world around them as visual artists. The Studio Thinking Framework, shown below, also defines three classrooms structures that studio arts teachers use to help students develop these ways of thinking: demonstration-lectures (brief, visually rich lectures that convey information students will use immediately), students-at-work sessions (students work on individual or group challenges while teachers observe and offer "just-in-time" instruction), and critiques (teachers and students briefly reflect on student work that is in progress or finished). Students who develop these habits are learning skills they can use in all aspects of their academic and personal lives.

STUDIO HABITS OF MIND WHEEL



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4. Daniel Pink, an observer and analyst of economic and social trends, presents the six essential aptitudes necessary for success in the our changing world and economy in *A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age*. His new world is full of promise for students engaged in the processes of appreciating and creating in the arts.



Source: *A Whole New Mind*

“We are moving from an economy and a society built on logical, linear, computer-like capabilities of the Information Age to an economy and a society built on the inventive, empathetic, big-picture capabilities of what’s rising in its place, the Conceptual Age,” Pink writes.

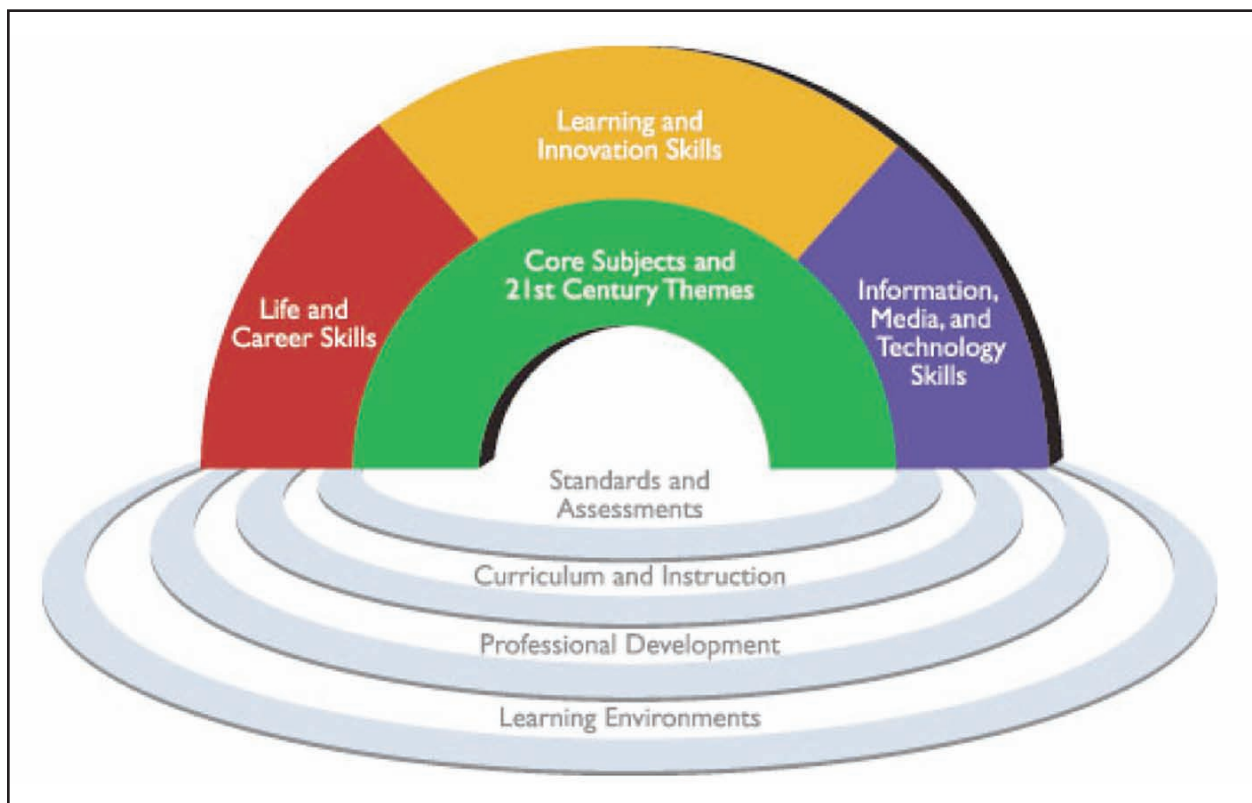
In this new age, he notes, professional success and personal satisfaction will depend on developing abilities that everyone can master: design, story, symphony, play, empathy and meaning. In moving from an information age to a conceptual age, we need to take our students beyond knowledge and application of knowledge that is still essential to thrive in a “high concept” or “high touch” approach to life. The right brain qualities of inventiveness, empathy, joyfulness and meaning are the bases for these new aptitudes — “the capacity to detect patterns and opportunities, to create artistic and emotional beauty, to craft satisfying narrative, and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into something new.”

In the following list, Pink shows the movement from left brain-directed reasoning to the six right brain-directed aptitudes:

- Not just function, but also DESIGN
- Not just argument, but also STORY
- Not just focus, but also SYMPHONY
- Not just logic, but also EMPATHY
- Not just seriousness, but also PLAY
- Not just accumulation, but also MEANING.

The above attempts to establish a language we can use to discuss the arts' intrinsic gifts are presented in the context of what contemporary educators refer to as "21st century skills" — a term that has framed the ongoing debate on how to reform and restructure education to better prepare our students. The most commonly cited list of these skills is divided into three categories: learning and innovation skills; life and career skills; and information, media and technology skills. The emphasis goes beyond mastering basic literacy and mathematical skills to creative thinking, collaborative working, and managing one's own time and that of others.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills advocates deep understanding over shallow knowledge; promotes student performance portfolios; explores interdisciplinary themes; and encourages students to construct creative solutions to contemporary issues.



Source: A Framework for 21st Century Learning, [www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org)

## What Are the Gifts of the Arts?

Arts educators, constantly struggling to establish and institutionalize arts programs in the schools, frequently must explain how the arts may affect students' academic and personal development. The following comparison tables show clear, direct connections between the commonly accepted 21st century skills and the gifts of the arts.

Here, then, is ammunition — documentation and a visual representation of how the skills offered by the arts relate to the skills that are driving much of general education planning and discussion.

The first table displays all of the skills, and the next three show the connections between the gifts of the arts and each of the three sets of 21st century skills. During a review of the contents of this paper, three groups of CCSESA Arts Initiative leaders made the connections shown, drawing on their experience as artists and teachers and their knowledge of the kinds of skills students will need.

**Roberto Galindo** is finishing high school in suburban Sacramento

"[Roberto] suffers through a prescribed identity that he now has some measure of control over through his new self-identification as a photographer," writes Michael Collett, Galindo's collaborator on a documentary photography project, "A View From the Ground: Documenting Our Community."

"He never fit in well in public school. Photography came to him in high school when he signed up for an art class at the last second, not knowing it was a black-and-white photography class. Ever since, he has had his Nikon EM in hand, and [is] ready for whatever great shot comes his way. Yes, he sees himself as a photographer who had trouble getting through school, but took an extra year to finish up."



Untitled, by Roberto Galindo. From "A View from the Ground."

Table 1

# The Gifts of the Arts to 21st Century Skills

21st Century Learning and Innovation Skills	21st Century Life and Career Skills	21st Century Information, Media, and Technology Skills	California Visual and Performing Arts Strands	Studio Habits of Mind	Pink's Six Senses	Eisner's Ten Lessons the Arts Teach
<p>Think Creatively</p> <p>Work Creatively with Others</p> <p>Implement Innovations</p> <p>Reason Effectively</p> <p>Use Systems Thinking</p> <p>Make Judgments and Decisions</p> <p>Solve Problems</p> <p>Communicate Clearly</p> <p>Collaborate with Others</p>	<p>Adapt to Change</p> <p>Be Flexible</p> <p>Manage Goals and Time</p> <p>Work Independently</p> <p>Be Self-Directed Learners</p> <p>Interact Effectively with Others</p> <p>Work Effectively in Diverse Teams</p> <p>Manage Projects</p> <p>Produce Results</p> <p>Guide, Lead, Be Responsible to Others</p>	<p>Assess and Evaluate Information</p> <p>Manage and Use Information</p> <p>Analyze Media</p> <p>Create Media Products</p> <p>Apply Technology Effectively</p>	<p>Artistic Perception</p> <p>Creative Expression</p> <p>Historical and Cultural Context</p> <p>Aesthetic Valuing</p> <p>Connections, Relationships, Applications</p>	<p>Develop Craft</p> <p>Engage and Persist</p> <p>Envision</p> <p>Observe</p> <p>Reflect</p> <p>Evaluate</p> <p>Stretch and Explore</p> <p>Understand Art World</p>	<p>Design</p> <p>Story</p> <p>Symphony</p> <p>Empathy</p> <p>Play</p> <p>Meaning</p>	<p>Good Judgments</p> <p>Multiple Solutions</p> <p>Multiple Perspectives</p> <p>Surrender to the Unanticipated</p> <p>Going Beyond Numbers and Letters</p> <p>Small Differences Make Large Effects</p> <p>Think Through Material</p> <p>Say the Unsayable</p> <p>Experience What Comes Only Through Art</p> <p>What Adults See as Important</p>

Table 2

# Establishing Connections Between the Gifts of the Arts and 21st Century Learning and Innovation Skills

21st Century Learning and Innovation Skills

California Visual and Performing Arts Strands

Studio Habits of the Mind

Pink's Six Senses

Eisner's Ten Lessons the Arts Teach

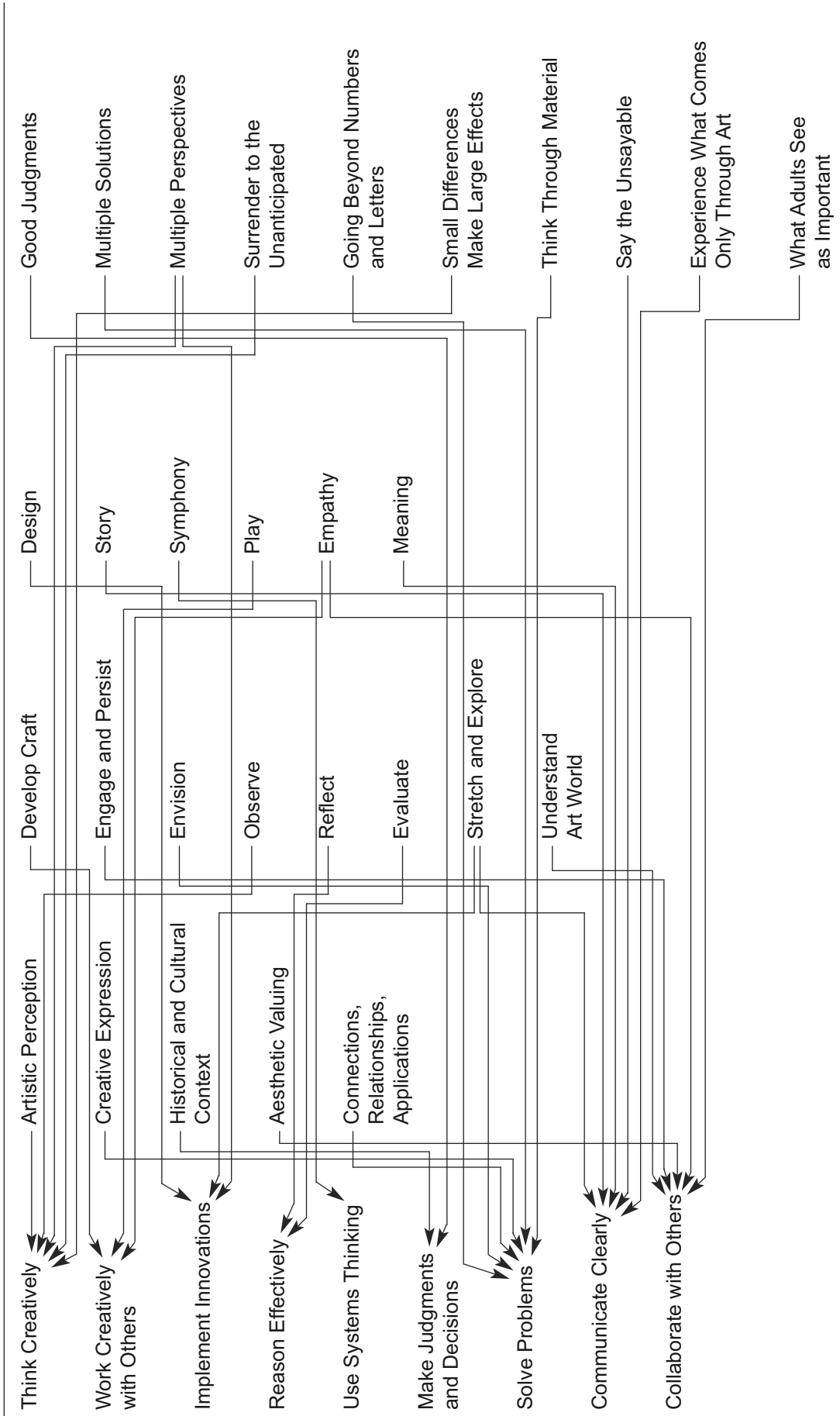


Table 3

## Establishing Connections Between the Gifts of the Arts and 21st Century Life and Career Skills

**21st Century Life and Career Skills**

**California Visual and Performing Arts Strands**

**Studio Habits of the Mind**

**Pink's Six Senses**

**Eisner's Ten Lessons the Arts Teach**

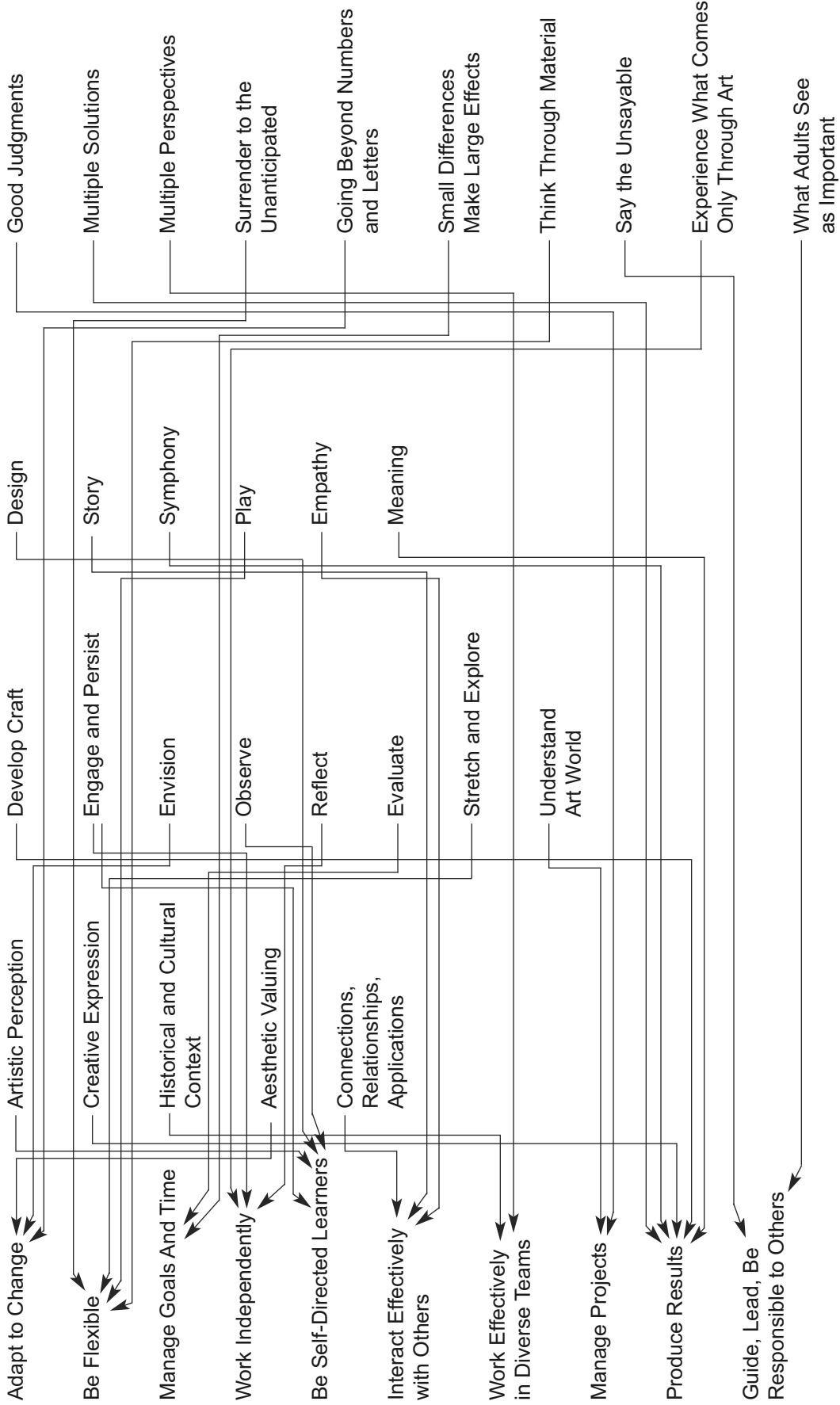
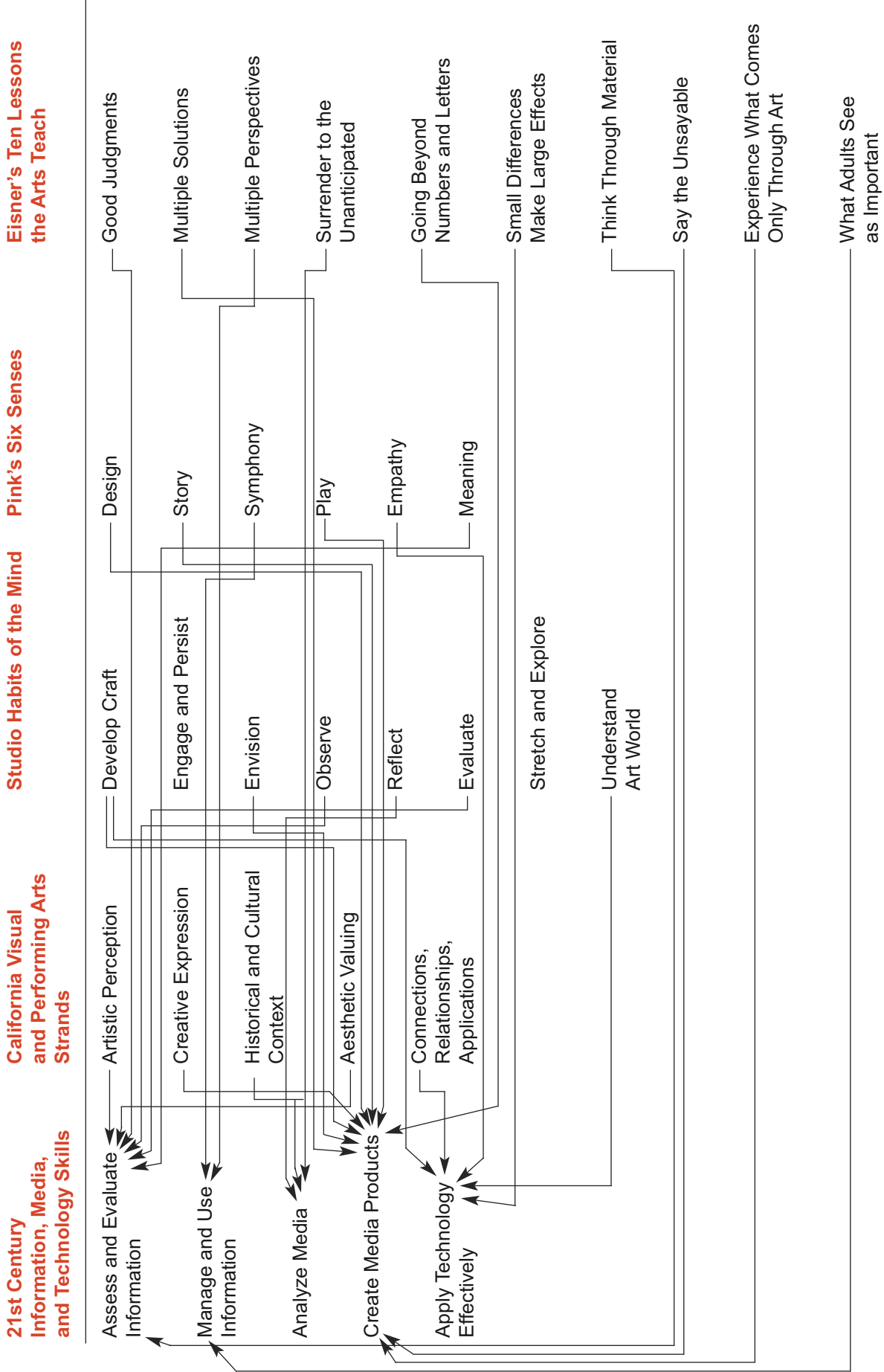


Table 4

## Establishing Connections Between the Gifts of the Arts and 21st Century Information, Media, and Technology Skills



## How Do We Artfully Redefine the Achievement Gap and Those Trapped in It?

Identifying how the arts can affect students' acquisition of skills, abilities and habits makes it clear that we should be educating students to do more than score high on standardized tests. In fact, these acquired skills are precisely the ones that our youth will need to live and thrive in their personal and work worlds. With the continued development of classroom-friendly assessment measures for the arts, such as those that are part of the CCSESA Arts Initiative, students art knowledge and skills will become part of a broadened sense of just what student achievement means. These are the skills that will prepare marginalized students for college and work.

While marginalized students are increasingly denied access to arts programs so they can "catch up" on reading and mathematics, other groups of students are excluded, too. Astoundingly, as *An Unfinished Canvas* points out, 89% of K-12 California schools do not meet the state's goals for arts education and do not offer a standards-based program that includes music, visual arts, theatre and dance. Their students have been excluded from the very arts experiences that can pave the way to acquiring 21st century skills.

Judgments about how the arts affect an individual's academic and personal progress need to be carefully assessed, separated from the narrowness of scoring and format that now is used to characterize student success. Consider these statements from very different sources about how we might judge success:

"The job of the future will have very little to do with processing words or numbers (computers do that now). Nor will we need many people to act as placeholders, errand runners or receptionists. Instead, there's going to be a huge focus on finding the essential people and outsourcing the rest.... Most of the best jobs will be for people who manage customers, who organize fans, who do digital community management. We'll continue to need brilliant designers, energetic brainstormers and rigorous lab technicians" ("The Future of Work," *Time* magazine, p. 50, May 25, 2009).

"Academic success is a multifaceted concept, but the research tends to focus on grades, achievement test scores" (Stone Hanley and Noblit, *Cultural Responsiveness, Racial Identity and Academic Success*, p. 10, 2009).

"In a world in which good design is increasingly used as a means of differentiating objects of mass production, creative design skills are highly desired in the labor force. As a result, entrance into a topnotch MFA program is now more competitive than getting into Harvard Business School. Howard Gardner cites 'the creating mind' as one of the five minds we'll need in the future. To cultivate such a mind, he says, we need an

education that features 'exploration, challenging problems, and the tolerance, if not active encouragement, of productive mistakes' " (from "The Intellectual and Policy Foundations of the 21st Century Skills Framework," p. 15).

"In her book 'The Death and Life of the Great American Education School System,' Diane Ravitch, major architect of the standards and accountability movement, rails again the current focus of schooling: The single biggest problem in American education is that no one agrees on why we educate. Faced with this lack of consensus, policy makers define good education as higher test scores. But higher test scores are not a definition of good education. Why do we educate? We educate because we want citizens capable of taking responsibility for their lives and democracy.... We must ensure that every young person has the chance to engage in the arts" (*New York Times Magazine*, p. 33, September 27, 2009).

## **Summary: The Transformational Power of the Arts for Marginalized Students and Our Society**

If we are committed to not leaving marginalized students further behind and not increasing their numbers, we have to begin using yardsticks for success that measure their ability to solve problems creatively, work independently and collaboratively, and apply technology. Above all, we must recognize and apply the transformational power of the arts to engage, motivate and instruct students.

For students who are marginalized by current curriculum content, traditional instructional practice, narrowly focused standardized assessments and institutionalized biases, engagement in the arts can provide positive, life-enhancing experiences, skills and personal direction — precisely what they will need to live and thrive in their personal and work worlds in the 21st century.

Collaboration among regular classroom teachers, arts teachers and artists in the schools will lead to the integration of these gifts of the arts into all school learning. Through these uniquely cultivated skills, formerly marginalized students will thrive. (Based on professional communication with Louise Music, 2010)

These steps can guide educators in how to foster personal and societal transformation through the arts:

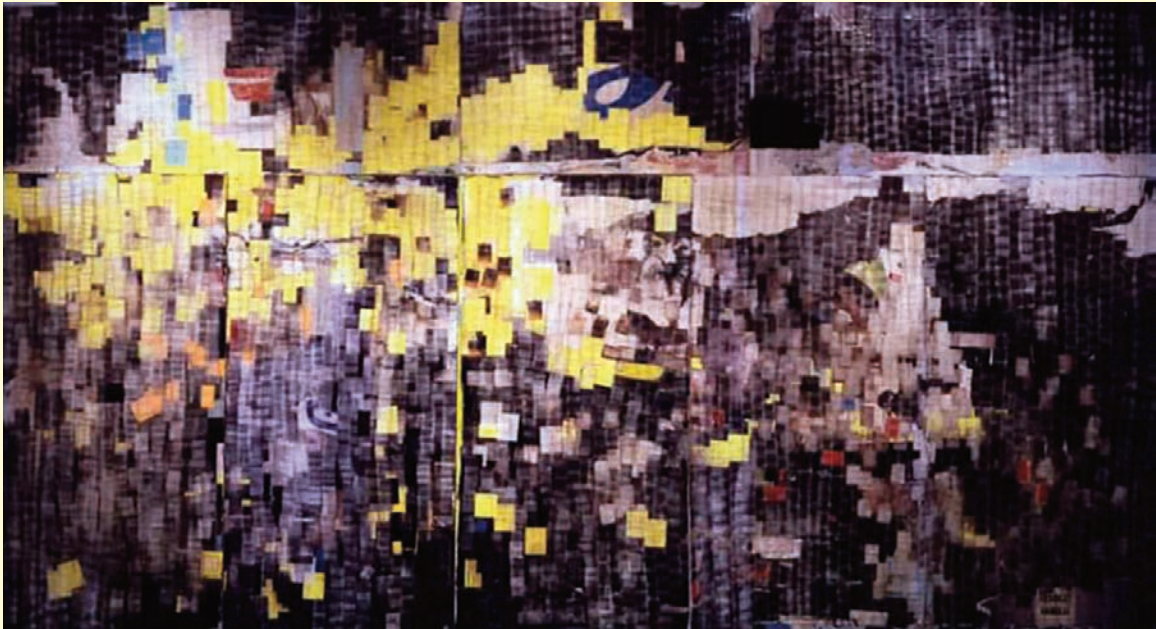
1. As you develop your program, keep in mind that the arts provide both intrinsic and extrinsic gifts.
2. In low-performing schools, emphasize the arts' motivational appeal to students, allowing them to change their school identities and become engaged observers and problem-solvers who are willing to stretch and explore their world.
3. Be prepared for criticism and nonsupport — not all in the school community will immediately recognize the transformational potential of the arts for closing the achievement gap.
4. Engagement, participation and feelings of success can be accomplished through carefully selected arts programs that provide students with 21st century skills.
5. Include progress/success within the arts program as an indicator of student achievement in addition to and beyond other measures.
6. Acknowledge, celebrate and promote various cultural groups' artistic traditions; don't assume that students will automatically understand the connections or want to learn more about their own cultures at this point in their personal development.

7. Culturally responsive arts education that draws on marginalized students' interests and experiences reinforces the idea that they need not give up their cultures and identity to achieve. Not all people will believe this statement or understand its implications for students' feelings of being accepted into the school or alienated from it.
8. Transformation in an arts-rich school environment means that everyone in the school community shares in the process.
9. Integrating the arts with other subjects both enriches students' experiences and uses instructional time efficiently.

As marginalized students are increasingly denied access to arts programs so that they can “catch up” on reading and mathematics, the role of the arts in closing the achievement gap needs to be revisited. The arts transform. Nothing short of personal and societal transformation will improve the lives of our youth.

**Mark Bradford**, 49, a collage artist in Southern California, was featured on PBS' "Art in the 21st Century."

"My practice is *décollage* and collage at the same time. *Décollage*, I take it away; collage, I immediately add it right back. It's almost like a rhythm. I'm a builder and a demolisher. I put up so I can tear down. I'm a speculator and a developer. In archaeological terms, I excavate and I build at the same time. As a child I actually wanted to be an archaeologist, so I would dig in my backyard. When I was six, I was convinced that I could probably find a dinosaur bone there, but after about a week I realized that it was only in particular places that you find dinosaur bones. It was not like my mother stopped me. She was very good about allowing me to do, as she called them, 'projects.' My art practice goes back to my childhood, but it's not an art background. It's a making background. I've always been a creator. My mother was a creator; my grandmother was a creator. They were seamstresses. There were always scraps of everything around. There were always two or three or four projects going on at the same time. We just never had an art word for it. But I would go to the museum as a child, and I was bored. They would tell me about art, and I would look around and say, 'This is art.' Then I'd get on the bus and go home. It never touched me. But the projects at home touched me. For instance, making the signs for the prices at my mother's hair salon. I was in charge of that so I taught myself calligraphy. So my very early work used signage and text, but it was not perfect. It always got a little slimmer at the end because I wouldn't measure it properly. But it worked out. My mother always said, 'When I raise the prices, you'll have another chance.' "



*The Devil Is Beating His Wife*, by Mark Bradford, The Saatchi Gallery

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