

*The Arts are Fundamental to a Quality Education for all Students*  
*By Dr. Kathie Kratochvil*

Standards-based, sequential arts instruction is fundamental to a well-rounded education for all students. When a student envisions and creates, imagination is engaged, creativity begins, and the student enters a world of conceptualization and complex problem-solving, which leads to the development of cognitive skills essential for learning. This is true in all four arts disciplines: Visual Arts, Theatre, Dance, and Music. The arts reflect and shape cultures, encourage people to exchange diverse views, promote cultural understanding, and build healthy communities. For these reasons, the arts are part of the core academic curriculum and are listed as such in the federal NCLB Act of 2001.

The arts reflect the human condition and have done so for centuries, as they are concerned with the examination and reflection of the human experience. Throughout the centuries, the arts have played a critical role in helping to shape and define societies and have provided much in the way of historical documentation of our global and cultural heritage.

Charles Fowler, (1931-1995), renowned arts educator and author, articulated the agenda for a growing educational movement and illuminated the most pressing issues affecting its advocacy. Through his writing he voiced the challenge of change and reform, accumulating a body of commentary as fresh today as ever. He consistently urged teachers to experience their work with students as creative encounters: alive, inventive, and filled with mutual discovery. In reference to his own career, he commented in 1993 on the occasion of donating his papers to the University of Maryland, College Park: "I was not satisfied as a teacher with merely passing on the culture. I wanted a role in creating it. The classroom is not just a place for learning about yesterday, but a laboratory for inventing tomorrow." He saw the arts as critical to the education of our youth, since "The arts, like other subjects in the curriculum of American schools, are affiliated with the schools' important responsibility to pass on the civilization—in this case, our rich and rewarding cultural heritage—to the next generation" (Fowler, 1996).

At the first international conference on arts education in March of 2006, hosted by the United Nations' Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, conference keynote speaker and Director-General of UNESCO, reminded participants that "In a world confronted with new problems on a planetary scale, creativity, imagination, and the ability to adapt competencies, which are developed through arts education, are as important as the technological and scientific skills required to solve them." The UNESCO conference participants redefined education to include three elements crucial to building the world's future: numeracy, literacy, and creativity.

Arts education also contributes to cultural awareness and the understanding of diversity. The arts can play a critical role in deconstructing prejudice because they promote cultural

and social integration and help to avoid the social exclusion of cultural minorities. Elliot Eisner, (2002), Professor of Education and Art at Stanford University, and widely considered the leading theorist on art education and aesthetics in the United States, supports this notion by stressing that “Among all of the fields of study in our schools, the arts are at the forefront of the celebration of diversity.” Through artistic representations students share their humanity and can therefore appreciate their commonalities, which result in changing and deepening each students understanding of the world.

Sir Ken Robinson (2001), Ph.D., Professor of Education at Warwick University in the U. K., and an internationally-renowned expert in the field of creativity and innovation in business and education, encourages schools to rebalance the curriculum so that all students have access to utilizing and practicing the creative and imaginative processes. He and other art education researchers and theorists (Goldberg 1997, Cornett 2007, Fowler 1996, Greene 1995) contend that quality arts education provides the vehicle to do this and thus asserts that *arts education should be an integral part of every child's education.*

### ***What the Research Shows***

There are three predominant scientifically conducted research studies in the field of Arts Education in the recent past which attempt to assess the impact of the arts on learning and student achievement. Each of these research studies are extremely extensive in breadth and scope, utilize nationally known researchers, are solid in research methodology, and examine the topic from the perspective of each of the four arts disciplines; theatre, music, dance, and visual arts.

#### **Champions of Change (1999)**

*Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning*, (Fiske, 1999), engaged seven groups of highly qualified academic researchers who were commissioned to study the knowledge and skills that students gain through their involvement in the arts, and how involvement in the arts enhances learning. Two particular goals noted were to explore the extent to which arts education builds academic and thinking skills, and to investigate the mechanisms that build these skills and help students transfer knowledge to other areas. The seven teams of researchers from Columbia University, UCLA, Project Pace at Harvard University, and Stanford University pursued a wide variety of approaches. They examined proven programs and students found to be successful in the arts using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Measurements used included test scores, teacher evaluations, and academic honors received by students in order to document the studies. *Researchers found a direct correlation between participation in the arts and academic achievement.* Specific results included in the Executive Summary include:

...the researchers found that learners can attain higher levels of achievement through their engagement with the arts. Moreover, one of the critical research findings is that the learning in and through the arts can help “level the playing field” for youngsters from disadvantaged

circumstances. The researchers provide compelling evidence that student achievement is heightened in an environment with high quality arts education offerings and a school climate supportive of active and productive learning (p. viii).

A research study by James Catterall, Richard Chapleau, and John Iwanaga contained in *Champions of Change* (1999), titled “*Involvement in the Arts and Human Development*” enlisted a sample of 25,000 eighth graders from the U.S. Department of Education’s NELS:88 database and followed them into the tenth and twelfth grades. More than 2,000 pieces of information on each participant were gathered, including information about individual students from parents, teachers, and principals. *The research team demonstrated that students with high levels of arts participation outperform “arts-poor” students by virtually every measure.* A closer look revealed that high arts participation makes a more significant difference to students from low-income backgrounds than for high-income students.

#### **The Arts and Academic Achievement: What the Evidence Shows (2000)**

Ellen Winner and Lois Hetland in their article, “*The Arts in Education: Evaluating the Evidence for a Causal Link*” (2000), question the validity of the claim that arts education has social, motivational and academic repercussions. They ask, “Are such claims rooted in empirical evidence, or are they unsupported advocacy?” (p. 3). This article is part of a larger meta-analysis of research designed to answer this question, and contained in a special issue of *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, titled “*Special Issue: The Arts and Academic Achievement: What the Evidence Shows*” published in the fall of 2000. The report is a project of Harvard University’s Project Zero. The report found three areas where reliable causal links were found: Listening to Music and Spatial-Temporal Reasoning; Learning to Play Music and Spatial Reasoning; and Classroom Drama and Verbal Skills.

#### **Critical Links (2002)**

A 2002 report titled *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development* (Deasy) sought to clarify if learning in the arts transfers to other academic areas. In the overview, author James Catterall notes that “Transfer denotes instances where learning in one context assists learning in a different context” (Deasy, 2002, p. 152). Sixty-two studies are included in the research, chosen by James Catterall of the Imagination Group at the University of Los Angeles, and Lois Hetland and Ellen Winner of Project Zero at Harvard University. Of particular interest are the clear causal links associated with Drama activities and Language Arts learning. In fact, Catterall goes one-step further to state that:

...the majority of drama studies in the Compendium connect dramatic enactment with story understanding and reading comprehension. Considering what dramatic play might do to produce such effects conjures suggestions that *drama is in fact a curriculum for story and reading comprehension*...In such studies, we might say that dramatic enactment is simply a better way to process a story than a teacher-led discussion; (and)

this appears to be the case...*If story understanding, reading comprehension, and topical writing are valued curricular goals, the drama studies offered in this compendium offer suggestions of promising ways to pursue these ends* (Deasy, 2002, p. 155).

The researchers also created an inventory list of the academic and social outcomes that are shown to be, by the studies collected in *Critical Links*, related to the arts. Some highlights from this list are indicated below.

Visual Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content and organization of writing</li> <li>Sophisticated reading skills/interpretation of text</li> <li>Reasoning about scientific images</li> <li>Reading readiness</li> </ul>
Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cognitive development</li> <li>Spatial Reasoning</li> <li>Spatial Temporal Reasoning</li> <li>Self-efficacy</li> <li>Self-concept</li> </ul>
Classroom Drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Story comprehension (oral and written)</li> <li>Increased peer interaction</li> <li>Writing proficiency and prolixity</li> <li>Conflict resolution skills</li> <li>Concentrated thought</li> <li>Ability to understand complex issues and emotions</li> <li>Problem solving dispositions/strategies</li> </ul>
Dance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-confidence</li> <li>Persistence</li> <li>Reading skills</li> <li>Social tolerance</li> </ul>
Multi-arts Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading, verbal and mathematics skills</li> <li>Creative thinking</li> <li>Cognitive engagement</li> <li>Self-confidence</li> <li>Risk taking</li> <li>Paying attention</li> <li>Task persistence</li> <li>Ownership of learning</li> <li>Higher order thinking skills</li> </ul>

### ***Arts Education in California***

Over the last decade, California policy-makers have paid increasing attention to the importance of the visual and performing arts in public education. Recent California policy developments affecting arts education include:

- 1978: California's Proposition 13, passed by voters in June of 1978, had a dire effect on funding for education in general, as income from local property taxes which had previously been used to support schools was reduced by as much as 57%. With substantial reductions in local education budgets, school boards were forced to greatly reduce or cut arts education programming (Reeves, 2006).
- 1999: California's 4-year state universities adopt a new visual and performing arts requirement, adding 1 year of arts coursework for admission, beginning with students entering in 2003.
- 2000: California State Legislature passes SB1390 (Murray), which calls for the creation of content standards in the arts.
- 2001: The State Board of Education approved, in response to SB1390, the *Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards*, which set forth what students should know and be able to do at each grade level in the four arts disciplines of music, visual arts, theatre and dance for grades pre-kindergarten to 12.
- 2001: The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing adopts new program standards that revise the subject matter requirements for the multiple-subject teaching credential to include training in the visual and performing arts, beginning in 2004.
- 2004: The state's existing *Visual and Performing Arts Framework* is revised to support curriculum development and instructional practices in the arts aligned with the standards in arts education.
- 2006: California policy-makers commit an unprecedented level of funding to support arts education, including \$500 million in one-time funds (for the arts and physical education) and \$105 million per year in on-going funds.
- 2007: California policy-makers commit an additional \$109 million to support on-going funding in arts education.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITY ARTS EDUCATION**

### ***Arts Education Policy in California***

#### **Instruction:**

Arts education in California is mandated for pupils in grades 1 through 12, as stated in Section 51210 of the California Education Code. The Code states "the adopted course of study for grades 1 to 6...shall include instruction...in visual and performing

arts including dance, music, theatre and visual arts, aimed at the development of aesthetic appreciation and the skills of creative expression.” Section 51220 of the California Education Code identifies a similar course of study for grades 7 to 12.

#### Content Standards:

As mandated in Education Code Section 60605.1, the State Board of Education adopted content standards in dance, music, visual arts and theatre. The Code states that content standards are intended to provide a framework for programs that a school may offer. The arts content standards are divided into five component strands including artistic perception; creative expression, historical and cultural context; aesthetic valuing; and connections, relations and applications. Additionally, State legislation mandates career technical education standards in the arts, media and entertainment industry which were completed in the summer of 2005.

#### Graduation Requirement:

Currently, the Education Code specifies that all students must complete one course in the arts or foreign language between grades 9 to 12 in order to satisfy the graduation requirement.

#### UC/CSU Entry Requirements:

The University of California and the California State University require the arts as a college preparatory subject for all high school students who wish to enter the state's higher education institutions (Area “F” requirement). By 2006, all students entering the UC/CSU system must have satisfied the visual and performing arts requirement by completing an approved yearlong, sequential course in dance, music, theatre or the visual arts that is aligned with the California state arts standards.

#### No Child Left Behind

The arts are included as core curriculum in the NCLB ACT of 2001. The definition of core subjects is located in Title IX, Part A, Section 9101 (1)(D)(11) Definitions. The definition reads: (11) CORE ACADEMIC SUBJECTS- The term ‘core academic subjects’ means English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, **arts**, history and geography.

#### ***Elements of a Quality Arts Education Program***

As defined by the California State Department of Education, the California Alliance for Arts Education, The California State PTA, and the California Arts Project, the elements of a quality arts education program are divided into 9 areas and include:

- **Standards Based Curriculum:** Sequential and articulated K-12.
- **Instruction and Methodology:** Available to all students, focused on standards, includes all four arts disciplines, addresses special needs and gifted students, delivered as discrete sequential subjects, appropriate student to teacher ratios.

- **Student Assessment:** Shows evidence of the students' ability to identify, create, describe, compare, analyze, interpret, and evaluate their own work and the work of others tied to the standards.
- **Professional Development:** Focuses on strategies for delivering a standards-based arts education program.
- **Qualified Administration and Personnel:** Board adopted arts education policy, highly qualified teachers in the arts, highly qualified coordinator of arts programs.
- **Strong Partnerships and Collaborations:** Opportunities for students to attend exhibits and live performances, encourages parent involvement, encourages support from other arts-related resources and groups, and fosters relationships with artists and artistic resources within the community.
- **Adequate and Consistent Funding:** Funding is ongoing and stable, multiple resources are utilized (district funding, parents, business partners, grants, etc.)
- **Adequate Resources and Facilities:** Arts are taught in rooms appropriately designed and equipped for the arts, budget includes adopted texts, instructional resources, materials and supplies.
- **Periodic Program Evaluation:** Identifying strengths and areas of need, both internal and external qualitative and quantitative data are collected and used to evaluate arts programs.