

The Fine Arts & 21st Century Education

*“When young people are involved with the arts,
something changes in their lives.” Edward Fiske*

Since antiquity, in the best of times and in the absolute worst of times, wherever humans have existed, music has also existed. Music makes human experience “special.” It aims to achieve a level of experience different from the commonplace. Music creates an alternative to the reality of the everyday; an alternative to the ordinary way of being. Music exists because of its unique nature and profound capacity to stir our spirits and enrich our lives. As with anything else, understanding and enjoyment are enhanced through knowledge and experience. Music education exists to make musical values more widely and deeply shared.

“Why Do Humans Value Music?”
Dr. Bennett Reimer
Northwestern University

Reed College at that time offered perhaps the best calligraphy instruction in the country. Throughout the campus every poster, every label on every drawer, was beautifully hand calligraphed. Because I had dropped out and didn’t have to take the normal classes, I decided to take a calligraphy class to learn how to do this. I learned about serif and san serif typefaces, about varying the amount of space between different letter combinations, about what makes great typography great. It was beautiful, historical, artistically subtle in a way that science can’t capture, and I found it fascinating.

None of this had even a hope of any practical application in my life. But, ten years later, when we were developing the first Macintosh computer, it all came back to me. And we designed it all into the Mac. Of course it was impossible to connect the dots looking forward when I was in college. But it was very clear looking backwards ten years later.

Stanford University Commencement Address 2005
Steve Jobs
CEO of Apple Computer & Pixar Animation Studios

In a world that so honors the STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), we require extra efforts to not ignore the other fields of human knowledge and practice. I worry particularly about the arts and humanities. There is less demand for these topics, which were once seen as central to liberal education. Parents, policymakers, and pupils are all pulled towards professions, and particularly those that have the potential for making one wealthy. Yet I believe that an individual cannot be a full person, let alone have a deep understanding of the world, unless he or she is rooted well in art, literature, and philosophy. Moreover, these realms of knowledge should not be the rewards for the middle-class executive, but rather the cornerstone of education for all young people. It is incumbent on those with the responsibility of trustee to make sure that humanistically oriented fields are protected.

“Five Minds for the Future”
Howard Gardner
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Though there will be an increased demand for skills in science, technology, engineering and math, the “STEM” skills, there will be even higher demands for creativity, invention and innovation. The arts have been the traditional source for developing creativity. Integrating the arts into STEM (making it STEAM) will be an important education goal as we move through the century.

21st Century Skills: Learning for Life In Our Times
Bernie Trilling & Charles Fadel

“Cornerstone” tasks represent a natural fusion of 21st century skills with big ideas of academic content. Think of them like **cornerstone performances** - the essence of “doing” the subject with core content. For example, in the arts, the composing/performing/critiquing of a sophisticated piece. Cornerstone tasks have the following distinguishing qualities:

- They reflect genuine, real-world accomplishments and are set in authentic contexts. They establish a realistic situation to which students apply their knowledge and skill.
- They require students to apply their learning.
- They call for genuine applications of thinking (such as creative problem solving), technology (such as information access), communication (written, oral, or graphic), collaborative teamwork, and habits of mind (such as persistence). By their very nature cornerstone tasks require 21st century outcomes.
- They recur across the grades, in increasingly sophisticated forms. As we systematically apply 21st century skills in recurring cornerstone tasks, we concurrently develop more sophisticated applications of critical and creative thinking, technology, communication and collaboration.

21st Century Skills: Rethinking How Student Learn
Jay McTighe & Elliot Seif

Symphony is the ability to put together the pieces. It is the capacity to synthesize rather than to analyze; to see relationships between seemingly unrelated fields; to detect broad patterns rather than to deliver specific answers; and to invent something new by combining elements nobody else thought to pair. Symphonic thinking is a signature ability of composers and conductors, whose jobs involve corralling a diverse group of notes, instruments, and performers and producing a unified and pleasing sound. But today Symphony is becoming an essential aptitude for a much wider swath of the population.

A Whole New Mind
Daniel Pink

For today’s students to be the innovators and economic leaders of the future, they will need to have experiences as musicians and dancers, painters and sculptors, poets and playwrights – in short, they will need to be creative innovators who will build our nation’s economy of the future. They will also sustain a rich and vibrant culture to nourish the heart and soul of the American people, and to communicate with our neighbors around the globe.

Reinvesting in Arts Education
Arne Duncan
U.S. Secretary of Education

21st Century Skills: The Fine Arts 4C's

by

P21 – Partnership for 21st Century Skills

Anyone who has ever seen a student become excited, energized, and confident through artistic exploration has seen first-hand how arts education engages children and contributes to their overall development. While each of the arts disciplines has its own unique set of knowledge, skills, and processes, the arts share common characteristics that make arts education a powerful preparation for college, career, and a fulfilling life.

Business leaders and visionary thinkers concerned about preparation of students for the future know that the ability to create is native to the arts and is one of the primary processes learned through arts education. The arts promote work habits that cultivate curiosity, imagination, creativity, and evaluation skills. Students who possess these skills are better able to tolerate ambiguity, explore new realms of possibility, express their own thoughts and feelings, and understand the perspective of others. Students' capacity to create and express themselves through the arts is one of the central qualities that make them human, as well as a basis for success in the 21st century.

Critical Thinking & Problem Solving through the Arts:

- Exercising sound reasoning in understanding.
- Making complex choices and decisions.
- Analyze how parts of a whole interact with each other to produce overall outcomes in complex systems.
- Interpret information and draw conclusions based on best analysis.
- Reflect critically on learning experiences and processes.

Creativity:

- Demonstrating originality and inventiveness in work.
- Being open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives.
- Acting on creative ideas.
- View failure as an opportunity to learn: understand that creativity and innovation is a long-term, cyclical process of small successes and frequent mistakes.

Communication:

- Articulating thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively using oral, written and non-verbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts.
- Listen effectively to decipher meaning, including knowledge, values, attitudes, and intentions.

Collaboration:

- Demonstrating ability to work effectively with diverse teams.
- Exercising flexibility and willingness in making compromises to accomplish a common goal.
- Assuming shared responsibility for collaborative work, and value the individual contributions made by each team member.
- Making complex choices and decisions.
- Understanding the interconnectedness among systems.
- Framing, analyzing, and synthesizing information in order to solve problems.

Experiences in the arts are valuable on their own, but they also enliven other subjects, making them indispensable for a complete education in the 21st century.

Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education

