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**Democratizing the Arts:  
A struggle for socio-economic equality in today's creative economy.**

The increasing depletion of adequate arts education in inner-city public schools is not only robbing less privileged students of crucial human and creative capital, but is also hindering their opportunities for upward mobility and eventual participation in the flourishing Creative economy. The lack of funding for art-based education in these schools not only demonstrates the growing socioeconomic inequality that exists in this nation, but encourages it as well. Mirroring urban demographics, inner city schools have become increasingly composed of students from low-income and minority households. In cities such as Houston and Chicago, less than ten percent of public school students are white, while public schools in suburbia boast predominantly white student bodies. These affluent suburban schools have two to three times more funds available than inner-city schools,<sup>1</sup> a difference that has caused great disparity in the quality of education between the two. The lack of a community support system in inner-city schools further exacerbates this difference, as suburban schools boast outside funding sources such as parent groups, foundations, or local businesses. In California fifty-three percent of principals reported that they “greatly” or “somewhat” relied on these outside sources to

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005), 2.

fund arts education.<sup>2</sup> Supporting and improving art programs in inner city schools will provide access to the new Creative economy for those who are currently held back by a cycle of poverty while simultaneously benefiting urban communities and nation both socially and economically.

### **The Creative Economy:**

*“Happiness is not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort”*

*-Teddy Roosevelt*

*“The American Art industry, both the commercial and nonprofit performing arts are an economic enterprise that is more lucrative than sports, in fact the net output of arts industry is the second largest net export after defense projects.”*

*-Charles Fowler, Strong Arts Strong Schools*

The developing Creative economy categorizes today’s predominant forces of production: creative and mental labor.<sup>3</sup> It is the result of changing forces in production

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2 K.R. Woodworth, *An Unfinished Canvas, Arts Education in California: Taking Stock of Policies and Practices*, (Menlo Park, CA: SRI International)14.

3 Richard Lloyd, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Post-Industrial City*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 244.

and consumption, signifying the ultimate departure from the industrial economy of the twentieth century into an entirely new and complex social and economic machine. The most innovative and lucrative work processes have transformed from factory to society. Sociologist Richard Florida, responsible for coining the term, writes, “In today’s economy, creativity is pervasive and ongoing: we constantly revise and enhance every product, process and activity imaginable, and fit them together in new ways. Moreover, technological and economic creativity are nurtured by and interact with artistic and cultural creativity.”<sup>4</sup> Florida and other sociologists have drawn connections between this type of economic production and the mentality and personal qualities of the ‘artist’. This modern period of neo-liberal capitalism, as Richard Lloyd points out, will be best tailored not to the traditional Protestant ethic but instead by bohemian ethic, the artist’s ethic.<sup>5</sup> This is true because working environments even outside of cultural and symbolic economies mirror the stresses of the traditional bohemian artist, with great tenuousness and uncertainty, and with a never before seen reliance on individual creativity.<sup>6</sup> Essentially, original and free thought are becoming the driving force behind this society’s values and economic innovation.

In the transformation to the Creative economy there has, however, been much turmoil. Rising inequality, unaffordable housing in urban centers, greater mobility among people, morphing family structures, and postponed marriages are all symptoms of

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4 Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 5.

5 Lloyd, 238.

6 Lloyd, 240.

these new forms of production. Post-war Fordism<sup>7</sup> and the technology-driven new economy of the 1990's did not ensure uninterrupted growth as was anticipated. Instead, global influences and accompanying capital reorganization have increased the economic divide between rich and poor, especially visible in the inner city. The Creative economy in fact has exacerbated this divide.<sup>8</sup> New transportation options, communication technologies, political strategies, and modes of organization have all increased the mobility of capital and been the cause of this disorder.<sup>9</sup> For the inner city, white flight and deindustrialization accompanied this transformation and made its repercussions especially severe for the cities' working class that was left behind. Additionally, new patterns of production in culture and technology influence new forms of redevelopment, often white-collar residential gentrification that displaces the low-income and minorities that are financially and politically unable to resist. Consequently it is the poor and minorities that bear the brunt of these changing social and economic forces.

### **School in the context of Creative Economy:**

*“Children in one set of schools are educated to be governors; children in the other set of schools are trained for being governed. The former are given the imaginative range to*

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7 Fordism: the economic philosophy where success and corporate profits can be gained through high wages that enable workers to purchase the output they produce.

8 Florida, Richard. *The Flight of the Creative Class*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2005.), 17.

9 Lloyd, 38.

*mobilize ideas for economic growth; the latter are provided with the discipline to do the narrow tasks the first group will prescribe.”*

*-Jonathan Kozol Savage Inequalities*

*“As we struggle to find solutions to an increasingly complex array of thorny social problems the arts, only one of many public goods, must compete for both financial resources and the public’s attention with an ever-increasing array of other social needs.”*

*-Kevin F. McCarthy The Performing Arts in a New Era*

Reflecting the cities they are in, public schools in urban areas are increasingly segregated by race and social class. In fact, our public education system has reached a crises point where one in three public schools is “high-poverty” as determined by half or more of students who accept free or reduced priced lunch.<sup>10</sup> Funding for public education has undergone a significant shift resulting in its ultimate bifurcation. An increasingly large gap now exists, resulting in a considerable disparity between the qualities of programs at urban-based public schools versus suburban ones.<sup>11</sup> The repercussions of this void are made worse by how this money is spent. The arts, effective means by which to acquire human and creative capital for upward mobility, often are left out of schools’ curricula when funds are lacking. For schools in low-income communities, funds are spent predominantly on construction and renovation, as in “basic repairs, such as new

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10 Carolina Reid, *Back to School: Prioritizing Education in Community Development Efforts* (Fall 2007).  
[www.frbsf.org/publications/community/investments/0709/back\\_to\\_school.pdf](http://www.frbsf.org/publications/community/investments/0709/back_to_school.pdf)

11 Reid, 3.

roofs or asbestos removal.”<sup>12</sup> Yet, more affluent schools possess the funds for projects considered amenities in the eyes of low-income public schools, such as science labs or performing arts centers.<sup>13</sup>

In this land of supposed ‘equal opportunity’, there has been an understanding in the U.S. that education is the social leveler which provides all citizens the ability to realize the American Dream.<sup>14</sup> While the U.S. constitution does not mention education explicitly at all, every state’s constitution guarantees its citizens a right to education.<sup>15</sup> This fact is mirrored in the funding of public schools, where 92 percent of school costs on average are funded through state/local expenditures, versus the 8 percent footed by the Federal Government. While the Federal government does not devote a large share of its budget to public education this is not to suggest it plays a minimal role in the quality, and nature of public education in the United States.

In fact the Federal government’s role in and influence on public education has grown dramatically in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and directly influenced existing inequalities. The perception of public education as a necessary ‘social equalizer’ began soon after the Civil War, with the Freedmen’s Bureau. Instituted to improve the educational opportunity for emancipated slaves, the Bureau initiated an educational precedent for the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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12 Reid, 4.

13 Reid, 4.

14 David Trend, *Cultural Pedagogy: Art/Education/Politics* (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1992), 42

15 John Backman, Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2004: A Brief Synopsis: States’ Impact on Federal Education Policy Project (Albany: New York State Archives, Jan. 2006), [http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/research/res\\_essay\\_intro\\_fedrole.shtml](http://www.archives.nysed.gov/edpolicy/research/res_essay_intro_fedrole.shtml)

The Federal Government made clear it would one: offer federal aid to raise the educational level of the disadvantaged members of society, two: promote the economic interests of the nation through the expansion of access to learning, and three: work towards the assimilation of new citizens into society in order to foster productive labor as well as social harmony.<sup>16</sup> Soon after, the Federal Government demonstrated its resolve to involve itself directly in fulfilling these three goals. Initially the precedent was reinforced by the institution in 1867 of the Office of Education (now the Department of Education) to make sure these goals were met. Further government involvement is epitomized in the Agricultural Adjustment Act<sup>17</sup>, the enforcement of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1958), and the National Defense Education Act in 1958<sup>18</sup>, all of which reiterated the principle that public education is a tool for social equity and economic advancement. However in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and for the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, there has been a significant reversal in the relationship between the Federal Government and public education.<sup>19</sup>

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16 Backman.

17 Agricultural Adjustment Act (P.L 74-320): authorized the Department of Agriculture to purchase surplus food for distribution to non-profit school lunch programs. Also subsequent amendments in 1940 and 1946 included a school milk program and the consolidation of food-commodity laws to provide free meals to low-income children, (the National School Lunch Act).

18 National Defense Education Act (NDEA): allocated an unprecedented amount of funds to public schools, influenced by pressures to outdo the Soviet Union in national defense and international economic competition.

19 Gilberto Arriaza, Susan Roberta Katz, and Emma Fuentes, "Waging war over public education and youth services: challenging corporate control of our schools and communities," *Social Justice* (September 22, 2005), <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-148574793.html>

A movement by conservative forces to deregulate and reduce the role of the Federal Government has been the source of this shift. Beginning with President Nixon and finding great traction with the Reagan Administration in the ‘New Federalism’ of the 1980’s, the Federal government began taking steps to reduce the Federal budget, attack inflation, reduce taxes, and decentralize and deregulate Federal social welfare programs.<sup>20</sup> For public schools this has led to a significant reduction in funds provided by the Federal government and greater control by the state and local levels. In addition federal mandates in the late 1970’s and 1980’s significantly altered how public schools were to approach education. Conservative forces influenced school reform to reflect the country’s business interests so that schools nationwide adopted three new techniques: “back to basics”, the creation of standards, and the implementation of punitive accountability systems by means of standard high-stakes testing.<sup>21</sup> These approaches have been embraced so thoroughly that now in 2008 they represent the basic foundation on which most local, state, and federal education policy is built on.<sup>22</sup> Essentially the federal government has begun to remove itself from its responsibility towards public education but it has not decreased its authority or influence. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) passed in December of 2001, not only typifies the recent position on education held by the Federal government but also accounts for and demonstrates how recent Federal action has been a large factor in existing inequity in public schools, especially evident in the quality and distribution of arts education.

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<sup>20</sup> Trend, 42.

<sup>21</sup> Arriaza, Katz and Fuentes.

<sup>22</sup> Arriaza, Katz and Fuentes.

While the NCLB was sponsored as a means to promote equity in our nation's schools the law itself, the administration's unwillingness to fund it as promised and the uneven management by the U.S. Department of Education have instead inflicted more harm than good.<sup>23</sup> In the name of "accountability" schools are now subject to standardized tests in order to determine whether it meets NCLB standards. However the NCBL offers little financial aid for its provisions to be met while mandating 100% control over state education budgets. In 2005 the National Education Association estimated that the nation's schools were given \$9.8 billion less than guaranteed and less than \$12 billion in 2006. Indeed, in fiscal year 2005, Illinois estimated that almost 80 percent of the states school districts were in severe budgetary deficits and Illinois is no exception. Meanwhile the role of arts education has taken a back seat in the push to raise standards, focus schools on academic fundamentals, and narrow the achievement gap.<sup>24</sup> In this financial crisis, schools are forced to teach quantifiable curriculum and eliminate "soft courses" such as Social Studies and arts programs.<sup>25</sup> The arts have been thought of as only "affective and expressive" and not "academic or cognitive" and therefore have become only "curriculum enrichments", electives for the talented, and available to those that have money.<sup>26</sup>

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23 Peter Schrag, "Bush Education Fraud," *The American Prospect* (Feb. 1, 2004), [http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=bushs\\_education\\_fraud](http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=bushs_education_fraud)

24 Nick Rabkin and Robin Redmond, "The Arts Make a Difference," *Educational Leadership* (2006 V. 63 #5), 60-64.

25 Trend, 42.

26 Rabkin and Redmond, 60-64.

Seen as expendable, art programs in less fortunate public schools are being cutback, as proficient funds are consistently lacking. In a statewide school survey for California, conducted in 2005-2006 by the Stanford Research Institute, a key finding was that students attending high-poverty schools have much less access to arts instruction than their peers in more affluent communities. Additionally, they stated that a lack of funding for education is a top barrier to the provision of arts education, and a need for other outside funding from sources such as parent groups, creates inequities.<sup>27</sup> The study reiterated the fact that pressure to improve test scores in other content areas drove funding away from arts programs.

When contrasted to “arts rich” schools, this inequity is much more stunning. Based on a study of over 2000 pupils attending public schools in grades four through eight, researchers from the Teachers College Columbia University found that students in these schools scored higher in creativity-imagination, expression, cooperative learning, risk-taking, and measures of academic self-concept than students in “arts-poor” schools. In addition, for the schools with strong arts programs both teachers and principles conveyed that the arts allowed teachers to be more imaginative, to have a better understanding of students’ abilities, and a greater fulfillment from work.<sup>28</sup> Because of Federal policies, 71 percent of the nation’s 15,000 school districts have had to reduce the hours of instructional time spent on history, music, and other arts<sup>29</sup>, a trend that has

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27 Woodworth, 4.

28 J.M. Burton, R. Horowitz, & H. Abeles, “Learning in and through the arts: The question of transfer,” *Studies in Arts Education*, (2000, 41, 3), 228-275.

29 Sam Dillon, “Schools Cut Back Subjects to Push Reading and Math,” *The New York Times* (March 26, 2006).

specifically hurt poor schools in urban communities where spending per pupil is statistically the lowest<sup>30</sup> and student racial compositions are predominantly minority.

But are these trends really worrisome? By requiring schools to meet standards and pressuring schools to meet rising benchmarks haven't we established the necessary accountability for our nation's failing public schools? When put into the context of the growing socioeconomic disparities in this country and the Creative economy we now live in, a well-rounded curriculum is imperative to ensure equal opportunity for all citizens. Richard Florida states that in order to build the creative community, "human capital is the most important investment a country makes" and furthermore this should entail "full arts and culture funding." Florida distinguishes the difference between public education during the industrial era, where "rote memorization"<sup>31</sup> was emphasized, versus now where our society needs "comprehensive education" one that stretches from "aesthetics to algebra" without believing that these two are exclusive.<sup>32</sup> These current trends in public education are a microcosm of increasing disparity between upper and lower, minority and majority classes in American society. The confluence between these two facts, increasingly poorer schools in increasingly poorer/minority neighborhoods and the cuts in arts education because of lack of funds aggravates the lack of opportunity for equality and upward mobility that is theoretically guaranteed in this Democratic nation.

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30 Reid, 5.

31 Rote Memorization: a type of learning that focuses on memorization, involved in rote learning is learning by repetition. The idea is that one will be able to absorb and utilize the meaning of the material the more one repeats it. It has been criticized for being a method that does not allow for in-depth understanding.

32 Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, 255.

## **The Individual:**

*“We must recognize the fact that every single human being is creative”*

*-Richard Florida The Flight of the Creative Class*

Today’s creative age has the possibility for much greater human potential, allowing Americans to engage in their creative faculties for financial gain.<sup>33</sup> But when one grows up poor in this country one will struggle to escape this demographic. Carolina Reid, an outspoken advocate for prioritizing education in community redevelopment efforts, puts it aptly: “The consequences of growing up poor are far reaching, affecting access to prenatal care, birth weight, and immunizations; behavioral problems; juvenile delinquency, drug and alcohol use, and teenage pregnancy, to name just a few. These pathways often overlap, ultimately impairing the cognitive development and lowering the educational outcomes of children”<sup>34</sup> The public schools and arts education in particular, are one crucial means by which to curtail what often is a cycle of poverty.

Students from middle and upper class backgrounds, making up the majority in private and suburban public schools, experience the fruits of better funding through better facilities, smaller classes, and higher teacher salaries versus the overcrowding, resource shortages, and aging facilities in inner city schools. While children with above average intelligence in richer neighborhoods can have elective courses in computer graphics,

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33 Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, 27.

34 Reid, 3.

broadcasting, art and sculpture, their counterparts in the inner city are more often placed in vocational courses that serve the industrial economy of the past by training for service and industrial labor. Given little or no hope in school, inner-city youth frequently drop out, having negative consequences not only for the individual but the community as well. It is not surprising that in schools with minority students comprising ninety percent, there is a forty-two percent graduation rate. Compare this to the graduation rate of whites and Asians: seventy-five and seventy-seven percent respectively.<sup>35</sup> It is a sobering situation considering those who drop out of high school inevitably have harder lives; they earn less money, use more public welfare, commit more crimes, and die, on average, nine years earlier than high school graduates.<sup>36</sup> In 1979, the hourly wages of college graduates were 57 percent higher than those of workers without high school diplomas. By 2001, they made 138 percent more (\$22.58 an hour vs. \$9.50 an hour).<sup>37</sup> We no longer live in a time where calloused hands or a strong work ethic will offer a middle-class standard of living. Now more than ever before the quality of one education will determine one's future opportunities.

An arts education is unique among other subject matters for its potential for pro-social development as well as academic achievement. The list of individual benefits for pro-social development is long: better discipline, increased self-esteem, reduced truancy, better relations with adults, more hope for the future, increased motivation, more positive

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35 Reid, 4.

36 Mitchell Landsberg, "Back to Basics: Why does High School Fail so Many?" *Los Angeles Times*. (Jan. 29, 2006)

37 Peter Drier, John Mollenkopf & Todd Swanstrom, *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the Twenty-First Century* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 163.

peer associations, less interest in drugs, more resistance to peer pressure, and reduced criminal activity. Within the academic sphere, the benefits entail: improved math ability, improved reading comprehension, improved language skills, increased interest in social studies, improved spatial-temporal reasoning, and an increase in high school graduation rates.<sup>38</sup> At the behest of art educators, many studies were initiated around the 1990's in response to budget cuts and a lack of scientific evaluation on the impact of art education. As a result, these effects have been documented and a strong case can be made for arts education.

The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988<sup>39</sup> was one of the first studies to reveal the positive correlation between arts participation and pro-social development and academic performance for the individual, a relationship that was shown to grow stronger over time. Most eye-opening was the significant correlation between high arts participation and academic achievement found for students in the lowest socio-economic status quartile, precisely the students who are in the greatest risk for academic failure and precisely the students who are experiencing cuts in their school's art education. A study released in 1999 by the Stanford University and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching further developed this finding by examining art after school programs for low-income youth. Researchers Shirley Heath and Adelma Roach

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38 Tony Silbert and Lawana Welch. *A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Art Education for At-Risk Youth*. (Los Angeles: USC School of Policy, Planning and Development, April 30, 2001.)

39 The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988: a nationally representative sample of eight-graders first surveyed in 1988 and again surveyed in four follow-ups in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. The survey covered a broad variety of topics covering school, work, and life experiences. Students' teachers, parents, and school administrators were also surveyed.

conducted the study over a ten year span and discovered that arts programs attracted higher-risk students more than sports or community service programs and provided more academic and developmental benefits.<sup>40</sup> It has been shown that art education can have the greatest beneficial influence for exactly the demographic that have the least access to it, children at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

Unequal access to study the arts represents the current disparity in educational opportunities that is further fortifying the gap between rich and poor. It is symbolic of conditions that sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton distinguish as *defacto* segregation; where today's schools are more often than not reproducing the socio-economic inequalities present in American society.<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Kozol perceives this state of affairs as the child of a "culture of militarism, detrimental to the development of intellectual curiosity and creativity"<sup>42</sup>. Arts education should not be limited to a small group of people with particular talents and this is in fact one of the "greatest fallacies of modern times"<sup>43</sup>, says Richard Florida. Our society, he contends, should not and cannot afford to be elitist and exclusionary. The pro-social and academic benefits of art education confer human and creative capital, particularly for inner city at risk youth entrenched in the mutually detrimental effects of failing communities and their failing schools.<sup>44</sup> The social, human, and creative capital not only facilitate upward mobility for

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40 Rabkin and Redmond, 60-64.

41 Drier, Mollenkopf & Swanstrom, 163

42 Kozol, 3.

43 Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, 34.

44 Silber and Lawana.

the individual but also positively influence their communities where a reduction in crime, stronger social networks, and decreases in drug activity can afford a foothold to take on the greater challenges of poor neighborhoods. As will be revealed, the relationship between inner-city communities and arts education in the schools has a much stronger mutually rewarding relationship than appreciated.

### **The Community:**

*“If you put a paintbrush or oboe in the hands of a 7 year-old, that same child, at the age of 13, will not pick up an Uzi”*

*- Jane Alexander, actress and former National Endowment for the Arts president*

*“The arts really play an intervention role. They really play a self-esteem role. And when kids feel good about themselves, they can combat some of the negative elements they are exposed to.”*

*-Seattle Mayor Norm Rice*

To sufficiently deal with inequality it is necessary to curtail its effects on the individual level and also to address the underlying causes of inequality being reproduced in urban communities. This is exemplified in education, where even if all school districts had the same resources, it would not be enough to produce equal educational outcomes

between poor and affluent students because of the social disadvantages in poor districts.<sup>45</sup> Arts education has the distinctive capability to ameliorate both the negative effects of inequality on the individual level and also the effects of neighborhood inequality. Progressive sociologists and urban planners today would advise cities to invest in their creative infrastructure if they want to succeed and prosper. In this Creative economy job creation and community revitalization can be born from arts, culture, demographics, and diversity.<sup>46</sup> Placing more emphasis on the arts in schools is not only a needed change in educational trends but it can also successfully make the most of these institutions as tools for community empowerment against the social influences of poverty and aid in the economic revitalization of this nation's urban communities.

Underfunded, overcrowded and standardized schools are not the only reason disadvantaged children perform poorly. Students are forced to contend also with high crime neighborhoods, economically unstable households, and little support networks outside of their school to deal with their academic frustration. Indeed, the flight of taxable resources away from cities to the suburbs has left cities prone for environments where negative influences in the community inevitably carry over into the schools. For instance, because of inadequate housing and rising and unaffordable rents, many children must switch schools repeatedly, a foremost cause of dropout rates. Furthermore, poor city services and hazardous environments cause health problems that have direct effects on cognitive ability (such as lead poisoning or iron-deficiency anemia) or in other cases lead to absenteeism or inattentiveness. Moreover, the children's intellectual

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45 Drier, Mollenkopf, Swanstrom, 163

46 Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, 44.

environments outside of school have less college educated individuals and provide fewer expectations for academic success.<sup>47</sup> So how then can schools and arts education facilitate progress in these discouraging conditions? Is it sensible to prioritize school reform when the neighborhoods around them struggle and deteriorate?

Just as schools cannot single-handedly tackle the complexity of challenges their students face, urban communities cannot ignore the integral role schools serve in the wellbeing and livelihood of the neighborhood. In the last thirty to forty years however, schools and neighborhood revitalization have rarely been linked. Mark Warren, Associate Professor of Education at Harvard University, contends there in fact needs to be collaboration between schools and community development efforts for quality education and lasting neighborhood revitalization.<sup>48</sup> Warren points out that coalitions and institutions- unions, faith based organizations, schools, congregations, non-profit organizations- are often adept in addressing deeply-rooted inequalities because of their ability to empower the community. Taking this into account, one realizes the only institutions that consistently exist in *every* neighborhood across the country are congregations and schools. Moreover, schools are immobile centers of social capital, bringing together parents, teachers, and community members with direct stake in the community's welfare. What many urban planners are beginning to realize is that as centers of social capital, schools can be a means to develop a "collective sense of efficacy and power" which can alleviate "unequal power relations" found in poor urban

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47 Richard Rothstein, "Leaving 'No Child Left Behind' Behind," *The American Prospect*. (Vol. 19, # 1, Jan/Feb 2008), 50.

48 Mark Warren, "Linking Community Development and School Improvement: An Interview with Mark Warren," *Community Investments* (Fall 2007).

communities.<sup>49</sup> What is needed then, Warren asserts, is ways to link school reform and community development efforts.

Restoring the arts is one viable strategy available to bond schools and the community in a mutually beneficial relationship. Through the arts, schools and community development efforts can work jointly towards neighborhood improvement and capitalize on the benefits of a collaborative approach.<sup>50</sup> In an interview on linking community development and school improvement, Professor Warren identifies in what way these collaborative approaches between schools and the community can form. The arts in particular can facilitate this collaboration in three significant ways. One facet entails getting more people personally engaged in the school. Another level involves creating meaningful collaborations between families and schools. Last but not least the arts can promote the school as an institutional partner where its services are used as “a starting point for building relationships with the school and the wider community.”<sup>51</sup> Via the arts, the relationship between a community and its school evolves into a partnership for change in the face of economic, social and educational concerns.

Of the abundant literature on art’s impact, very little analysis has been done on the direct effect of the arts on a community.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, there exists no research into

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49 Warren.

50 Deborah McKoy, “The Community Development and Education Connection: Reviving Cities, transforming Schools, and engaging young people in the process,” *Community Investments* (Fall 2007).

51 Warren.

52 Joshua Guetzkow, “How the Arts Impact Communities: An introduction to the literature on arts impact studies,” *Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies* (Princeton University, June 7-8, 2002).

how arts can be a link between the school and its community and what effect this can have. However, the report *Gaining the Arts Advantage: Lessons From School Districts that Value the Arts* (2000), demonstrates through various case studies how school arts programs can positively impact the community and vice versa. Published by the National Endowment for the Arts, the report was a response to school and community leaders around the United States who wanted to know how to develop and sustain arts education. The report covers Ninety-one school districts identified by state and national education and arts organizations as having superb arts education despite national accountability measures and staffing, program, and resource shortages.

The report's most important finding was that to enable the development and sustainability of arts education, the active involvement of influential segments of the community is vital. By making it their goal to provide a strong arts education, school's bridged the divide between school reform and community development. Inadvertently, the schools became institutional partners to their communities and arts were the services used to begin building relationships with the wider community. In certain instances, strong arts programs made their presence felt in the community by showcasing the programs through the provision of exhibition spaces and performance venues in the schools for students, faculty, and community artists. Conversely, outside organizations in the community provided free tickets for attendance at community arts events to students, parents, staff, and faculty. Working together, in some cases schools and segments of the communities organized weeklong festivals of the arts. These collaborations materialized in a great variety of ways. Partnering with the community to build sustainable arts education enhanced existing community-school relationships and led to the formation of

new networks- between parents and families, artists, arts organizations, businesses, local civic and cultural leaders, and institutions – all of which capitalized and expanded upon the social capital found in schools. In linking schools to the community, Professor Warren asserts the key is to start by reaching out and attempting to collaborate with the institutions that already exist within the community. This potential for new networks can compensate for the lack of human and financial capital in urban communities by enhancing and broadening the social, civic, and cultural connections of students and the general community.

Further connecting schools and the community in mutually beneficial relationships, strong arts programs successfully encourage more people to be personally engaged in the school. This can entail “formal partnerships” between school and community arts organizations as well as a range of formal and informal interactions among school staff and the community. These interactions include: active parent and community involvement in school arts programs; interdisciplinary teams involving arts specialists in the development of curricula; arts faculty involvement in community arts events; artist residencies; student exhibitions and performances for community audiences. Through these formal and informal partnerships, strengthening the arts addresses another level of building school-community cooperation by creating meaningful collaborations between families and schools. In these schools parents and parts of the community were earnest and active in shaping and implementing the policies and programs from each school district. Arts can encourage enthusiasm and pride within the community and school, as witnessed by principals who consistently reported that parents who never come to school for parent-teacher conferences would come to see their child perform, creating

more opportunities for building relationships important to the school and district. These meaningful relationships between families and schools represent indigenous efforts to build social capital and relationships while functioning also to empower people through personal ownership of the reforms.

While the specific characteristics of these networks and the community consensus that is reached varied in response to local contexts (Vancouver and Washington differ in specific detail from Miami and Florida, for example), in all cases the report listed three central ways the arts dramatically improved the schools themselves. Strong arts improve the school climate: with a coherent and strong arts programs schools look, sound, and feel different because schools became more attractive, warm, welcoming, and visually exciting. Secondly, the art's comprehensive tasks challenge students: producing a play, performing a concert or dance recital, these examples and others have students using many artistic skills, directing aesthetic and expressive qualities for set purposes, and working with human behaviors and emotions in a variety of ways. Students are actually *willing* to discipline themselves or undertake rigorous practice and rehearsal sessions. Finally, the arts turn schools into communities. These schools became more supportive, more like families, encouraging students and teachers to work together, to create things together, perform together, or display results of their efforts together.

The impact of school arts programs on the economy of the communities is off-handedly considered negligible,<sup>53</sup> but utilizing public schools as integral parts of an arts-involved strategy for community revitalization has apparent value. In one regard, improved school environments and integrated community networks will curb the effect

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53 Guetzkow.

extraordinary dropout rates in urban public schools has on their neighborhoods. In a recent article in the Los Angeles Times entitled “Back to Basics: Why does High School Fail so Many?”, they found that dropouts from Birmingham High School, a typical Los Angeles high school, will cost the county hundreds of millions of dollars a year in lost income taxes and increased welfare and healthcare costs. In another regard, high quality schools have a major influence on housing values: families seeking first rate education will pay premiums on housing costs/property taxes.<sup>54</sup> The demonstrated effects of strong arts programs to improve the schools can attract middle or upper class back to city, bringing more revenue with them. Additionally, economically integrated schools bring other benefits academically, regardless of individual socio-economic status.<sup>55</sup> The aggregation of deleterious factors in communities and their schools impart a self-confirming identity of inequality<sup>56</sup> but the arts are a unique avenue by which the school and a greater segment of the community can come together to address socio-economic inequality through comprehensive community development.

### **A Case Study: Vancouver (WA)**

The case of Vancouver, Washington, exemplifies the once thriving city that now faces budget crises and the complicated decisions of how to spend limited funds. At one

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54 Drier, Mollenkopf & Swanstrom, 209.

55 Alan Finder, *As Test Scores Jump, Raleigh Credits Integration by Income*, The New York Times, September 25, 2005.

56 Rosie Meade and Mae Shaw, “Editorial Community development and the arts: reviving the democratic imagination,” *Community Development Journal* (Vol. 42, #4, 2007), 6.

point a thriving ship-building center, beginning around 1989 manufacturing plants began closing and soon 15,000 high-wage, primarily union jobs, vanished. Consequently family incomes dropped dramatically, to a point where the average household's income loss (real, not adjusted) was \$5,000 over the last decade's income. The number of students using free and reduced lunch rose from 12 to 49 percent. Facing hard times, the Vancouver school district also had to cope with 27 older school buildings in desperate need of repair. Almost accidentally, it was this need for facility rehabilitation that was the catalyst for educational reform and the formation of school community partnerships.

Deliberating over how to approach repairing their facilities, the school board challenged the school districts superintendent to come up with a strategic plan, one for the kids, which did not just recommend "bricks and mortar". The superintendent's response was to go into the community of Vancouver and by doing so, the superintendent arrived at a plan from the people and owned by them. Initially using a 'steering group' of 80 vital citizens – parents, business leaders, students, some faculty, a few board members- to involve 800 people in what was to become a series of town meetings. Public education became a broader picture with a grand vision. The result was a four point plan to address the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Coming together the community, school board, students and the superintendent, arrived at a vision for measurable and achievable goals and arts it turned out, served a vital role in the attainment of these goals. While initially the utility of art education was debated versus the other core subjects, over time it became an issue of choice and equal opportunity– kids are best served with an integrated curriculum – and it was agreed that for some kids, arts is what it takes to spark achievement. In order to not only provide this

integrated curriculum but also rehabilitate existing facilities the school began community outreach through educators, parents, and the students in order to build support for two key bond measures. Despite only 26 percent of the voters having school-aged children, their personal stories of depleted arts programs and school resource shortages built a community vision and produced shared goals that enabled the passing of the bond measures. Furthermore, to fully reach and sustain their goals it was also deemed necessary to seek out and engage organizations and individuals of “substantial means”. In this regard, arts proved a supplemental and effective means to establish these lasting relationships. The locally based corporation and largest employer in Clark county, Hewlett-Packard, got onboard with a Community Action Plan that included a K-12 Education and Arts and Culture Program. Hewlett- Packard executives embraced the proposed interdisciplinary approach that promoted creativity remarking “that’s what we want because that’s the way our employees work”. Additionally, the schools were able to attract donors such as Leslie Durst, who because of her arts-rich childhood in NYC, contributes large donations for Vancouver arts education. All totaled Vancouver schools now have an educational foundation maintaining approximately \$1million in assets, which includes interest income to support children’s additional education needs, such as musical instruments or travel funds to competitions.

The district cites its continuing challenge as the effort to “balance broad exposure and high standards with focused opportunities.” As a result of their efforts the elementary schools now offer broad-based arts experiences, the middle schools have varying levels of experiences with a “wheel of study” for exposure to electives such as choir and drama, and high schools have a range of programs with traditional music, art

and drama. Furthermore the community gained artists who were brought in to teach and practice their art. Additionally the grand Skyview high school performing facility has begun to be used not only by more students and faculty- as a competitive forum for opposing school's marching bands for example- but also by local arts groups and community members as a social forum. By incorporating the community, their demand for "choice" led to some tension in overall vision, but the benefits of coming together to plan for change was appreciated by everyone. The trick is, as one teacher remarked, to "start with where the people are and build the trust, respect, and leave time to plan"

### **A Case Study: Greenville County (SC)**

Greenville County, South Carolina, is the largest School District in South Carolina with 58,000 students, of which 28 percent are African-American and 72 percent are white. One-fifth of the students receive free or reduced lunch, and the district is composed of 92 urban, suburban and rural schools. Greenville County was specifically set apart in the report as a school that encompassed nearly every factor they found to be useful for the building and sustaining of a strong system-wide arts education; these factors also implicated the community in intricate forms.

Much like in the case of Vancouver, a shared vision was achieved between community and school, a vision that engendered cooperative participation. Through community outreach, potential links to parents and community were reified in instances such as: the sharing of student art in different ways -festivals, art shows, poetry readings at local cafés, performances of jazz guitar ensemble, string quartets, gospel choir, dance company, theater productions- and also generally by communicating with parents and

with the public about students', teachers', and districts' successes. Greenville County experiences now a greater degree of parents who pitch in with materials, muscle or matching funds for grants/special projects. The school environments also began improving, as Principals began encouraging student artwork in school environments, such as a mural with "rolling South Carolina hills, dense forests, and rollicking sea waves".

Separate from parent-school relationships the outside community has become involved in a myriad of ways. As in the case of Vancouver, outside artists were brought in to participate in school residency programs and initiated professional development workshops for teachers as well. Arts organizations within the community began to work with students in their schools and were also able to utilize the communities' own theaters/rehearsal halls. Service clubs, principally Rotary Clubs, are brought into the picture through their support of three community projects: "the Singing Christmas Tree," "Spring Sing", and "a Night of Music", which have become community fixtures. Even General Electric, Flour Daniel and the American Federal Bank became involved in the welfare of the district and its schools by providing foundation grants for needy children to attend performances, funding programs at the Fine Arts Center for interested students, and underwriting the Arts Teacher of the Year Award respectively.

#### **A case study: The Bronx (NY).**

. Another approach towards community and school revitalization through the arts began outside of school but respected art education as an integral part of the process. A development council of about 60 leaders from Bronx-based corporations and heads of cultural organizations such as the Bronx Zoo, botanical garden, and art museum, have

come together to find a “launching pad for community development”.<sup>57</sup> Arts in their public schools have been set apart as necessary tools for this endeavor. Although the project is in its infancy, they anticipate economic benefits from this coming together of groups, organizations, and institutions. They anticipate that future audiences for performing groups will depend on the creation of interest and commitment to the arts by students today. To foster this interest, funding increases have been allocated for school arts programs, a directory of arts groups and events for children has been published, and ticket subsidies are offered for the young. Another important point the South Bronx development council has stressed is the symbiotic relationship between cultural institutions and art education. Just as cultural institutions need audiences, school-based arts programs need trained teachers, access to community arts resources, and help in the development of programs of instruction in the arts. Thirdly, they acknowledge the impact the arts have on the economic health of America’s communities, large and small. They cited a study done by the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies (NALAA), named “Arts in the Local Economy” where thirty-three American communities in twenty-two states were analyzed over three years. The arts should be considered an “industry,” they found, based on the provision of jobs, income, and tax revenue at federal, state, and local levels. While mainstream thinking holds that funding arts education will come at the expense of economic benefits, this study finds otherwise

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57 Bruce O. Boston, *Arts Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century American Economy*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Kentucky Center for the Arts, September 16-18, 1994.), 30.

stating that as well as contributing to “social enrichment”, they are especially a “sound investment for communities of all sizes.”<sup>58</sup>

Utilizing arts in the communities and in the schools while not a panacea for urban problems, is a viable, versatile, and progressive strategy to help struggling urban communities. The approaches adopted in Vancouver, Greenville, and in the Bronx, bear resemblance to the neighborhood revitalization that often occurs as a result of the Bohemian appeal in a city. Using locally based businesses, cultural organizations, nonprofits in the arts and the public schools, the urban community can capitalize and build on local creative capital to distinguish and develop the sub-cultural capital that may exist in the community. As Professor Warren believes, the best thing organizations working for community development – including financial institutions- can do is to look for promising things that are happening locally and support them, either financially, or by helping to build partnerships and connections to other resources and networks.<sup>59</sup> In this way, these partnerships and the pooling of resources in these communities will mimic the organizing principles Richard Lloyd recognizes in Bohemian artists. These principles are ones that “give coherence to the local scene” and generate value in many ways.<sup>60</sup> But this is essentially a grassroots Bohemia as it incorporates and builds the local scene and does not need the foreign artists of Lloyd’s Wicker Park Bohemia to attract capitalist economic interest. It still utilizes the cultural production that “privileges the old center

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58 Boston, 31.

59 Warren.

60 Lloyd, 244.

city” as a “generative milieu” and “site of fantasy” to spark consumer desire.<sup>61</sup> But because of its grassroots nature, the community will be less susceptible to the gentrification that occurs when capitalist interest is sparked in the community. It will be revitalizing the community from the inside out instead of vice versa. It is as Richard Florida would suggest for the establishment of a creative community: to combine “innovation and economic growth with authentic community and a better way of life” and it mirrors to a great extent the generative ability of Bohemias for the “collective process of cultural production and fostering collaboration, linking artists to audiences, and sustaining a “work culture.”<sup>62</sup>

**The Nation:**

*Society acquires new arts and loses old instincts.*

*-Ralph Waldo Emerson*

The symbiotically beneficial relationship between public arts education and community revitalization can generate benefits not only for the urban communities and individual but also for society as a whole. Currently, the Creative economy, if allowed to continue on its directed path, will, like economic systems of the past, “both exacerbate existing social problems and create new ones” posits Richard Florida.<sup>63</sup> This is due to the

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61 Lloyd, 244.

62 Lloyd, 162.

63 Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, 64.

regionally uneven nature of the Creative economy's development, exemplified by the current unequal funding in public arts education.<sup>64</sup> To remedy this, Florida recommends we realize as a society that the scientific, economic, artistic, and cultural are mutually reinforcing parts of the creative whole.<sup>65</sup> This is an age where "the production and consumption of symbolic and cultural objects can be as profitable as the production and consumption of durable commodities."<sup>66</sup> If realized on a national level through the media, politicians, or influential individuals, greater support can be garnered for arts education across the country. Building a foundation for the arts would be equivalent to historical periods where canals, railroads, and highways were built to reinforce the physical infrastructure for industrial growth because the arts are a foundational element to the Creative economy.<sup>67</sup>

Making public schools into "places where human creativity is cultivated and can flourish"<sup>68</sup> is the equivalent to reinforcing what can be considered the physical infrastructure of today. Human capital is the strongest investment a country can make and this can be done through full arts and culture funding.<sup>69</sup> Doing so helps, not only at-risk youth, but also transfers benefits to the state and national level. In the study *A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Arts Education for At-Risk Youth*, prepared for the Public Policy

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<sup>64</sup> Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, 17.

<sup>65</sup> Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, 251.

<sup>66</sup> Lin, 270.

<sup>67</sup> Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, 249.

<sup>68</sup> Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, 254.

<sup>69</sup> Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, 255.

Program at the USC School of Policy, Planning, and Development, they found that the cost of providing arts programs could rise by nearly 50% and still provide a net benefit to the state, because of the savings to the criminal justice system and increased tax revenue. In fact, a conference of researchers in higher education institutions at Columbia University found the U.S. could regain nearly 200\$ billion yearly in economic losses and in turn reclaim its economic and educational world leadership if the quality of schooling was raised. Their findings were worrisome even, projecting that by 2012, the U.S. will fall seven million short of the projected need for college-educated workers. They pointed out that by raising high school completion rate by only 1% for men ages 20-60, the country would save \$1.4 billion yearly in decreased criminal costs.<sup>70</sup> It has been proven that arts education keeps kids in school and can even allow for some the opportunity to attend college. The benefits conferred to individuals and communities translate directly to the national and state level through the money saved and the provision of a more educated, diverse, and creative workforce.

Further argument for this change in our guiding principles is the case for increased tolerance and diversity in society. As Dr. Charles Fowler, an outspoken proponent for arts in education said: “arts education is the irreplaceable conduit for conveying the artistic heritage of African, Asian, Latino, European, and Native Americans to citizens of the next generation”<sup>71</sup> The three qualities that Richard Florida distinguishes as crucial for the creative society: Tolerance, Technology, and Talent, will

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<sup>70</sup> Kozol, 1.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Fowler, *Strong Arts, Strong Schools: The Promising Potential and Shortsighted Disregard of the Arts in American Schooling*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.), 26.

be encouraged and developed. Arts no longer have to be justified as an aid to math, science or any other subject matters. While students will do better in other subjects when involved in the arts, the non-academic benefits embrace culture and promote tolerance. Self-discipline, motivation, aesthetic awareness, cultural exposure, social harmony, creativity, improved emotional expression, and appreciation of diversity<sup>72</sup> are characteristics imparted to those involved in the arts. Furthermore, giving underprivileged youth this chance to gain human and creative capital welcomes expressive and valuable members into the Creative economy. These potential members are currently left behind in a “cultural caste system where only the rich can afford access to arts education.”<sup>73</sup>

Ideally, spending in the arts should be carried over into all sectors and on all levels: local, state, and federal. This would mean increases in spending for the private and public sectors in arts, in culture, and in forms of innovation and creativity.<sup>74</sup> This is not to suggest that turning everyone into artists is the goal, but instead it is the skills learned in the study of arts that lend to the personal qualities and skills appropriate for this day in age. More significantly, it is the convergence of these sectors which can strengthen at-risk communities by helping not only its children but also building social capital and the creative infrastructure that will aid in the community’s revitalization. Class and racial segregation in inner-city schools are reflections of greater

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<sup>72</sup> Eric Jensen. *Arts with the Brain in Mind*. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001), 3.

<sup>73</sup> Silbert and Lawana, 3.

<sup>74</sup> Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, 250.

socioeconomic trends in society but through arts education there is opportunity to bridge the economic, social and racial boundaries that exist, to instead build tolerance in our culture and work towards a more sustainable and equitable future.

*“When you go out on the street you see the poor man and the rich man; and when you look around, you see all the so-called educated people throughout the world wrangling, fighting, killing each other in wars. There is now Scientific knowledge enough to enable us to provide clothing, food, and shelter for all human beings, yet it is not done. The politicians and other leaders throughout the world are educated people, they have titles, degrees, caps and gowns, they are doctors, and scientists; and yet they have not created a world in which man can live happily. So modern education has failed, has it not? And if you are satisfied to be educated in the same old way, you will make another howling mess of life.”*

-J. Krishnamurti

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