

“Arts in Mind“ column

The MFA is the New MBA

By Annette Venables

What if your child’s principal sent you a letter that read, “We regret to inform you that due to budget cuts and scheduling difficulties, we will no longer teach reading. We are exploring a variety of afterschool enrichment programs in which your child will have the opportunity to participate in a reading program. We appreciate that this is disappointing, but know that we remain committed to providing an excellent education to our students in all other areas.”

“How can they cut reading?” you might scream at the top of your lungs. “Reading is an essential part of a good education!” But in schools throughout the country, and even in our neighboring affluent communities, this happens everyday with such essential programs as art, music, dance, drama and poetry.

In recent history, there have been numerous studies extolling the benefits of arts education, and lots of people have made lots of money making sure that fetuses all over the world are listening to Beethoven in utero. Now there is even more power behind support of the arts in schools—business leaders are demanding it.

While battles rage in the education community about standards and practices, business leaders and human resource experts are already looking way beyond test scores. And they are not betting on the promised changes—change happens at a snail’s pace in education vs. at lightening speed in boardrooms. Rather, they believe that tomorrow’s workers may benefit most from studying and participating in the arts today.

In his book *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainer’s Will Rule the Future*, author Daniel H. Pink says that an MFA is one of the hottest credentials in business because art students bring creativity to the conference table—they have a unique way of looking at and solving problems.

Dan Pink points out that design and traditional "right brain" thinking will be the course of the future. We are moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age, he says. To prepare for it we need to improve six essential abilities. They are: Design, Story, Symphony, Empathy, Play and Meaning.

Like Dan Pink, business leaders consistently cite a similar set of qualities necessary for competing in the global marketplace. Such abilities as critical thinking and problem-solving skills, teamwork, creativity, innovation, and professionalism are those that match the "right brain" traits and are the same skills that are nurtured by studying the arts.

And yet, in March, a benchmark study entitled *An Unfinished Canvas*, sponsored by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and SRI International, revealed that California students lag behind the national average in hours of arts instruction—they receive up to 50% less in music and visual arts instruction at the elementary level.

Even in days past, and even for the children who made it to the end of their 8th-grade education only to spend the next 50 years on the assembly line at the local factory, poetry was studied and recited in school and children learned how to waltz with a partner.

It is essential that arts education in California and in the rest of the country remain part of core education, and not just an extra.

Business and philanthropical leaders seem to agree—No matter what it ends up saying on your child’s degree, arts education, and the qualities it fosters, is likely to play an important role in shaping his or her life.

“Arts in Mind” is a series from Kiddo! that explores arts and arts education. Annette Venables is a first grade teacher at Old Mill School and a parent in the Mill Valley School District.