

**Creativity: The Key to a Successful Workforce
Economic Summit IV**

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12:30 - 1:45 pm

Rm. 202 AB

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The world of work has changed from a primarily industrial society of the 20th c. into an information society of the 21st c, challenging the structure and changing the face of the

workforce. No longer can employees expect a set body of knowledge to carry them throughout a career. Multi-skilled, multi-dimensional, creative individuals are needed to move companies and businesses forward for economic success. For such individuals, technology can open and expand boundaries of separate disciplines and provide new tools to access information, create new knowledge, and communicate among and beyond workers. Workers with imagination and creative skills will lead the workplace of this century in producing innovative ideas and challenging solutions.

Ideas are the fuel of a strong, working economy. They built America into the superpower of the world, economically, politically, and socially. We need more educated, self-directed, flexible, creative individuals to create and implement innovative ideas for this new millennium. Developing ideas through collaboration, team-work, problem solving, conceptualizing, critical thinking, and risk-taking are the hallmark of the creative worker (s). This kind of knowledge moves the economy, according to management gurus such as Peter Drucker, W. Edwards Deming, and Peter Senge. They have long maintained that knowledge, not labor and capital, is the basic economic resource of today's economies - information at work in the learning organization.

Where and how will such abilities be developed?

Substantive arts education in the schools is the answer to this important question. The creative and critical thinkers who will occupy the future workplace will be shaped by the experiences of their developing years. This places a large responsibility on the school – the prime source of the understandings and abilities they will carry throughout life. However, most of students' experiences in school are rule-driven – antithetical to the development of creative habits of mind. Mathematics, science, language, history – all very important fields of understanding – have their own sets of rules based on logic, set procedures, and single right answers. Alone among all the subjects, the arts require not only logical but also intuitive, analogical, and metaphoric thinking processes. Aspects of creativity, such as flexibility, fluency, elaboration, and originality are especially cultivated in the arts. Persistence, enthusiasm, absorption, high motivation, and a context that supports deviation from convention and risk-taking are all hallmarks of good arts education and are the sine qua non for developing creative habits of mind. Substantive, sequential arts education in the schools is the seedbed for developing a creative workforce.

The proof of this can be found in the large body of research on learning, intelligence, and the brain. As school reform and brain research gained momentum in the early 80's, researchers found that not only did students need the "basic" courses, but also a major factor in learning – arts education – enhanced cognitive, social, and emotional development. Howard Gardner, cognitive psychologist at Harvard University, also found that humans have many intelligences besides the logical/mathematical and linguistic areas that have formed the basis of intelligence tests for the past 80 years. Gardner found these tests too narrow and limited to assess student's full potential. His studies provided a broader perspective of the concept of intelligence that included a range of abilities in addition to the logical/mathematical and linguistic, such as spatial intelligence, needed by

the artist, architect, and inventor; bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, vital for the actor, dancer, or athlete; musical intelligence, critical for the musician, critic, and composer; interpersonal intelligence, the ability to know and understand other people; and intrapersonal intelligence, or self-knowledge. All of these categories, as well as those traditionally taught in our schools, are developed through the arts. Gardner argues that eliminating the arts in a school curriculum is as detrimental to intellectual development as eliminating mathematics or science. In view of these findings, enhanced arts education should be embraced and advocated by the workplace, which increasingly needs well-rounded, creative employees.

Research and teacher practice also show that the arts furnish many tools for new ways of knowing and doing. They allow for a wider range of learning styles to be recognized and provide students with a unique literacy, thereby expanding their ability to reason, analyze, interpret, synthesize, imagine, explore, and take risks – all aspects of creative thinking. Drs. Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles, Columbia University, have found in their research that students deeply engaged in the arts possess better real-life skills than those with lower levels of training in the arts. They are better problem solvers, have more original solutions and more of them, are highly innovative, are more focused, and can integrate diverse facts and ideas better. They also possess better social abilities and personal attitudes.

Another trait of the creative person is perseverance. The arts education process of learning has rigorous demands such as staying on task and following the process of creativity to a successful completion. This develops a strong work ethic. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, cognitive psychologist, in his book, *Flow*, discusses the creative process as one in which individuals become so involved in the act of creating they are unaware of time and place. This habit of mind is one that enriches the learning process and produces an enthusiastic employee.

Also, arts education connects learning experiences to the real world of work. Students become engaged in the "doing" part of education. For example, in arts programs students function as designers, graphic artists, animators, musicians, composers, actors, mime, arts therapists, and dancers, and these skills and trainings expand into and are applicable to other fields of work. This is an important factor for business since these skills and habits of mind have been found to be truly portable to other contexts such as the workplace. Arts education is not just the process of making or doing but a substantive, more comprehensive process necessary to make sense of the form.

Self-direction and collaboration are other outcomes of substantive arts education. In the arts students learn to reflect on and critique their work and receive and give constructive peer assessments. This trait, so vital to all productive work, enables them to gain insight into the content and form of their learning, moving them to higher levels of understanding. In the arts multiple solutions to a given problem are encouraged and explored. Arts students are accustomed to working in collaboration with others in the creative process, be it in visual arts and design, music, theatre, or dance.

Substantive arts education opens a window to the world. As we live in a global society, understanding and working with other cultures is a major ingredient in the creative workplace. Students in arts education explore and study other world cultures through their arts, and, by noting the similarities and valuing the differences, build a foundation of understanding and respect for others. Through study of the Western and non-western societies and civilizations as well as their own, students of arts education have a unique perspective on how others live and learn.

To realize all the above benefits to our students and future workforce requires that the arts be given greater status in schools. A comprehensive curriculum with the arts as equal partners with mathematics, science, social studies, and languages is needed by all students, not just the "talented," so that all students can compete in this challenging world. This means that arts education can no longer be considered an addendum or a frill to the school required curriculum, but an equal partner.

Unfortunately, our present economic situation adversely affects arts education programs. With budget restrictions throughout our state, arts courses are being reduced or eliminated, the same courses responsible for the development of the aesthetic and creative intelligence of our students, who will play a key role in developing economic strength of our state. For example, media and design work in Wisconsin requires a creative workforce that can give our industries a competitive edge. Media and design are the creative fields that will determine the look of our cities and the sounds and sights we will enjoy in the 21st century. How well are we preparing students for this? For the best interests of Wisconsin's future, business and the public in general must become strong advocates for arts education in the schools!

To advocate effectively we must consider several questions. Do we have comprehensive curricula in our schools that include a strong arts education program? Have our schools cut arts education programs because of challenging budgets or testing? Is arts education for all students a value in our schools? If not, what can we do as business and community leaders to advocate for that? Your voice is vital and must be heard.

Arts education is basic to an educated person – and basic to the new skills needed in this Information Age. It is also critical for educational success in our schools and economic success in our state. To achieve this success, we all must support and value arts education in our schools, which will produce our future workforce. Creativity is the basis of success!

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