

## A connection to arts makes kids fit for the future

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Will our children--- and their children--- be able to live as comfortably as we do now? What will they do to make a living? Will they be prepared for the future they face? What if you were starting over today--- would you be successful?

Author Daniel R. Bankoff makes the point that our lives and the lives of our children are being dramatically impacted by the “three A’s”--- abundance, Asia, and automation. We have so much stuff that we spend \$ 17 billion on self-storage --- More than on movies. Asia has a big impact--- with 350,000 engineers being graduated each year in India alone. Automation--- if a \$500-a- month chartered accountant in India doesn’t replace your accountant, TurboTax will.

So how do we prepare our children ---and ourselves---to face a very different future? We must teach our strengths. We are the most creative society on the planet. In 100 years we have moved from an agrarian economy to an industrial and manufacturing economy to a knowledge-base economy. Now we are moving to a “creative economy.” Real value is in the capacity to design and create--- not produce. If our children are facing the challenges of the “three A’s”--- what’s our solution?

My answer lies in developing skills in the “three C’s”: creativity, compassion, and conceptualization. We need to help our children learn how to connect things creatively; how to feel what others feel so they might create what others might need, want or find useful, fun or elegant. They must learn how to see how things fit into patterns or context; how to take what they know and apply it in different situations; how to seek the “big picture” in addition to memorizing the 1,000 words.

Our children need to practice working together and solving problems in groups. They need to discover that they can learn from others different from themselves. Finally, our children need to learn how to keep on learning. In short, in an economy where the highest value is moving to innovation, design and creativity, we need to be teaching these skills.

I am not suggesting we give up teaching math, science or fundamental reading and writing. We do need these left-brain skills--- but they are no longer enough. It seems we have become so comfortable with what we are doing now that we have lost a sense of urgency in addressing the future. We are like the frog in the pan of water on the stove. We don’t notice the water getting hotter until it is too late to jump. So what can we do now to help our children?

What makes the difference at those schools that graduate more of their students and demonstrate higher achievement? Most high-schools have sports programs---but every one of the top-performing schools in Georgia also has a significant arts program. Arts help overall student performance---and not just in the arts. More than half the engineering students at Georgia Tech played a musical instrument in high school.

The Georgia Department of Education promises to add an arts administrator next year---but no arts in any form is required to graduate. We have crippled the arts in our schools in Georgia by failing to fund the arts. Georgia ranks 48th in per-capita funding of the arts and 46th in average S.A.T. scores. About 40 percent of our children are not graduating from high school. We are making some progress in some places--- but we have an urgent problem today, and it will become exponentially greater over time.

Only where parents demand it and local support steps in is there any strength in the arts in our schools. For years Davidson School for the Arts in Augusta has achieved the highest SAT average among all public schools in Georgia. Davidson’s students are not smarter. These students succeed because their school uses the arts in education to teach the “three C’s” plus group problem-solving, self – expression and confidence.

Teaching the “three C’s” skills with the arts schools is also important to the future of our economy as assembly plants shut down and companies merge or move to the other side of the globe. The skills developed by putting the arts into our schools will sustain a stronger creative business economy and provide meaningful jobs in Atlanta and throughout Georgia.

Georgia now ranks eighth nationally in “total arts employees,” with the fastest rate of growth. Performing arts are only 15 percent of this total. Design, advertising, architecture, publishing, film, radio/TV, visual arts and photography are bigger. Atlanta already has the highest percentage of its residence in arts-based employment of any major city—more than San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles or Seattle.

Since the arts improve overall performance in schools and can provide creative, job-ready work force --- why is it that the arts are not required in our schools? Frankly, the water in which we and our children are sitting in is getting really hot and I, for one, think the time to jump is now.

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