Powering the Creative Economy

Creativity is an important part of California’s economy. In 2014, the creative industry constituted nearly 10% of all jobs in California, including jobs in industrial design, publishing, aerospace and entertainment. Even though the creative industry is a pillar of the state’s economy, California is just 47th in the nation in arts spending. State leaders interested in sustaining this thriving economy believe we must start by increasing access to K-12 arts education, but budget cuts in schools and pressure to improve English and Math performance have limited the amount of classroom time dedicated to art-based curriculum.

In this guide we will explore what the creative economy is, and whether our K-12 education is preparing students for 21st century jobs in the creative industries.

What Is The Creative Economy?

According to professor Richard Florida, the United States has seen three economic eras. For centuries, our economy was based on ranching and farming, also known as the agricultural age. Starting in the 19th century, our country transitioned to the industrial age, where we saw a rise in manufacturing and other types of industrial, physical work. In the last several decades, our country has developed a post-industrial economy that many people call the creative age. In the creative age, 21st century jobs rely less on the ability to manufacture and produce items, and more on the ability to problem solve, innovate and communicate. The creative economy relies on professionals that “inspire us with their artistry or take powerful, original ideas and transform them into practical and often beautiful goods” (from What is the Creative Economy, KCET). There are many industries that are considered a part of the creative economy, including publishing and printing, entertainment, visual and performing arts, communications arts, product and industrial design and more.

The Creative Economy in California

How important is the creative economy in California? According to the Otis Report on the Creative Economy, nearly 1 in 10 jobs in the state are related to the creative sector. This statistic includes jobs that are both directly and indirectly related to the creative industries. For example when a movie is made, there are many jobs that are created to support the production of that film, including food services, technician positions, security, accountants, lawyers and more. These are the “indirectly related” or “induced” jobs that are important to the creative industries, but are not stand alone creative jobs.

As defined above, the creative sector outputs nearly $300 billion dollars a year, making it an important contributor to the California economy. However, some people question whether the definition should be so broad. They argue that actual “creative practitioners”, those people employed in the visual and performing arts, are quite small in numbers (see the Huffington Post article, “Why You Should be Suspicious of the ‘Creative Economy’” for more information). Regardless of the definition, state leaders and lawmakers are looking at ways to keep creative industries in California alive, and ensure that future generations are prepared to participate in the creative sector jobs that drive this part of our economy.

CALIFORNIA FOCUS: Does California have more reason (than other states) to focus on arts education as a career pathway? Why or why not? Cite specific examples!
Does Arts Education Power the Creative Economy?

Many state leaders believe that arts education is a key component of preparing students to find employment in the creative industries. Arts education starting at an early age can expose students to a number of careers that they may wish to pursue as they get older. Career technical education programs in high school can provide students additional direct training in arts-related fields, preparing them for careers or for further study in college.

Additionally, arts education can provide benefits that extend beyond gaining technical skills. According to the California Alliance for Arts Education, student involvement in the arts has been linked to higher academic performance, increased standardized test scores, greater involvement in community service and lower dropout rates (CAAE fact sheet). The group also advocates that arts education fosters skills that are essential in our 21st century economy: critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity. On the other hand, many argue these skills can be taught in core subjects like Math, English, Science, and Social Studies, and arts education is not the only way to cultivate creativity.

Regardless of how they are taught, the skills mentioned above are becoming increasingly important in all types of jobs. Companies are looking beyond a college degree for people who are innovative, strategic, and who work well in groups. Jobs in the creative economy can also offer higher wages than many other jobs. The Otis Report found that 63 of 80 jobs they studied paid above the annual median salary of $39,000 in California and 51% did not require a college degree. Denise Grande, Director of Arts Education for Arts for All, noted during testimony to the legislature that “creative occupations, which includes jobs like floral designers, media and communication workers, audio equipment technicians, advertising sales agents, makeup artists...offer viable career opportunities that pay living wages, even for those who do not directly continue on to college after high school.” (Joint Committee for the Arts, legislative hearing).

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

From the silent movies of over a century ago to the smart phones of today’s digital age, Californians have excelled at combining technical innovation and creative expression.

- Brainstorm a list of Californians who have made great contributions in technical innovation and creative expression. e.g. George Lucas (Star Wars), William Hewlett (HP)
- Consider the ways in which the people on your list have contributed to the state’s economy. List examples of economic activities that are directly or indirectly related.

In recent years shows like Glee, America’s Got Talent, The Voice, etc., have brought the visual and performing arts to the forefront of pop culture. Has this affected your desire to participate in the arts? How can dance, theatre, arts and music education enhance a student’s ability to learn math, English and science?

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK

Many well-known companies in California are seeking creative individuals for their workforce, including Google, Facebook, Apple, SpaceX and Tesla. Increasingly, these companies are looking for skills that go beyond technical training, like strategic thinking, creative problem-solving and leadership.

Yet many companies are coming across a “skills gap” – in other words, the people applying for jobs do not have the skills the companies want. Bloomberg Business recently published an article on this topic, identifying the top skills that companies find lacking in graduates of MBA programs.

Take a look at the article and consider, how is K-12 education preparing students in these areas? Are these skills only important in business, or are they also important in non-profit or government jobs? Is arts education one of the answers to closing the skills gap? Are core subject areas like English, Math and Science more important?
The State of Arts Education in California

In California, the Education Code recognizes the importance of arts education by requiring schools to provide art courses. However, a study by SRI International found that a few years ago, 89% of California schools did not offer standards-based courses in all four art disciplines (music, visual arts, theatre and dance) and 29% of schools did not offer any standards-based art courses. In large part, this is because shrinking budgets and pressure to improve Math and English test scores have limited the amount of classroom time dedicated to arts-based curriculum. In California, between 1999 and 2004, student enrollment in music education declined by 47% (CAAE fact sheet). The recession prompted further decline in arts education. In 2011-12, 77% of school districts interviewed by the Legislative Analyst’s Office had shifted at least part of the money they received for art and music programs to other spending priorities and 43% had shifted all of their art and music money (LAO Report). California ranks near the bottom of the nation in how much money we dedicate to arts funding in our state. In spite of these facts, the creative economy is still a vibrant and important part of our overall economy. In part, this may be because of the support of arts in our communities. Many schools are getting additional money from parents or outside donors, and many nonprofits are dedicated to supporting the arts generally and arts education specifically.

Should Equity Be A Concern?

In spite of general support from communities, parents and students for arts education, many schools in California are not providing arts instruction, for various reasons including budget cuts and testing priorities. The SRI International study found that, when you look at the state’s schools by income level, those in high poverty areas are far less likely to provide arts instruction than those in higher income areas. This creates an issue of equity, where not all students in California have access to arts education.

Why is this important? There are many benefits associated with arts education. As noted before, arts education can lead to better academic performance, more involvement in the community and career opportunities that pay good wages, some right out of high school. If only some students have access to arts education, it raises the issue of whether our system is giving students fair and equal opportunities across the state.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

In the last few years, many schools have cut arts education due to lack of funds. Although schools in wealthier areas may have access to funds raised from parents or the local community to preserve their arts offerings, other schools may not be able to rely on that kind of money.

- Why do you think arts programs are among the first to be cut in tough financial times?
- What might be the long-term effect on individual students and to the community as a whole if arts education has been eliminated from their schools?
- Should every child’s school day include creative activities? Why or why not?

What subjects do you value most in your education? Are the visual and performing arts included in your answer? Why or why not? Are there specific experiences in your life that influence your answers?

“Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.” – Albert Einstein
Are Schools the Only Answer?

Although some argue that arts education can help build the skills necessary for the modern economy, others believe that creativity can be cultivated in other ways. Given the increasing focus in schools on Math and English, some question whether non-profits, community-based organizations, government agencies and private organizations around the state are better vehicles for offering art classes and encouraging creativity in kids of all ages.

In many areas of the state, these groups are actually partnering with schools to bring more access, quality and equity to arts offerings around the state. By pooling together the resources of all of these groups, the goal is to make it easier to provide arts-based education to all children in California (Information from the Background Paper for the Conference on Access, Equity and Quality in Arts Learning). A good example of this is the Arts for All initiative in Los Angeles. Arts for All is a county-wide collaboration aimed at increasing arts instruction for all students in the county. According to this organization, “No single agency, organization or interest group can ensure high quality arts education for all students in Los Angeles County...shared leadership is necessary to achieve arts education in public schools.”

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

In 2002, the Los Angeles County Arts Commission established a collaborative effort that brings the resources of foundations, corporations and government agencies together to provide access to arts education to students in the 81 districts within the county. For high school students these offerings include “Career Pathways” which focus curriculum and instruction on the unique skills needed to succeed in one of 15 “industry sectors” identified as having the greatest future employment opportunities for today’s students. Among these sectors are the "Arts, Media, and Entertainment," “Engineering and Design” and “Fashion and Interior Design.”

Investigate these three sectors and the pathways associated with them at the following site: http://statecenter.com/resources/industry-sectors

- What information is provided by the site about each sector?
- Take a look at the “programs of study” associated with each sector. How do these programs provide for both academic and career-technical preparation?
- Do you see ways in which these arts-related programs relate to your plans for college and career?

Next, looking at all 15 sectors, prepare a list of the sectors and pathways that are of most interest to you. Talk with mentors, teachers, school counselors, and family members about your interests so that they can help you connect with opportunities and achieve your goals.

APPLICABLE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

1) Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–12
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., quantitative data, video, multimedia) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

2) Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects 6–12
Research to Build and Present Knowledge: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.