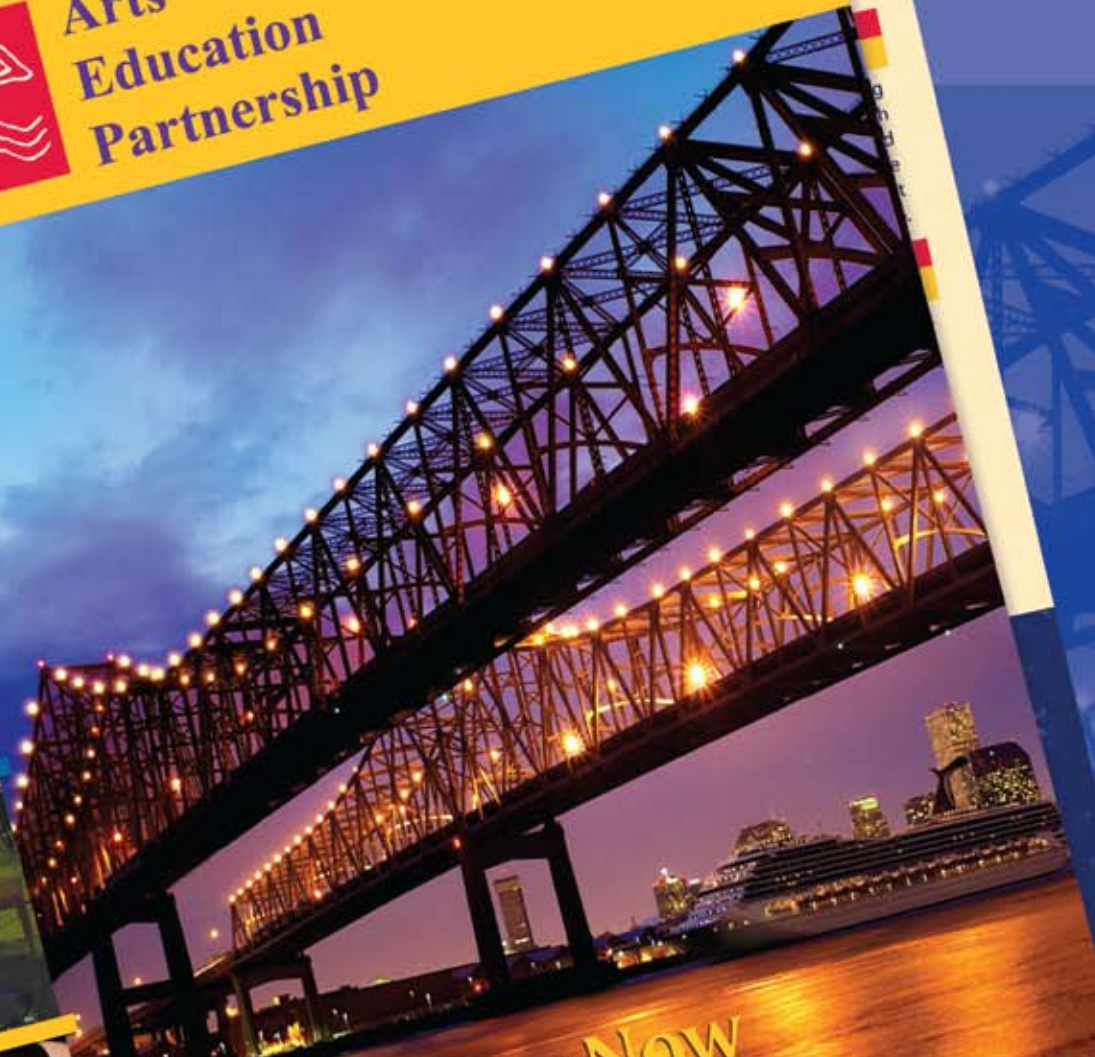


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All Together Now

Building Strong Communities Through
Arts and Education Partnerships

February 12-13, 2009
New Orleans, Louisiana

Reflections
on the Forum

Table of Contents



Introduction: An Invitation to Reflect	3
<i>Sandra Ruppert, Michael Sikes, Laura Smyth</i>	
Shining the Light on What Works	5
<i>Doug Herbert</i>	
New Voices for New Times.....	7
<i>Arnold Aprill, Amy Rasmussen</i>	
What Happened, What's Next?	9
<i>John Abodeely</i>	
Revisiting the ImagiNation	11
<i>Kathleen Cerveny</i>	
Understanding the Issues and Building the Field.....	14
<i>Colin Ilgen, Amira Wizig</i>	
Bringing Change Closer to Home	16
<i>Bethany France, Richard Baker</i>	
Reflecting on New Orleans	18
<i>Eric Booth</i>	
Inspired to Action	22
<i>Tom DeCaigny, Jessica Mele</i>	

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Introduction: An Invitation to Reflect

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When we first started thinking of how we might disseminate information about the AEP Winter Forum in New Orleans, we knew we wanted to shake up the format of a traditional Forum report. At this stage in the evolution of the Partnership, and of the arts education field as a whole, we felt we would learn more about what really happened at the Forum, and what could be shared, by hearing from multiple voices from the field rather than our own interpretation of events. And since the theme of this Forum was All Together Now: Building Strong Communities Through Arts and Education Partnerships, it seemed especially inappropriate that the story of the event unfold through multiple perspectives and voices.

We were also, quite selfishly, eager to hear from you in response to new directions at AEP and in our nation. As Sandra said in her opening remarks, AEP wants to build on our established and solid foundation as the premier source for the field for clear, high-quality, relevant information on research and policy in arts and education. We want our Forums to be an opportunity to weigh and sift that information, as well as a chance to consider challenging and new ideas from both within and outside the field. As a partnership that focuses on both the arts and education – two challenging, complex and changing fields each in its own right – we cannot help embracing many points of view. But we hope we always do so with an eye toward a common goal: ensuring the vital and central role of the arts and creative learning in the quality education of every child. In New Orleans, we brought together government leaders, legislators, grantmakers and practitioners for a sampling of that kind of cross-pollination. It was clear from the eavesdropping we did on both casual and official conversations that participants engaged with the topics on many levels.

**Back to
Table of Contents**



Introduction: An Invitation to Reflect *cont'd.*

It is difficult not to come away from a Forum energized by the work going on all over the country in support of the arts and their place in the lives of young people. When we all get together in one place, the room seems to hum. For this new AEP staff, to have our first meeting together in New Orleans, a place where culture has been at the heart of its survival, was very moving and significant. After two days of informative and challenging presentations, it was an honor for us to end the meeting with a day in the Lower 9th Ward, shared with many of you, in which we had a chance to meet and work alongside artists committed to the recovery of their hometown.

The reflections you'll read in this report come from participants across broad spectra of geography, professional affiliation, role, and stage of career. As you'll see, there is no scarcity of perspectives or opinions, from the content and format of the meeting to the state of the field itself. As a group, they really showcase the great passion and intellectual resources we have at hand as a field. From the large plenary sessions to the small group discussions to unofficial networking time and exploration of our host city, it's obvious from even this small sample that we continue to grow and evolve as a field. We hope that all of our readers – both those of you who were with us in New Orleans and those who were not able to attend – will enjoy these reflections as much as we did.

Finally, we are so grateful for the generosity of time and spirit of our colleagues who agreed to write these reflections. It's a privilege to be part of a field where we can learn so much from each other. Happy reading, and we hope to see you in Cambridge in October!

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Shining the Light on What Works

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A first impression that has stayed with me since the forum in New Orleans is how fortunate we are to have Sandra Ruppert and her team at the helm of the Partnership as it begins a new chapter in its history. What began in 1994 in response to the Goals 2000: Educate America Act has adjusted course with the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, and now the Partnership is poised to help us all navigate another new and exciting era of school improvement. And judging from the high caliber of the speakers and presenters, as well as the depth of our engagement with such issues as 21st century skills, reform of the American high school, and others central to the Forum's agenda, Sandra and her team have put us on a good course to begin the latest journey.

While I was inspired by the thoughts and eloquence with which they were delivered by many of the forum's presenters, the session that provoked the most thought for me was the breakout in which Jean Hendrickson of the Oklahoma A+ Schools and Judi Holifield of Mississippi's Whole Schools Initiative shared their impressive stories of success and the strategies of arts instruction and arts integration that the schools in their networks have used to make the arts part of a complete education. I, like many others, have watched these two statewide networks, along with others like them in other states like North Carolina, where the A+ schools network is in its 14th year, successfully weather the comings and goings of school reform efforts, staying the course and adhering to their core principles – maintaining the integrity of the arts disciplines as well as providing meaningful, cross-disciplinary connections with the other core academic subjects. And, instilling a commitment to that principle and insuring its accomplishment through high-quality professional development and other services for teachers that enables them to do their best for students in and through the arts.

As I listened to Jean and Judi talk about their reform models and their successes, I wondered why it's taking so long to make their and others' experiences with the arts as a strategy for whole school reform more widely recognized and replicated in more places. Just before and since our gathering in New Orleans, several important, national-level organizations that are influential in school improvement

**Back to
Table of Contents**



Shining the Light on What Works *cont'd.*

have focused special attention on arts education and arts integration. [The January/February issue of *Principal*](#), the journal of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, was devoted almost completely to arts education, as was the [February issue of *Middle Ground*](#) from the National Middle School Association. ASCD's March "[Education Update](#)," contains a major article on arts integration, featuring North Carolina's A+ Schools. And [February's *Edutopia*](#), from the George Lucas Educational Foundation, titles its edition, "Why the Arts Must be Saved," and answers that with an excellent set of articles, one about the Woodrow Wilson Elementary School in Bartlesville, Okla., an Oklahoma A+ School. Quite an impressive affirmation of the critical role of the arts in a complete education!

Shortly before our forum in New Orleans, the staff of the Department of Education met and heard from our new Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. Among the things he told us is that, as a nation, we need to identify the things that work for schools and students, shine a light on them, and then scale them up so that more students can benefit from them. I was thinking about these words from the new Secretary as I listened to Jean and Judi in their breakout session. Before and since then, as I've read the above affirmations of the role of the arts in school improvement, I've thought about what an auspicious time this is right now for us to shine that light on the efforts in Oklahoma, Mississippi, North Carolina and many other places where the arts are at the center, rather than the margins, of making schools successful and helping all children to achieve. In fact, we at the Department "shone the light" on arts integration on March 26th, when our Education Policy Briefing series features the [Comprehensive Education Through the Arts](#) program of the Kennedy Center.

Together, with the continuing efforts of the Arts Education Partnership, let's be sure that, as our country invests anew in public education with federal stimulus funds, the light shines brighter and brighter on the arts, allowing them to be a more integral part of the solution for American education.

[Back to
Table of Contents](#)

New Voices for New Times

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**Back to
Table of Contents**

The AEP meeting in New Orleans was built around two key concepts:

- 1) Transitions: in leadership, economics, technologies, populations, approaches to education, etc.
- 2) New Voices: Hearing from points of view outside our community

There were conversations about shifting how we advocate for the arts from the language of “economic impact” and “the front of the house” (products, audiences, the visible) to thinking in terms of “economic drivers” and “the back of the house” (producers, infrastructure, the grassroots). Mississippians Sally Killebrew and Malcolm White explained the innovative economic-recovery-through-the-arts strategies developed by the Mississippi Arts Commission in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Steve Seidel convened conversations about the “Qualities of Quality” research he has been co-leading. There were fruitful new conversations about setting the research agenda for AEP.

All in all, our network seems to be “coming of age” – moving from feeling victimized and underappreciated to strategizing the development of new policies for broad impact. We are also welcoming new young leadership into our field, including the enthusiastic young staff that Director Sandra Ruppert has put together.

And of course, New Orleans is a wonderful city, rising like a phoenix not from fire, but from wind and water. We got to see Mardi Gras parades, including the Mystic Krewe of Barkus – the parade for costumed dogs. CAPE Executive Director Amy Rasmussen visited the Louisiana State History Museum and took a boat ride on the Mississippi – and witnessed 2 weddings on board! CAPE Founding and Creative Director Arnold Aprill went on a “swamp tour”, joined by Wesley Montgomery from the National Performance Network, a shy and retiring gay couple from Los Angeles, and an outspoken group of Mennonites. Both Amy and Arnold returned to Chicago covered with Mardi Gras beads.



New Voices for New Times *cont'd.*

There was a fair amount of discussion at the meeting about the arts developing “21st century work skills”. These conversations resulted in the perennial tug of war between “essentialists” and “instrumentalists” - those who think arts education should be kept “pure” and those who think it is useful to talk about the arts as instrumental in achieving goals that are valued beyond the arts world. The essentialists shot back, “Aren’t we good enough just the way we are, without having to justify our existence with external goals? Athletics and science don’t have to justify themselves.”

Physical education and science actually do have to justify themselves these days. They are on the chopping block just like the arts, pushed out of the curriculum by high stakes test prep in Reading and Math. (The perception that sports and science trump art is a baby boomer holdover from the 50’s, when there was a big push for science education and “physical fitness” catalyzed by fears that the U.S. was “losing the space race” because of the launching of the Russian satellite “Sputnik”.)

And we must also confront the fact that we aren’t good enough just the way we are. Music education that does not include composition is not comprehensive music education. Theater and dance education that do not include playwriting and choreographing are not comprehensive theater and dance education. Visual arts education that limits itself to modernism and does not include the study and practice of pre-modern and post-modern approaches to the arts is not comprehensive visual arts education. Arts education that does not include historical and contemporary understandings of the arts as socially engaged beyond the art world is disinformation about the history and role of the arts in human societies.

It may be useful to move past this false dichotomy between the essentialists and the instrumentalists by shifting our discussion from how arts education supports the development of “21st century work skills” to how “21st century learning skills” (inquiry, collaboration, documentation, reflection, alternate solutions, multimedia representation, interdisciplinary thinking) supports quality arts education in the 21st century.

[Back to
Table of Contents](#)

What Happened, What's Next

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The AEP Forum in New Orleans demonstrated three important elements of arts education work today.

1. The field of arts education is improving its partnerships with civic and public education institutions and leaders.
2. Many infrastructural or policy issues remain unresolved, ultimately hindering arts instruction within public education and community settings.
3. Arts education leaders from around the country are prepared to do work of greater impact, but questions remain about what that work should be.

The plenary sessions programmed for the audience members featured leaders from public education, community service, and government—none of whom were arts or arts education professionals exclusively. Yet most of the featured speakers were deeply engaged in projects about or including arts education in thorough and thoughtful ways. Featured projects represented by the Lieutenant Governors of Wisconsin and Oklahoma and the State Commissioner of Education from Maine offered audience members a view into our field's largest and highest-impact education reform projects using the arts. These projects and the executive-level leaders that represent them demonstrate the success of our field's effort to make arts education an issue of importance and use to leaders working outside of arts education and the arts.

Throughout the Forum, breakout sessions featured projects and specific, often local efforts at improving the consistency and quality of arts provision. Each of the issues addressed by the programs profiled in breakout sessions decries an infrastructural weakness in the arts education field: state and local policy; student assessment in the arts; research for 21st century education issues; visible leadership for our field; youth participation in service and arts education provision; and other issues. A lack of field-wide understanding or consensus about these issues hinders our progress in partnerships with education and civic leaders. Finding resolution to these misunderstood dilemmas and disseminating them would be a great boon to our effort

**Back to
Table of Contents**



What Happened, What's Next *cont'd.*

to provide arts education to all children. How can AEP and other national service organizations promote the quick and thorough resolution of the critical issues challenging arts education? Once resolved, how can resolutions be put into practice in local communities across the nation? How can we advance practice in the arts education field to ensure higher impact programs and quicker progress?

Finally, it was clear from several one-on-one conversations that senior leaders—those with decades of experience, huge amounts of energy, and remarkable success in their careers—are eager to take on innovative if risky projects that promise huge rewards if done well. Individuals from all over the country discussed upcoming networking opportunities, site visits, and needs to outsource unrelated work to partners better able to handle it. Finding new and better ways to achieve our goal of arts education for all children is of paramount importance to our field's most successful members.

The formidable question remains: What projects and work should be done? What are the greatest levers for change?

These questions are particularly pertinent to those who are already at the leading edge of their field. What are they supposed to do next to make another, a newer, or a better wave of change in arts learning for their students?

[Back to
Table of Contents](#)

Revisiting the ImagiNation

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Back to Table of Contents

In December 2007, the Cleveland Foundation hosted a meeting of the Arts Education Partnership (AEP), a non-political think tank and consortium of organizations supporting the arts in learning. At that meeting, AEP rolled out a major frame-changing concept: to create the ImagiNation – a nationwide, grassroots movement to create public will in support of arts education for all children.

This was only a concept, but AEP recognized that all the data-gathering, hand-wringing and pontificating by the arts community about the value of the arts had gotten us nowhere in decades past and was not likely to get us anywhere – ever. If there was to be positive change, ordinary people would need to value the arts in their hearts and minds. But how?

Last week at the Spring Forum of the Arts Education Partnership in New Orleans, Eric Friedenwald-Fishman, a strategic communications expert, suggested the “how.” Through successful work in the areas of children and families, the environment, public health and human rights, Mr. Friedenwald-Fishman’s organization, Metropolitan Group, has developed a Public Will Framework to organize social impact campaigns to have long-term and movement-building influence.

Mr. Friedenwald-Fishman argued that the traditional uses of financial and institutional capital to leverage social change – in all areas of society – are no longer working. Institutions at the top of the social structure (foundations and cultural entities, even the National Endowment for the Arts) shouting about how important the arts are will not make a difference.

The example he gave of how institutional hierarchy and traditional policy and enforcement models cannot solve social problems hit very close to home. Thirty-five years ago, we (the nation) had a water pollution problem. Then (through Cleveland’s river catching fire, our lake’s death and the leadership of Ohio Sen. Louis Stokes) we passed the Clean Water Act. Government enforced the shutting down of 100,000 pipes that dumped toxic waste into our rivers. Hurrah!



Revisiting the ImagiNation *cont'd.*

But today, more rivers than ever are polluted, not from industrial sources but by every American impacting their local watershed with fertilizer, asphalt runoff, flushed prescription drugs, etc. And you can't monitor and enforce laws for every single American. But now we have the widespread, diversely engaged environmental movement. Launched in countless ways by individuals and groups large and small, the movement informally develops common messages and shares information and passion, even across wide political divides.

In brief, Mr. Friedenwald-Fishman said that when individuals in communities are armed with information, are helped to imagine a different life than what they were born into, and are given the ability to engage with one another, public will can be built that can lead to change.

He said the frame of reference and the messages about the arts need to change. The arts must be re-framed in the context of social values. It's not that children will do better in school if the arts are part of the curriculum. It's that they will do better in life. The opportunity is for success, not just graduation. We need to reframe the concept of "achievement." Achievement is not merely a score on a test. It is the ability to function in a world that requires creative thinking, problem-solving and learning to work with others.

"And when have we needed creative solutions and critical thinking more than now?" he asked. "You can't have great science without creative thinking. You can't be a great mathematician without practice in abstract thinking. You can't be a leader in a diverse world without understanding different cultural references and points of view."

Well, I get the need for the kind of grassroots, cross-political movement that both the ImagiNation concept and the Public Will framework outline. And I see that Mr. Friedenwald-Fishman's work may offer a strategy for implementation.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Revisiting the ImagiNation *cont'd.*

But I still believe there needs to be some leadership – not by fiat or regulation or enforcement. But somehow the information and messages need to be crafted and disseminated beyond the “choir.” Somehow the opportunities to bring diverse people together to imagine an alternative future for our children and engage in common action toward that future must be created. The match has to be struck and the dry grass lit for the ImagiNation to become a raging grassroots fire of change.

The conceptual work done by AEP in 2007 and the strategic ideas put forth at this year’s Forum seem to be in alignment. Can we hope that leadership and a plan of engagement will emerge?

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[Back to Table of Contents](#)



Understanding the Issues and Building the Field

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The mission of the Arts Education Partnership (AEP) is to ensure that every child in public schools across the country receives a high quality education in the arts. AEP director Sandra Ruppert acknowledged the importance of the mission on the first day of the forum, emphasizing the need for continued partnerships among the participating agencies and organizations. Over the course of two days, we observed that many of the obstacles standing in the way of building effective partnerships could be overturned, if only there were a better way to package the idea that arts education considerably impacts children's cognitive development. This point clearly links the measurable difference in cognitive skills with someone who receives an education in the arts, in contrast to someone who is denied that experience. Speaking ethically, how can we deny this gap, particularly when it affects poorer districts and children the most?

This question came up again in the small group session, "Believe it or Not! 10,000 People Participated in an Online Arts Education Blog in One Week", in which we identified some of the major ideas or trends occurring in the blog, as well as pointed out obstacles facing the project of a public arts forum. The overall impression was that the blog needed a more solid research foundation. To give the blog a firmer sense of direction, a scientific platform that would clearly demonstrate how the arts affect learning was needed. We needed to clarify how the arts impact learning with longer-term qualitative as well as quantitative studies that produce measurable, relevant data. By showing a clear link between the arts and cognitive development, this would substantiate our field's position on the claim that a high quality arts education cannot be dismissed. It is a moral imperative.

The forum provided a vivid snapshot of where the field of arts education is right now, with recommendations for the direction we need to take collectively. Our need to address 21st Century learning skills came up numerous times, with discussions regarding education reform as a whole, changing skills sets sought by hiring companies,

**Back to
Table of Contents**

Understanding the Issues and Building the Field *cont'd.*

and how our field can situate itself around such skills. Participants were called to action as agents of change and charged with responsibility to provide a more effective and visible framework to engage all constituents, contribute to research in the field, and seek additional ways to collaborate, unite our methodologies, and build on best practices.

Amidst a changing political landscape and struggling economy, with a recovering New Orleans as our meeting place, these ideas resonated for us and we are inspired to add to the momentum and need for change and advancement in our growing field. Throughout the forum, the collective mood evoked a sense of urgency and hope. As graduate students weeks away from completing thesis work and graduating, we saw the audience for the work we hope to publish and felt the need to contribute and to provide additional perspectives. Student and classroom teacher perspectives must also be brought to the forefront of research and work must be delivered with cohesiveness and intentionality. And as we learned from the overwhelming blog response, we must tap into the field of technology and seek additional ways to connect our work and our thinking to build on ideas from forum to forum.

We hope to honor and build on the work of leaders in the field and grow into our own in the future. For now, we look to the New Orleans AEP forum as a source of motivation and inspiration for all that has been and must still be achieved as a collective whole. This forum indeed demonstrated that, like its title *All Together Now*, forging strong partnerships are the direction we need to head in more than ever, and AEP's thematic year of "Transitions" positions us all to embark on such a journey together.

[Back to
Table of Contents](#)

Bringing Change Closer to Home

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The AEP Forum in New Orleans renewed our commitment to arts education which fosters imagination, creation, and innovation (ICI) as worthy and essential goals of education. Since the NEA's Education Leaders Institute, we, as Louisiana arts education leaders, have been actively seeking and promoting ways to make ICI a reality throughout the curriculum but especially emphasizing the visual and "performing arts' unusual power to bring this intent to reality." Louisiana's Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu's speech to the plenary about preparing the 21st century workforce through arts education was entirely consistent with this aim. He spoke specifically of his Cultural Economy Initiative, which created jobs in the creative industries and helped to establish arts and culture as a viable sector of Louisiana's economy. The Louisiana team recognizes the economic gains from such an innovative approach and also sees the tremendous societal benefits.

The session moderated by Gene Wilhoit, Executive Director of CCSSO was particularly enlightening. The panel consisted of the lieutenant governors of Oklahoma and Wisconsin and the Commissioner of Education for Maine. Lt. Governor Lawton of Wisconsin said, "Arts are core curriculum" and that Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) should include the arts to make STEAM. Her point was that without the creative contribution of an arts education, it would be difficult to move inquiry to innovation. Maine's Commissioner Gendron consistently repeated that all education was going to have to be "done differently." This includes achieving the proper balance of all essential elements, including the arts. This session significantly contributed to presentations that we have been making to groups throughout the State.

Another session that helped galvanize our thinking was "Envisioning National Learning Expectations for the Arts," a small group discussion led by Frank Philip, the CCSSO Director of the National Conference on Student Assessment. It was attended by arts education program consultants from ten states and representatives of AEP, NEA, NASAA, and the USDOE. This was an opportunity to begin the consensus building process to create new learning

**Back to
Table of Contents**



Bringing Change Closer to Home *cont'd.*

expectations in the arts and provide a better balance to the curriculum. The essential next steps of making the arts play their essential roles in creating a productive and democratically effective society were examined.

Also, the session on “What are We Learning from Statewide Whole School Arts Integration Initiatives” led by OK A+ Schools Executive Director Jean Hendrickson and MS Whole Schools Initiative Director Judi Hollified encompassed a transformation in education in which Louisiana hopes to achieve in the near future. This session focused on whole schools arts integration and research-driven school transformation that is happening in two states. It was clear that a similar model school program can possibly be instituted in Louisiana in a way that directly supports common themes of successful education focused on imagination, creativity, innovation, technology, democratic learning, and 21st Century Skills.

The presentations helped us realize that there is momentum for improvement, not just change, in the field of education. There is a strong desire for arts to be recognized and truly become a necessary component of a balanced curriculum. Assessment is an important but limited component of education necessary for informed decision making but not as an end in itself. It must sit beside the implementation of arts experiences that are inviting, humane, just, and excellent in a manner assuring equal access to all students.

[Back to
Table of Contents](#)


Reflecting on New Orleans

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**Back to
Table of Contents**




I arrived at this gathering of our clan with an unusual perspective. I had given myself a self-proclaimed sabbatical, so for the 14 months prior to the convening, I had little direct contact with the field. Freelancers don't get sabbaticals, so I undertook this luxurious (and expensive) opportunity because I needed to go deeper, in my own understandings and in the ideas I had to contribute. So I arrived at the Forum with very fresh eyes. Everything seemed extremely vivid. I was struck by several impressions, the strongest ones described below; apologies that they read like challenges to the field, but that is what I felt. The biggest impression was personal, however--how many truly generous and good people we have in this community. I had fallen out of the habit of seeing how much heart everyone brought to the conversations--with my year's distance, I couldn't miss its bright light.

Sorry to say it, but as a field, we seem pretty stuck. I heard exactly the same conversations, questions, complaints, and concerns I had heard 14 months before. And indeed, these were largely the same issues and questions I had heard for a lot of years. The time away gave me a fresh appreciation for how smart, committed, concerned and hardworking as we are in this field, but as much good learning as we foster in our programs, we do not learn well as a field. We are stuck in a lot of ruts.

Listening to colleagues, I could feel the weight of so many years of struggling within resource scarcity; I felt the cost of laboring so hard so long in a field that is largely ignored by the education powerbrokers, largely balkanized by arts institutions--all the while the arts themselves are a peripheral concern to the American public.

We heard a lot of inspiring things spoken in plenary sessions and in breakout rooms, but I heard little as a result that sounded like the beginnings of change. This is not to say good things will not happen as a direct result of experiences at the Forum, indeed splendid developments may arise that I didn't happen to hear, but the vibe was more resigned than resilient, more the recipient than the instigator. I cheered the Congressional passage of \$50 million for the NEA along with the others in the room, but upon reflection, that amount was

Reflecting on New Orleans *cont'd.*



insultingly small by stimulus package standards--and we had to go to the wall, once again, arguing our value just to get that gesture of inclusion. We also cheered the fact that we got the arts extricated from the category of zoos and casinos. I came away with a sad heart for how heroic and disempowered we are. No wonder many of the dialogues felt stuck and familiar to me—still arguing about arts integration vs. arts instruction, people fighting just to keep their programs funded at bare survival levels—because we have not become a potent community. We don't know what to focus on, we don't know how to agree on some basic issues and gather our strength.

I was struck by the dearth of young people in our Forum rooms. For years, we have all given lip service to the problem of emerging leadership, and still the problem worsens. The current economic stress will probably exacerbate the problem--aging leaders like me are staying longer, younger talent is suffocating and leaving the field. And the people who find their way into the field are no better prepared to succeed than we were. We have to do better than this. For years I have been urging colleagues to bring a young leader to every important gathering, like AEP Forums and other conferences. Of course that is expensive, but not nearly as expensive as a lack of impassioned, informed young leadership. To me, this isn't just a problem anymore, it's a crisis. And how desperately we need their ideas, their energy, their generation's strengths, their irreverence and challenge. Whenever in breakout sessions I heard young people speak up (it happened very rarely in plenary sessions), I felt the energy in the room surge.

Creativity. It is a buzzword in the field, and it appeared in a lot of the sessions and plenary panels. I believe this is a huge opportunity area for us, so I was glad to see its visibility. But I was struck by our fuzzy and generic use of the term and everything that surrounds it. We have no sense of what we mean by it, we would not agree on its core capacities, or how to develop them, or if they can be developed, or if they can be assessed, or what the arts' distinctive offering to the creativity question in education and business really is. This is one area where the American public at large feels we have something of real value to offer. This is one area where we

[Back to
Table of Contents](#)



Reflecting on New Orleans *cont'd.*

have an increasing call from corporate America, and from some school reform leaders, to raise creativity as a priority in schools. But to my eyes, we are woefully unprepared and naive about the issues involved and unaware of how we might grab the opportunity.

I believe American schooling changes only when the business community gets scared—Sputnik, *A Nation at Risk*. We have such an opportunity now. The development of creative capacity, our ultimate entrepreneurial asset, is being fast-tracked for development overseas, not only in the European Union but in India and China too. U.S. Corporate leaders see that this will erode our final competitive advantage. The time to get serious about creativity is now; but are we willing to give creativity the priority place, not just the lip service?; and are we willing to apply some rigor to our own thinking and practices? Our actions would argue we are nowhere near willing. I heard a lot of talk about creativity, but I didn't hear anything that led me to sense we were anywhere near ready to get serious about this serious opportunity.

I was particularly struck by two breakout sessions I attended-- Steve Seidel's presentation on the Project Zero/Wallace Foundation Qualities of Quality research which became a real investigation of the foundation issues rather than a reporting of data--this stayed with me, provoked my deeper thinking, and challenged me to consider ways we can determine quality in programs where we think we know it when we see it, but don't have ways to document it so those in the room can trust in what we determine. And the panel on national service with Kiff Gallagher of the Musician's National Service Initiative and the New Orleans leader of Teach for America--two young leaders challenging us to consider our usual work in remarkably different ways.

AEP itself. I was grateful to AEP for a lot of their choices at the Forum. Good speakers--I was especially excited by Eric Friedenwald-Fishman--a fresh voice from a different field providing real down-to-earth ways to change our advocacy game. I wished for a whole Forum focused around his challenge to build public will for arts education in a planned,

[Back to
Table of Contents](#)

Reflecting on New Orleans *cont'd.*

coordinated way. I could see those Forum participants working out a sketch of a plan together that could make an appreciable change in our status quo.

I am grateful at the way the AEP staff is genuinely soliciting our input for the necessary research agenda. Sandra and her enthusiastic staff set a very positive tone at the conference for me. But to my reentering eyes we seemed more like a field that likes to get together and talk than a field that likes to get things done that lead to change. I hope over time we can set our sights on specific action areas we can address together, and convince ourselves that we CAN effectuate change.

Refreshing to have these personal essays as a way of documenting the impact of the conference. Nice piece of innovation, AEP.

[Back to
Table of Contents](#)

Inspired to Action



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Atending national conferences on arts education is often like going to camp – you meet amazing people from all over the country who share your interests, you make some art, you talk about what you do at home, and then you go back to where you came from and fall back into your old life.

The February 2009 AEP Forum in New Orleans was different, due in large part to the transitions currently taking place in local governments and financial markets. Those transitions crept into our plenaries and interactions. We were sitting next to a colleague when she learned that state legislators at home had eliminated her budget. We nervously listened to rumors about the federal stimulus bill's contents - money for the NEA being inserted, deleted, or inserted and deleted, or deleted and then inserted again. We all cheered together when the announcement came that the stimulus bill had passed in the Senate. There was a momentum behind this Forum that felt exciting and urgent.

The political and economic ups and downs were the backdrop for some big-picture re-visioning during AEP's Research Agenda session, "The Arts and 21st Century Learning Skills." Instead of presenting answers – program models, or funding streams, or management strategies – participants asked questions; large, open-ended, difficult questions. We then grouped the questions by whatever categories or themes we saw emerge. It was a marketplace of inquiry – we bumped into each other, we negotiated with each other, we compromised and grouped and disrupted and split groups of questions. Our brainstorming from that session will launch AEP's Research and Policy Agenda. It was a welcome opportunity to contribute tangibly to a national initiative. Our collaboration on that day was a necessary transition from conference participation to collective action. During the forum in New Orleans, we sat at the nexus of federal, state, and local arts and education policy. We shared common values for learning in and through the arts.

**Back to
Table of Contents**

Inspired to Action *cont'd.*



Then, we all went home to communities in crisis. In San Francisco, Mayor Gavin Newsom asked all city agencies to cut 25% of their General Fund use, a mandate that left the Arts Commission's Arts Education Program in jeopardy. The California state budget crisis endangered money for education and art in schools. The San Francisco Department of Children Youth and Their Families cancelled its biennial Children's Summit. The First Five Commission of California cancelled its statewide stakeholder conference. At a time of economic uncertainty, supporters of children and families have few common gathering points.

We felt lucky to be part of a national arts education community. We took what we learned from research and panels at the AEP Forum and turned it into advocacy at home. Our conversations and questions with colleagues became the blueprint for our conversations with local policymakers, many of whom do not share our value of art as education. When the San Francisco Unified School District's Strategic Plan called for a "21st Century Curriculum", we partnered with other arts education practitioners and district staff to say, "The arts can do that."

AEP's choice of Transitions as a forum theme was a prescient one. The speakers and sessions situated the field of arts education in today's political and economic contexts, which are themselves changing: education reform in New Orleans, state arts policy and economics; regime change in Washington. This was not the usual return from camp. This time, we could not just return to business as usual. We came back with new tools – ideas, inspiration and connections - for change at home.

[Back to
Table of Contents](#)

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