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Life Needs Art

Asserting Creative Rights for Oregon Students

Oregon poet Kim Stafford, an award-winning writer, oral historian and teacher who leads the Northwest Writing Institute at Lewis and Clark Graduate School, recently wrote and unveiled Oregon's Declaration of Creative Rights. The declaration is slated to help the Oregon Arts Commission launch a statewide network of arts education advocates.

Stafford, in explaining how he crafted the declaration, said: "I turned to Thomas Jefferson for help, and modeled the 'Declaration' after his words in 1776, complete with long sentences and capricious capitalization. It was great fun to write, despite the serious purpose: I really think Oregon's future is at stake if kids don't have early creative experiences in school."

This is such great stuff. The literary value of Stafford's words encourages all of us to afford all children early and frequent experiences in creativity so that each child is free to advance through access to art.

Stafford, in fashioning the affirmation after our country's declaration of rights, wrote: "We hold early Creative Experience to be indelible, and that all children need be offered, equally and abundantly, certain Rights that secure access to the formative Encounters of Art—and that among these are making original Work, savoring creative Practice, and the Pursuit of one's own generous Vision and articulate Voice."

The purpose, of course, is to inspire us to action. But what action can we take? First we can become knowledgeable of how creativity impacts our children's ability to process and advance their learning skills. With that understanding we can serve as advocates to help change the nature of education within our schools.

Now more than ever it seems we need creativity to flourish — not only to advance our imaginations and our ability to think outside of the box, but to nourish our souls and seek that artistic re-

flection and connectivity that is so important to our development. Novel thinking, crucial to the success and productivity in this technology-based environment, begins with the creative arts at an early age.

Carl Sagan, who helped to launch several Mars missions, said it is the tension between creativity and skepticism that has produced the stunning and unexpected findings of science. Therefore, it must be our job to help frame creativity in education as a dynamic human enterprise that entails the nature of risk taking as an essential means of learning.

From a website on advancing arts education comes this: Creativity is an attitude that demands that you manage your thinking. It's a way of blending together data based research, which is logical and rational thought, with outrageous exploratory know-how that comes from your intuitive wisdom.

When you integrate this intuitive ability with learned information and knowledge, you operate using all your resources which provides flashes of insight and recharges your thinking.

We hold this statement to be true. The arts provides an avenue to build the workforce of tomorrow yielding increased academic performance, reduced absenteeism and better skill-building. An even more compelling advantage is the striking success of arts-based educational programs among disadvantaged populations, especially at-risk and incarcerated youth.

Don't be limited by familiar ways of thinking and acting. Art is not just what your kids bring home and put on the refrigerator nor is it just your favorite band or movie. The creative force is with us and expanding your children's (and yours as well) imagination makes for much better brain power.

For more information: www.oregonartseducationcongress.org.