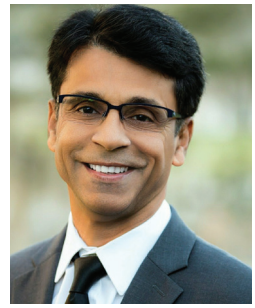
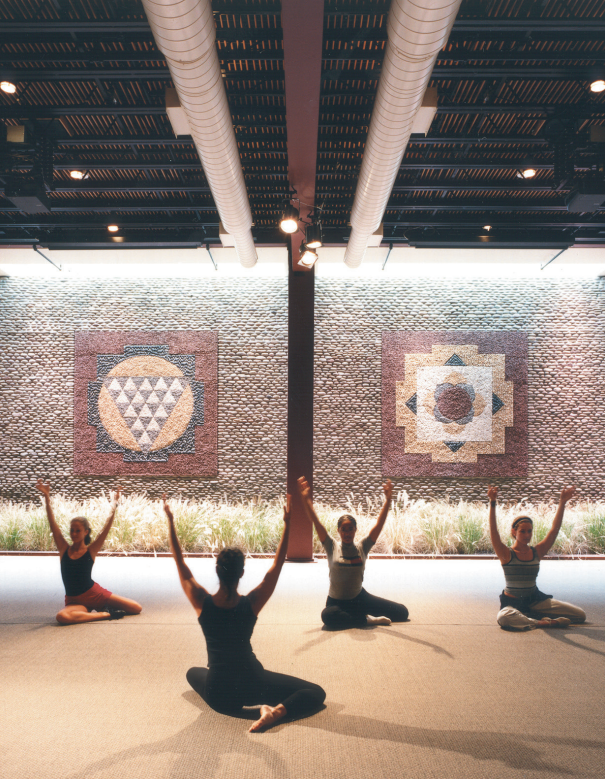
"...THE CONCEPT OF UBIQUITY REFERS TO THE AVAILABILITY OF AND ACCESS TO ART THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL, WELL INTEGRATED INTO EVERY PART OF THE CURRICULUM AND FULLY ENMESHED IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT."



Prakash Nair and Louis Serota from leading architects Education Design International, explore their three essential components for the design of arts-based learning spaces in schools.

UBIQUITY, VARIETY AND CREATIVITY

It was not so long ago when art instruction in schools was considered less important than the "real" purpose of education: to help students master subjects like science and mathematics. This trend is being rapidly reversed as the evidence mounts regarding the value of the arts in the school curriculum for learners up to the age of 18. Sufficient data exists to overwhelmingly support the belief that study and participation in the fine arts is a key component in improving learning throughout all academic areas. Evidence of its effectiveness in reducing student dropout, raising student attendance, developing better team players, fostering a love for learning, improving greater student dignity, enhancing student creativity and producing a citizen more prepared for the workplace of tomorrow has been documented in studies held in many varied settings, from school campuses to corporate America.



The fine arts also provide learners with non-academic benefits such as promoting self-esteem, motivation, aesthetic awareness, cultural exposure, creativity and improved emotional expression, as well as social harmony and an appreciation of diversity[1]. Similar benefits[2] have been attributed to the performing arts such as music and drama. Those benefits include:

- Better memory
- Improved hand-to-eye coordination
- More engagement in school
- More success in society
- Emotional development
- Pattern-recognition skills
- Building of imagination and curiosity
- Relaxing
- Building discipline
- Teamwork
- Self-confidence

Arts spaces in traditional schools are often set up in ways that limit their utility and reduce the benefits noted above. For example, while it is definitely a good idea for schools to have dedicated art rooms, they are less effective when such rooms are just repurposed classrooms not specifically designed for art. In this article we will demonstrate, using actual examples, why an approach that incorporates the ideas of ubiquity, variety and creativity is essential when planning and designing schools to fully embrace and celebrate the arts.

Ubiquity

Because art has the potential to enrich every subject, the concept of ubiquity refers to the availability of and access to art throughout the school, well integrated into every part of the curriculum and fully enmeshed in the built environment. Here are some specific ways in which the concept of ubiquity can be expressed in school design:

- Display of student work: This can be a student-created sculpture at the entrance to the school, a prominent display of student artwork in the entrance lobby or in school hallways, or a formal exhibition of student work.
- "Art Everywhere": Spaces are designed so that art can happen anywhere, such as in the commons area of the school and also in classrooms and adjoining areas where students spend so much of their time
  The "Art Everywhere" concept goes beyond just providing opportunities for students to do art in different parts of the school. It is also about making the whole school more "artistic" from a design standpoint.

Variety

The idea of variety refers to the various types of art and how spaces that are tailored to fit those specific needs are more likely to be successful. "Arts" is a generic term

but, in fact, different kinds of art have different spatial needs. The more specialised the spaces become, the more effectively they can cater to activities. Ideally, there needs to be different spaces for drawing and painting; sculpture; fashion design; building and making; and performing arts like music and drama.

Creativity

It is especially important to be creative when it comes to properly designing schools for a good arts curriculum. While artistically designed buildings themselves play a role in creating the proper ambience for studies that emphasise art, it is important not to stop there. When it comes to existing buildings having to be redesigned to better integrate the arts into the everyday life of students, creativity becomes essential. Leysin American School in Switzerland was able to creatively redesign an old, abandoned hotel/sanitorium building into a school with a wonderful arts studio. Similarly, the American School of Bombay overcame the limitations of its old building, previously used as a dormitory, to create a Black Box theatre and "sky studios" for art on the roof.

In his 2006 book, *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel Pink predicted that: "The future belongs to a different kind of person with a different kind of mind: artists, inventors, storytellers – creative and holistic 'right-brain' thinkers whose abilities mark the fault line between who gets ahead and who doesn't." Pink's prediction is now moving towards realisation at breakneck speed, even as schools are caught in facilities optimised for a standardised curriculum and out of sync with the new imperative to nurture students' creativity and problem-solving skills. School redesign that focuses on arts-based spaces to make them functional and inspirational could be the best place to begin a journey of transformation that the whole educational enterprise desperately needs. ■

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1 "The Importance of Fine Arts Education", KATY Independent School District, compiled by Bob Bryant. http://www.katyisd.org/dept/finearts/Pages/The-Importance-of-Fine-Arts-Education-.aspx
2 "The Benefits of Music Education" by Laura Lewis Brown. PBS for Parents. http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/music-arts/the-benefits-of-music-education/