

**Abridged Transcript of Darlene Carman's  
March 20, 2004 Presentation**

**The Importance of Art to our Children and Society**

When we think of progress, we think in terms of new ideas and products, which as scientists now know, are creations of visual thinking. Two great artists of the 16th century provide insight to the creative power of visual thinking.

Michelangelo the sculptor of David in Florence and many other beautiful carvings, said, "I clearly see the form trapped inside the marble stone and with my chisel I remove the excess material to free it."

The tremendous visual thinking skill of Leonardo Da Vinci allowed him to create on paper very elaborate designs and devices that were 200 years ahead of the technology of his day. Things like the welding torch, helicopter, propellers, machine-guns to name a few.

These two great artists were like the Rock Stars of their time and they influenced many followers who tried to emulate their greatness by studying art. Though most did not gain the recognition they desired, society and culture gain from the development of their creative visual thinking skills. New ideas, devices and social progress were the byproduct derived from their passion for art.

Today our society's greatness is defined by technology. Wouldn't you agree that electronic communication namely the ability to communicate to anyone in the world is one of the most important advancements of our time? Keeping in mind that before this advancement, the way to deliver the written message was by train, ship or horseback. In the late 1700's and early 1800's thousands of scientists around the world were experimenting with electricity developing all sorts of new devices. I'll bet you think it was a scientist who invented electronic communication. Nope. It was a professional artist and teacher with no scientific background. Using mostly the power of creative visual thinking, Samuel Morse developed the first electronic communication device- the telegraph and code.

The common skill that artists used to create their magic is visual thinking. After years of striving to understand the magic of creativity scientists, through clinical research, have revealed some interesting facts about visual thinking.

Visual thinking, also called spatial thinking, is a major function of creativity and takes place in the right side of the brain. The right brain breaks down information or knowledge it receives into mental images or patterns. It organizes these images and patterns by comparative relationship to one another to form a picture. So if it is a puzzle, for example, the right brain has the ability to compare the similarity of puzzle pieces and mentally fit them together. New images can be created from incomplete patterns that just suddenly evolve. We call this inspiration or insight. Visual thinking works without using words or symbols.

The left-brain on the other hand uses words and symbols to describe, define, manage and maintain knowledge. Educators say the learning process of the left-brain is Sequential. Sequential refer to a logical step-by-step process that puts the proper words and symbols together to build knowledge. The knowledge that is accumulated by the left-brain is memorized and put to use as required. It is important to note that the left-brain does not have the ability to create its own symbols for building knowledge. It can only receive new information from experience, teachers or the right brain etc. Although the two sides think differently, they work together.

If, for example, the brain was General Motors, the left side would be the Factory and Warehouse facilities and the right side would be the Design and Research departments.

Clinical studies suggest that art activities are one of the better ways to stimulate the right brain and to improve visual thinking skills.

Fact, children who regularly participate in art activities during their early school years develop stronger language and problem solving skills.

Before entering school children gain knowledge by exploring their environment and by parental direction. When hand and eye coordination begins to develop, they discover art as a way to express feelings and to communicate. They like to draw themselves and how they fit into their environment. You get little stick figures representing the people in their home, the house, sun that forms their first pictures.

As language develops, the left side of the brain begins to organize and memorize words relating to things, feelings, places and other factors that make up their environments. Speaking, writing and reading become the dominant way to communicate and gain knowledge. Verbal thinking now dominates and the importance of visual thinking diminishes.

With the vast amount of knowledge children must learn to build their careers and to be productive citizens, strong verbal left-brain skills are a must. The school systems do a great job structuring a very efficient learning curriculum for our children.

With the emphasis on learning skills tipping heavily on the sequential left side, parents and educators need to strike a balance by providing children with visual activities that nourish the right side of their brains. The extent to which children develop their creative right brain spatial skills will determine how effectively and creatively there're able to exploit the knowledge they have acquired.

This is where families can help restore the balance by providing a fun creative environment where visual thinking is nurtured through art, music and dance. Physical activities that involve hand, eye and body coordination stimulate the right brain.

Art is not just for children. Stressed and overworked adults need art in their lives as well. Not only to relax and therapy, art stimulates a creative approach to solving problems. Have you heard of the term thinking outside the box? Thinking inside the box is thinking with known knowledge and is the way the left-brain works. Thinking outside the box is thinking with unrelated knowledge or creating new knowledge and is the way the right brain works. Art helps adults find creative solutions.

Seeing great art at museums and galleries is not the way to activate visual thinking you have to experience it on a meaningful and emotional level. You have to do art for the process to work.

TV is not a visual thinking activity because the TV is giving you the pictures therefore; your right doesn't need to get very involved.

Many parents say to me "I don't have any talent for drawing. So paint or do ceramics. We don't create art to be famous. We include art in our lives to express ourselves and to develop observational skills.

Here is a sample of ways a family can weave art into everyday activities: (I am just dealing here with visual art.)

Have a wall at home to feature family art every week. Create a home gallery.

Do a funny family cartoon album. "Funny things that happen in my family". Do only positive things no making fun of someone. Ex: my bird attacking the squeaky dog toy I brought home one day.

Help your children start a journal of nature around them with words and lots of pictures. This will help them to become more in tune with their environment while developing their visual skills.

Create a picture book of your pet or favorite sport.

Have your children design placemats for your table. (For a modest amount a local print shop will laminate your children's works.)

With your children, make most of the family and relatives birthday and holiday gifts at home.

Next family outing like sports event, the zoo or whatever draw or paint your favorite part, thing or activity when you get home.

Doodling, do it any time while thinking. Doodling helps keeps your right brain active and stimulated. Look for images, patterns, faces, numbers and letters in your doodles.

For young children drawing a picture is a very effective way to communicate. Find time to draw with them. Using stick figures you can describe or explain a situation that would be difficult to explain in just words. It is an enjoyable interactive experience because you are communicating on an equal level.

Why at this time in our social and economic history have children's art activities become so important. Daniel H Pink in the Introduction of his book "A Whole New Mind" readily answers this question. "The last few decades have belonged to a certain kind of person with a certain kind of mind-computer programmers who could crunch code, lawyers who could craft contracts, MBAs who could crunch numbers. But the keys to the kingdom are changing hands. The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a different kind of mind-creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers. These people-artists, inventors, designers, storytellers, caregivers, consolers, big picture thinkers-will now reap society's richest rewards and share its greatest joys".

The migration of our economy and society from the Information Age to, as Daniel Pink calls it, the Conceptual Age is well under way. It's not that we wanted or planned it; it's just an outgrowth of successful capitalism. The following work force trends will illustrate the conditions that are the energizing this migration:

- A growing number of major U.S. Manufactures are out sourcing their production support and assemble jobs to Mexico, Ireland and Asia.
- The Vast majority of electronic assemble of U.S. consumers' products now take place in China.
- Routine computer programming work is now computerized and more advanced computer programming jobs are now being out sourced to India. (India is currently graduating over 300,000 engineers a year from their Universities to fill these positions.)
- Advancements in Computer and Information technology have allowed many U.S. Companies to either computerize or out source their clerical functions and customer service jobs.

Just as earlier generation of workers moved our society from Farms to Factories then onto Information Technology, so continues our migration to a society where conceptualists will drive progress, achieve professional success, and accumulate wealth.

What is important to parents is that they carefully consider this movement towards the Conceptual Age when they evaluate the following questions: What career path should my child embark on? Does it have the potential to provide professional satisfaction and/or wealth? What educational background and/or training will my child need to succeed?

Copyright: 2005  
by Darlene Carman