

## Bringing Drama to the Core



### A Creative Approach to Teaching Core Subject Areas

| BY DR. RALPH G. PERRINO AND J. DENISE PERRINO |

Daniel H. Pink's book, *A Whole New Mind*, posits that the age of left brain dominance in the workplace and the American economic engine is fading. That is, the "linear, computer-like" emphasis of the Information Age of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is being displaced by a more right brain emphasis that will require "high concept" and "high touch" skills. The dichotomy between left brain and right brain, in Pink's view, will move towards the artistic class—those who can "empathize with others", "understand the subtleties of human interaction", invent and create and find joy and meaning in the pursuit of life's goals (Pink, 2006). To some, this may seem like a silly fad. To others, this is a visionary approach that will assure American competitiveness in a global economy.

Pink's theory may support the move toward a more right brain dominated world. If Pink is correct, what does this mean for those who must prepare students for the world that lies ahead? The impact of such a transformative change will require new emphasis on academic areas that have been, to some degree, sidelined since the days of the Cold War and the space race, when public funds were diverted to the pursuit of military might and scientific achievement. Those sidelined areas include the performing arts.

Fairfax County, in a unique move, has embarked on a new initiative, "Bringing Drama to the Core." The idea was initially conceptualized by Judy Bowns, a Theatre

Arts and Dance Resource Teacher for Fairfax County Public Schools. She challenged theatre arts teachers to "employ their natural use of theatre strategies to deliver core curriculum information by writing lesson plans that meet standards in both theatre and the core subject. Bowns added, "Using theatre strategies to deliver core curriculum gives the students a new way to learn and "own" the information that had previously eluded them" (Bowns).

The mission statement of the program asserts that the teachers of "core" subject areas should use creative techniques from theatre arts to provide alternative approaches to SOL instruction while meeting Program of Study objectives. "Bringing Drama to the Core" embraces the idea that the use of kinetic, physical, vocal, and ensemble techniques that teachers use in a theatre arts classroom can be employed in the core classroom with effective results. This idea of using "play" to achieve an academic goal outside the realm of the performing arts is a unique cross-curricular approach.

If the world is moving towards a right brain approach in the workplace, as Pink has stated, then Fairfax County's "Bringing Drama to the Core" initiative is a step in the *right* direction. It may also place Fairfax County at the forefront of this effort on a national scale. The county is currently working the "Bringing Drama to the Core" initiative into classrooms in creative ways. One example is a physics class in which students are

asked to illustrate the concepts of nuclear fission and fusion using role-play scenarios to demonstrate technical and scientific principles. Government classes provide another opportunity to employ Theatre Arts techniques in the core curriculum. In the "Mr. or Ms. Foreign Policy" lesson, students are provided with U.S. foreign policy information. Students are then asked to create and wear "Foreign Policy Costume[s]" that capture the essence of U.S. foreign policy. A panel of teachers and classmates evaluates each costume on the basis of originality and effectiveness in communicating the concept(s). These two examples demonstrate unique ways in which a student can use the Theatre Arts to achieve a higher level of understanding in core subject areas.

Attendees of the 2007 National Conference on the Creative Economy, held this year in Fairfax County, embraced these creative approaches to public education. Sixty-four percent of conference attendees made two recommendations: "Improve K-12 education" and "[encourage] the free flow of ideas." According to conference participants, this can be achieved by harnessing the creativity of each individual, encouraging risk-taking, promoting tolerance in the workplace and in the community and encouraging the management and sustenance of an educated workforce (National Conference).

The recommendations of the National Conference on the Creative Economy provide the framework for initiatives like "Bringing Drama to the Core." In a county where 57% of its residents work in "creative occupations," the development of new approaches to teaching core academic subjects seems more critical than ever (National Conference). In this creative environment, Daniel Pink's thesis may prove prescient. ♦

Pink, Daniel H. *A Whole New Mind*. New York, NY: The Berkley Publishing Group. 2006.

Bowns, Judy. Personal Interview. 20 Nov. 2007.

National Conference on the Creative Economy. (2007, Oct. 24). Fairfax, Virginia.

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