

## **The Mute Child in the Creative City**

Dr. Sarah Bainter Cunningham  
Executive Director for Research  
School of the Arts  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
[sbcunningham@vcu.edu](mailto:sbcunningham@vcu.edu)

Prepared for Face to Face 2013  
NYC Arts in Education Roundtable  
Plenary Panel  
March 28, 2013

I'm delighted that this talk follows James Catterrall and Ellen Winner's thinking on the individual child, and how children learn, transfer skills, and develop habits of mind. As a complement to James and Ellen's thinking, I function more as a political scientist of arts education. I would like to understand how we shape the larger classroom of the city with creative children in mind. In Plato's Greece, cities were to reflect the balance of the harmony of the soul. The city leaders and citizens carried significant responsibility, balancing a variety of elements to secure a harmony of competing forces. Today, arts education is in the middle of such competing forces.

Diane Ravitch titled her last book, Death and Life of the Great American School System after Jane Jacobs' Death and Life of Great American Cities. In Jacobs' work, we were choosing consumerism over family welfare, preferring credentialing certificates to quality education, and neglecting basic cultural needs of communities. In Ravitch's work, we are experiencing education reform fatigue and lacking educational vision. While Ravitch profiles the cities of San Diego and New York, she doesn't complete the circle: she does not more closely examine the relationship between urban design and education design.<sup>1</sup> The hunch – to connect Jacob's concern with urban space with the future of learning – is rich with possibility. This reflection explores the role of children and learning in the political and academic discourse on creative cities. We need to examine whether or not creative cities are built on a fatal flaw: ignoring children and arts education under the myth that creative, educated individuals are generated somewhere out there in the world, and magically appear in our cities to move innovation, social networks, and profitability.

A rich conversation about the creative class takes place within the creative city movement. The founding theories describe how city neighborhoods attract educated talent from elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> These theories generally do not discuss building talent from within a city.<sup>3</sup> Nor do these theories address *how* citizens gain the educational potency

---

<sup>1</sup> While Ravitch's book does not intend to reflect on urban design, she has regularly acknowledged the arts as essential to a complete curriculum.

<sup>2</sup> See Florida's Cities and the Creative Class, Edward Glaeser's "Review of Richard Florida's Rise of the Creative Class" and Marrocu and Paci's "Education or Creativity: What Matters Most for Economic Performance?"

<sup>3</sup> Appropriately, this talk was given at the City College of New York. On another occasion, city and community colleges must be considered as a vital aspect of dreams of the ideal city. This institution,

that allows the city to thrive and be creative. We are left to query – is this creative talent intentionally supported or an accident of our times? Who thoughtfully builds the talent attracted from elsewhere? Where are the Gardens of Eden where creative young adults are being shaped? Are these homes where parents take an active role in choosing creative outlets and educational goals for their children? Are these a distinctive cohort of public schools or after school programs determined to foster creative talent? Are there some cities that develop public policy in a manner that supports these parents, schools, and organizations that willfully generate a creative class?

What *is* a creative city? This is a place where the mix of cultural and entertainment industries allows for growing populations of creative people, who then have an impact on other aspects of the city – aspects other than their work life. These “creatives,” as they are called, are equally consumers and producers.<sup>4</sup> As you can gather, accounts of creative cities tend to depend on economic relationships and how this group of people *works*, the value of their *labor* to the city, and how their tendency toward producing spills over into the character and personality of neighborhoods. Richard Florida values these people for their activity in their leisure time.<sup>5</sup> His theories depend on a group that has enough leisure time and disposable income to be able to shape cities outside of their work life. They can attend plays, go to concerts or films, attend gallery openings and sometimes buy the art. But, again, this theory depends on creative people being attracted to a place. The place doesn’t invest in creating these “creatives” and may not need to invest in creating them. That is not part of the theory. The place must generate a brand of creative city to attract producers, consumers, and audiences. In a sense -- especially from an educator’s point of view -- it’s a theory about getting something for nothing: economic gain in a social vacuum.

The economics of creative labor is far from conclusive. Creative labor includes individuals with college degrees who are physicists, mathematicians, computing professionals, architects, engineers, college faculty, health professionals, life science professionals, librarians, social science professionals, as well as writers, artists, arts professionals, and fashion or design professionals. When the writers, artists and designers are disaggregated from regional economic studies, “no direct economic role is found” to contribute to economic growth.<sup>6</sup> In one assessment, schooling through the university level has a greater impact on creative productivity than other factors.<sup>7</sup> In an economic context, we still have some work to do to determine how it is that the broad category of creative class fosters economic growth while the subset of *real* creative workers fail to move the needle of financial prosperity.<sup>8</sup>

---

founded in 1847, attempts to support the “children of the whole people...successfully controlled by the popular will.”

<sup>4</sup> See Stuart Cunningham’s essay “The Creative Cities Discourse: Production and/or Consumption.”

<sup>5</sup> Again, Stuart Cunningham deftly outlines the features of Florida’s analysis.

<sup>6</sup> Marrocu and Paci, “Education or Creativity: What Matters Most for Economic Performance,” 22.

<sup>7</sup> Glaeser, “Review of Richard Florida’s rise of the creative class.”

<sup>8</sup> The *Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP)* tracks careers of arts graduates to provide empirical data on arts employment. Research findings run counter to popular beliefs depicting arts graduates as underemployed as compared to other sectors. See Steven J. Tepper’s “Uncle Henry is Wrong. There’s A Lot You Can Do with That Degree.”

At most, those who deploy the concept of “creative class” might demand more rigor from the concept of “creatives.” In a 2006 essay, Ann Markusen noted, “It is simply incorrect, and indeed dangerous, to label people in large lumpy occupational groupings such as managers and professional workers as creative, and others — all production and service workers — for instance as not creative.”<sup>9</sup> As Marrocu and Paci note in their 2012 analysis of existing literature, extremely broad use of the term “creative” does not reflect the kinds of activities, investments, or efforts taking place specifically within the “bohemian” arts community. These scholars associate features of the creative class directly with educational attainment, noting: “the most highly educated group is the most relevant one in explaining production efficiency.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, when we fail to address educational policy in pursuit of the creative city, we seem to perpetuate misleading and fabulist notions of the *polis*. In this fabulist myth, a spontaneous combustion of people, place, and zeitgeist regenerate urban decay and torpor into a creative city, without thoughtfully deploying educational systems or the potential of a professional sector trained in teaching arts and design.

If creative cities support creative labor with the influx of the “creative class,” why aren’t we talking about creative work in children’s schools and community educational settings? Urban education reformers remain curiously silent on pursuing creative work as a factor either for schooling or for the health of the creative city. Likewise, could urban theorists and designers, especially those who praise “creative citizens,” work with educators to generate a sea change? In this scenario, schools with a creative dexterity in art and design are not simply professional arts high schools but everyday neighborhood schools, an essential part of the warp and woof of the real creative city.

Creative cities need to invest heavily in arts education soon, or their prospects may be dire. In the very least, cities should invest in arts education so that they can export their creative human resources to *other* cities, desperate for the creative class. Let’s jump into the future – around 2050. Cities will encompass 70% of the world population. 82% of the American population will be urban.<sup>11</sup> American and European cities will no longer dominate the landscape. Lagos, Nigeria, for example, is the world’s fastest growing city. There will be numerous “metacities” (bigger than megacities) supporting populations of more than 20 million residents. Children will account for a great deal of this growth. 60% of urban growth will be from children. Cultural inclusion and arts will be essential, as much of this growth reflects expanding immigrant communities with a variety of cultures sometimes in conflict. Cities will also increase in their political power. Many urban theorists observe how the city-region is replacing the nation-state as the locus of economic and cultural agency.<sup>12</sup> City policies related to all sorts of things, *including education*, will dominate how state and federal policies might be dictated. New York is a

---

<sup>9</sup> Markusen, “Urban Development and the Politics of Creative Class: Evidence from a Study of Artists,” 1924.

<sup>10</sup> Marrocu and Paci, “Education or Creativity: What Matters Most for Economic Performance,” 23.

<sup>11</sup> See “The Future Report 2012” produced by Global Futures and Foresight, international NGO *The Future Cities Institute*, reports on “Glasgow 2020”, “America 2050” and “The Future Value Chain.” In these studies, the leading trend is “increased urbanization.”

<sup>12</sup> See Saskia Sassen’s *Cities in a World Economy* for a detailed analysis of the “new urban economy.”

great example of this on gun control, health and beverages, and public education. Mayor Michael Bloomberg confidently drives national discourse through city policy.

Targeted place-based arts initiatives attempt to right this imbalance by investing in the creativity of the place through public artworks, residencies or other truly creative programming.<sup>13</sup> Such projects shift from creative spillover as an unintentional benefit of artists within a community, toward intentional design of robust opportunities for creative spillover.<sup>14</sup> Creative place-making efforts take advantage of the role that “open, inclusive and culturally mixed environments” play in productivity and community vitality.<sup>15</sup> While efforts may undertake educational activities, indicators of vibrancy within these programs examine population density, employment rates, walkability, creative jobs, and cell phone activity to look at the relation of business to non-profit arts activities.<sup>16</sup> Deliberate and conscientious piloting of such investments requires singular focus on directed outcomes that, at the present moment, do not allow for a focus on children.

Nonetheless, just as Richard Florida remains silent on a robust concept of creative education leading to the creative class, creative work or creative labor, new efforts to direct the artistic richness of creative cities seem similarly mute on the value of creative children to “livability” and “vibrancy” within our communities. An enlightened city plan includes a vision for the creative city – and yet this vision often fails to empower exactly that population of professional adults and organizations whose explicit mission is to build creative citizens. Unwittingly, we give voice to the creative city while muting the creative child, thereby slowing down progress toward our ideal vibrant, expansive, and regenerative urban life.

Why do we care? Even if well-intentioned programs and policies wittingly *and* unwittingly ignore the role of children, it is still the *educational attainment* (based on trajectories of successful students) that provides the conditions for creative people, jobs, and the growth of “creative” neighborhoods. So why aren’t we investing in creative cities by investing in the growth of creative education initiatives with rigorous arts and design components? And, if creative workers are essential to urban vitality and economic growth, when will the average public school be able to support a young person’s ambition for a creative career through informed guidance and preparation that depicts the many *real* options for creative work?

At a time of incredibly scarce resources, we (the arts education field) need to build our capacity to enter into conversations on city design. If you were given the chance to shape

---

<sup>13</sup> See National Endowment for the Arts “Our Town” grants program and ArtPlace America “ArtPlace” grants program.

<sup>14</sup> See National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts 2010 Report: “Creative Clusters and Innovation: Putting Creativity on the Map.”

<sup>15</sup> Marrocu and Paci, “Education or Creativity: What Matters Most for Economic Performance,” 24.

<sup>16</sup> Note that ArtPlace Vibrancy Indicators accessed June 5, 2013. <http://www.artplaceamerica.org/vibrancy-indicators/>. To appreciate the complexity of evaluating neighborhood vitality and livability, see Ann Markusen’s discussion of the “indicators of creative placemaking” in this blog post at Createquity: <http://createquity.com/2012/11/fuzzy-concepts-proxy-data-why-indicators-wont-track-creative-placemaking-success.html>. Likewise, see NEA’s “Our Town” Indicators.

your program into something that contributes to the creative city, in a way to more fully realize the creative city, how would you do it? This may not be easy. But I believe we need to start thinking in this way to grab the increasing global political power that our cities are wielding.<sup>17</sup> We need to push for public presentations of creative cities that take responsibility for educating “creatives” as a mark of global success. But it is not simply about “educating creatives,” we must actually move from infantilizing the role of the artistic child in the city as something nurtured, fostered, and shaped, to consider how happy, artistic, design-minded children are an essential shaping mechanism for all our lives. In other words, rather than be a demand on the system (that requires more and more per pupil funding), how are our young people cultural contributors to the shape of our daily lives? How is their creativity essential to the vitality and vibrancy of the city? It is this conceptual obstacle – viewing children as a need or demand on the city and not as a power – which keeps them out of the creative city in the first place.<sup>18</sup>

Sometimes policy succeeds in offering opportunities, but we are not ready for them. In 2007, the United Kingdom launched a Children’s Play Initiative. This effort supported children “being seen and heard not reared in captivity” (as one reporter put it) breaking from the attempts to “schoolify” almost every aspect of children’s lives.<sup>19</sup> With \$340 million dollars invested, organizations struggled to present innovative ideas for play.<sup>20</sup> The project hired a consulting firm to assist municipalities in devising creative play programs. Communities grappled with this challenge, lacking internal expertise to provide meaningful responses. In this case, a public official boldly supported a forward-thinking initiative. Communities were not prepared to respond. They had to adopt best practices from other places.

This case study reminds us that we might not be as imaginative or prepared as we might hope for or believe. Can we prepare? Can we refine our practice, not just of imagining our organizations or classrooms but imagining conditions in which a younger generation, better educated in arts and design, re-inscribes public space and urban identity for all neighborhoods? How are our policy imaginations even able to exercise in a climate where, at the center of competing forces, collective, well-intentioned efforts have muted the creative potential of the child in order to meet more global aspirations? Organizations like the New York Arts Education Roundtable, and their annual Face-to-Face conference, are essential. These gatherings bring our colleagues together, our challenges to the surface, and allow us to strategize to imagine future prospects for the creative class.

---

<sup>17</sup> Engaging political agency through the arts and design may allow for heightened reflective capacity afforded by aesthetic engagements that deepen self-understanding to secure democratic space.

<sup>18</sup> See Jane Jacobs’ Death and Life of American Cities: “Garden city planners, with their hatred of the street, though the solution to keeping children off the streets *and* under wholesome surveillance was to build interior enclaves for them in the centers of super-blocks. The trouble with this scheme...is that no child of enterprise or spirit will willingly stay in such a boring place after he reaches the age of six,” 79-80.

<sup>19</sup> See the 2007 Demos report, “Seen and Heard: Reclaiming the Public Realm with Children and Young People.”

<sup>20</sup> See Katie Hill and Guy Julier’s article, “Design, Innovation and Policy at the Local Level” in Design and Creativity: Policy, Management and Practice, 57-73.

The truth is, we don't have a practice of shaping possible futures within our field because we are so busy doing the work, and solving immediate needs. But imagining is difficult, especially when linking to materialities of the world we are now living in. At the same time, consensus-building takes place when, in the present, we can agree on a similar trajectory by sharing a future scenario. This is a tactical maneuver – not just a future scenario with supported arts education programs in schools – but a very specific shared set of scenarios. These scenarios need to be developed in concert with the creative cities movement, and not separate from this movement. In this way, we might bridge our professional resources to better realize the noble aspirations for arts-minded urban regeneration and to secure a more vibrant future.

In the future city, the creative class is not over-valorized at the expense of creative children. Children's cultural consumption habits transform into critical aesthetic engagements to richly shape decision-making and interventions to seek a healthier city. Accounts of urban regeneration engage directly with children and youth as powerful contributors. In these conditions, schools that limit creative possibility would be seen as at odds with city health and city prosperity. Likewise, citizens become engaged in robust conversations on what work is, what creative work might be, now that more of the population has the opportunity to learn creatively, and learn multiple art forms. Global portraits of cities take pride in how artistic children are flourishing, and how developed artistic capacities affect *the first generation of intentionally and publicly supported creative adults*. These new adults, while global travelers with extensive mobility, feel a moral attachment to be of service to their home city. Akin to alumni attachment to a favorite college, these new adults support the ongoing creativity of their home city through extended virtual connections and actual financial investment even when they no longer live there. Meanwhile, a release of economic pressure in the arts education industry from k-16 boosts creative output, as artists of all ages feel supported for the first time in decades. The creative city provides increasing venues for personal and civic expression as a way to understand the challenges of increasing populations. Dire inequalities fostered by creative cities are navigated in open discussion, as multiple citizens are able to better describe their needs through expressive media and aesthetic articulations noting how city services may improve.

Arts educators may be the crucial lynchpin to providing residents with the ability to communicate their needs, and articulate their own voice in shaping the city. Art and design literacies enable all citizens, especially marginalized populations (including children) to make claims on what the city *could* be. A child's positive, creative experience contributes to a renewed embodiment of citizenship. The creative city willing to do this will be seen as the leader of a new approach to recognize quality of life and individual prosperity over short-term economic value.

## References

- Anheier, Helmut K. and Yudhishtir Raj. Isar. *Cities, Cultural Policy and Governance*. London: SAGE, 2012.
- ArtPlace America. "ArtPlace America Guidelines." Accessed March 24, 2013. <http://www.artplaceamerica.org/loi/>.
- CEOs for Cities. "City Vitals 2.0." Accessed March 24, 2013. <http://www.ceosforcities.org/city-vitals/research/city-vitals-2.0-2012/>.
- Department of Culture, Heritage and Diversity, Council of Europe. "Intercultural Cities: Governance and Policies for Diverse Communities." Accessed on March 24, 2013. [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/Default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/Default_en.asp).
- Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. "UK Innovation Nation 2008." Accessed March 23, 2013. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dius.gov.uk/policies/innovation/white-paper>.
- Demos. "Seen and Heard: Reclaiming the Public Realm with Children and Young People." Accessed March 24, 2013. <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/seenandheardreport>.
- European Union Institute for Security Studies and National Intelligence Council. *Global Governance 2025: At a Critical Juncture*. Paris: Institute for Security Studies, 2010.
- Evans, G. "Creative Cities, Creative Spaces and Urban Policy." *Urban Studies* 46 (2009): 1003-40.
- Florida, Richard L. *Cities and the Creative Class*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Gill, Tim. "Getting Serious about Play." *The Guardian*, December 12, 2007. Accessed March 23, 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/dec/12/gettingseriousaboutplay1>.
- Glaeser E. "Review of Richard Florida's the rise of the creative class." *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 35 (2005) 593-596.
- Han, Ji. "Innovation for Sustainability: Toward a Sustainable Urban Future in Industrialized Cities." *Sustainability Science* 7.1 (2012): 91-100.
- Hillenbrand, Margaret. "Advanced Search Murakami Haruki in Greater China: Creative Responses and the Quest for Cosmopolitanism." *Journal of Asian Studies* 68.3 (2009): 715-47.
- Hospers, Gert-Jan and Roy van Dalm. "How to create a creative city? The viewpoints of Richard Florida and Jane Jacobs." *Foresight* 7.4 (2005) 8-12.
- Institute For The Future. "IFTF: The Future of Cities, Information, and Inclusion." Accessed March 23, 2013. <http://www.iftf.org/our-work/global-landscape/human-settlement/the-future-of-cities-information-and-inclusion/>.
- Hamamoto, Ben. "IFTF: Where Will We See the First Universal Design Cities?" Accessed March 23, 2013. <http://www.iftf.org/future-now/article-detail/where-will-we-see-the-first-universal-design-cities/>.
- Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage, 1992.
- Julier, Guy and Liz Moore, eds. *Design and Creativity: Policy, Management and Practice*. Oxford: Berg, 2009.
- Markusen, Ann. "Fuzzy Concepts, Proxy Data: Why Indicators Won't Track Creative Placemaking Success." *Createquity Blog*. Accessed March 24 2013. <http://createquity.com/2012/11/fuzzy-concepts-proxy-data-why-indicators-wont-track->
- Markusen, Ann. "Urban Development and the Politics of a Creative Class: Evidence from a Study of Artists." *Environment and Planning A* 38.10 (2006): 1921-940.
- Marrocu, Emanuela, and Raffaele Paci. "Education or Creativity: What Matters Most for Economic Performance?" *Economic Geography* 88.4 (2012): 369-401.

- National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. "Creative Clusters and Innovation: Putting Creativity on the Map." Accessed March 25, 2013.  
[http://www.nesta.org.uk/events/assets/features/creative\\_clusters\\_and\\_innovation\\_report](http://www.nesta.org.uk/events/assets/features/creative_clusters_and_innovation_report).
- New York City Department of City Planning. "Agency Strategic Plan - New York City Department of City Planning." Accessed March 24, 2013.  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/about/strategy.shtml>.
- Price, Gordon, and Rodrigo Reis. "Making Kid-friendly Cities: Lessons from Two Cities." *Preventive Medicine* 50 (2010): S95-96.
- PSFK. "The Future Of Work: A PSFK Labs Report." Accessed March 23, 2013.  
<http://www.psfk.com/publishing/future-of-work>.
- Ravitch, Diane. *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*. New York: Basic, 2010.
- Sassen, Saskia. *Cities in a World Economy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge, 2000.
- Scott, Allen J. "Creative Cities: Conceptual Issues And Policy Questions." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 28.1 (2006): 1-17.
- Tepper, Steven J. "Uncle Henry is Wrong. There's a Lot You Can Do with That Degree." *Huffington Post*, May 27, 2011. Accessed March 24, 2013.  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steven-j-tepper/uncle-henry-is-wrong-ther\\_b\\_868279.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/steven-j-tepper/uncle-henry-is-wrong-ther_b_868279.html).
- UNICEF Child Friendly Cities. "Child Friendly Cities." Accessed March 23, 2013.  
<http://childfriendlycities.org/>.
- UNICEF. "The State of the World's Children 2012: Children in an Urban World." Accessed March 23, 2013. <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2012/>.
- Urban Visions: The Future of Cities: In-Depth Reports Blog. Scientific American*. Accessed March 20, 2013. <http://www.scientificamerican.com/report.cfm?id=future-cities>.
- World Economic Forum. "The Future of Government: Lessons Learned from Around the World." Accessed March 24, 2013. <http://www.weforum.org/reports/future-government>.