

PROVIDING CULTURAL BALANCE  
FOR YOUNG AMERICANS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
in the Department of Theatre  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term  
2015

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## **ABSTRACT**

Children today are increasingly being introduced to tablets and other personal electronic devices at very young ages. Due in part to this, the entertainment industry now has a near ubiquitous presence in America compared to cultural arts. Its influence on the development of children is almost impossible to ignore.

My thesis will study an approach to engaging young people by way of location-based projects that synthesize two or more art forms (e.g. theatre arts, literary arts, visual arts) in order to provide a unified effort for cultural arts and also provide balance to the influences of entertainment. Incorporating research, interviews with people instrumental in the creation of this approach, and analysis of the data, I intend to answer several essential research questions:

- What are the pros and cons of creating and/or operating these collaborative cultural arts facilities?
- Are recently created collaborative cultural arts centers, nationally and internationally (e.g. ImaginOn in Charlotte, NC) successfully addressing the imbalance of cultural influence and if so, in what way?
- What are the conditions and steps required to create a collaborative cultural arts facility and replicate a model similar to Charlotte's ImaginOn in other cities in the United States?

Although a mere academic effort, this paper represents an enormous paradigm shift during my mid-life. This has been a shift I could not have made without the support of a few special individuals. It is to these people this paper is dedicated:

To my wife and Dearest Friend, Blair who embodied enduring patience living with a graduate student during long hours and late nights with bottomless encouragement and unconditional love.

To my son, Grayson who supported the abrupt change in my life path despite not really understanding why I needed to do it. THAT is love.

To my daughter, Kaitlin whose passion for education inspired me to a leap of faith leaving a lucrative corporate life and pursuing altruism in academia. THAT is love.

To my Mom and Dad without whom I could have achieved nothing in life. Since I was a small child, they always encouraged me to pursue whatever that to which I set my heart and mind with unbridled passion and disregard for potential failure. Their faith in me and their unconditional love for me has been my life's foundation. THEY are love.

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## **LIST OF SYMBOLS, ABBREVIATIONS and ACRONYMS**

ASSITEJ	Association International du Theatre pour 'Enfance et la Jeunesse
ASSITEJ-USA	The American chapter of the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ)
CML	Charlotte Mecklenburg Library
CTC	Children's Theatre of Charlotte
IMLS	the Institute of Museum and Library Services
FoE	The Futures of Entertainment
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NEA	National Endowment for the Arts
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
PC	personal computer
PDA	personal digital assistant (or device) such as smartphones, tablets, etc.
SPPA	Survey of Public Participation in the Arts
TYA	Theatre for Young Audiences
USA	United States of America



# CHAPTER 1

## Corporate America and Media

Children today are increasingly being introduced to tablets and other personal electronic devices at very young ages. Due in part to this, the entertainment industry now has a near ubiquitous presence in America compared to cultural arts. Its influence on the development of children is almost impossible to ignore.

Gradually over the past several decades, children's familiarity with certain fairy tales comes not from the authors, such as the Brothers Grimm, but rather © Disney. The content created for films, tablets and e-readers is less the 'classics' and more 'the classiest.' What does this paradigm shift towards innovative technology and flashy media portend for the rising generations? There are opportunities to be sure. Personal electronic devices permit their owners to carry with them not just one or two books, but entire libraries. Social media accessed using these devices provides American children the means by which to gain valuable international awareness by connecting with other children across the globe via Skype. However, this technology also provides challenges.

During the early weeks of my research for this paper, the giant consumer electronics corporation, Apple® hosted an event at which it announced the impending release of the latest iteration of their popular smartphone: the iPhone 6®. Soon thereafter, thousands of people waited at Apple stores worldwide (many on the street for days) just for the chance to be among the first to buy these products. "Apple opened up pre-orders for the new iPhones last Friday (12 SEP 2014), notching a record 4 million in the first 24 hours. With new pre-orders requiring customers to wait as long as November for their iPhone" (Molina). Within a few more weeks, Apple

released three more products: the Apple Watch<sup>®</sup>, the iPad Air 2<sup>®</sup>, and the iPad mini3<sup>®</sup>. The sales of these products also projected to be in the many millions. It seems American consumers cannot wait to acquire the latest “it” electronic accessory and begin participating in the newest trending ways of behavior. Are these accessories necessary? Are they fulfilling a need for their consumers or is the American consumer fulfilling a corporate business plan?

Few will dispute that American culture is frequently characterized by its entertainment industry (particularly if one includes sports in this category). The majority of this aspect of contemporary American culture is fabricated, packaged, and distributed by a small number of corporations. It is capitalism at its best: provide to the consumer what they want and make a profit for the corporation. This might seem fair, but if the corporation is leading the consumer’s behavior rather than responding to the consumer’s needs, the situation might be the realization of what Marxist historian Ernest Mandel called the “Third Age” of capitalism.

In the fictitious world of Michael Crichton’s popular novel, *Jurassic Park*<sup>®</sup>, and the film of the same name, technology has advanced to a point where dinosaurs long extinct are brought back to life and showcased to humans in a zoological theme park. This fanciful situation brings together two species separated by sixty-five million years of evolution and extinction with disastrous results. One of the novel’s characters, a chaotician named Ian Malcolm, declares to John Hammond, the creator of the dinosaur theme park:

Scientific power is like inherited wealth: attained without discipline. You read what others have done, and you take the next step. You can make progress very fast. There is no discipline lasting many decades. There is only a get-rich-quick, make-a-name-for-yourself-fast philosophy. And the buyer will have even less

discipline than you. The buyer simply purchases the power, like any commodity.

The buyer doesn't even conceive that any discipline might be necessary.

(Crichton 305-306)

Perhaps the same capitalistic head-first-dive-into-unknown-dark-waters approach can be said for the advancements and the marketing of today's technology in regards to personal electronic devices with how they are leading our culture. Using the latest advancements, today's entertainment corporate giants produce not only the creative content (the media), but also the delivery systems (the medium) on which this media is presented (films, cable TV, DVD's, etc.) Corporate success is measured not by the developmental growth of American culture, but rather by the sales of the corporation's products and profits. The numbers that matter to them are not how young American students compare to other students worldwide, but how favorable quarterly profits are for their shareholders. Does anyone really know what the long-term effects of this will be on our culture (particularly the adverse ones)?

The *Jurassic Park* book can be read on e-readers, the ever more pervasive tablets and even most smartphones such as the iPhone<sup>®</sup>. The entire film version of the novel, produced by Amblin Entertainment<sup>®</sup> and distributed by Universal Pictures<sup>®</sup>, can be viewed on numerous types of personal electronic digital devices such as tablets (again), laptops and (yes, again) smartphones. It is likely you are reading this paper on one of these devices. It is also likely you have read or seen *Jurassic Park* and so you clearly understand contextually the concept of which I write. Indeed, I am composing this very paragraph seated in an easy chair in my living room "typing" on an Amazon Kindle<sup>®</sup>. The hand-props of the 1960s science-fiction television series *Star Trek*<sup>®</sup> are the everyday tools we use today. The future is now.

Notice that I have been able to quickly convey complex concepts in metaphorical perspective using benchmarks iconic in American entertainment...and American culture. Also notice, there are almost a dozen registered trademarks in the preceding four paragraphs. Not only is entertainment a benchmark for American culture, it is also corporatized and protected intellectual property.

The realm of digital media is determined not so much by the content of the media itself as it is by the medium...the method of its delivery. In his book, *Understanding Media, the Extensions of Man*, communication theorist, Marshall McLuhan states, "...in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message...because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (McLuhan 7). McLuhan may have even been prescient considering how technology essentially sculpts our culture today.

### **Technology in the Classroom**

What are the ways in which the growing use of electronic devices and their media content impacting the cultural development of the rising generation of children? Academic studies have been conducted regarding how personal portable electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets and smartphones might adversely affect the learning abilities of children. Other studies have shown that these devices have greatly enhanced learning in today's children. The studies performed to date have focused on education and technology in the classroom. Perhaps by implication, these studies can also inform how cultural development is occurring with American children.

In 2006, Cisco Systems, Inc. and the Metiri Group (an independent education research and development company in California contracted by Cisco) published a lengthy report,

*Technology in Schools: What the Research Says*. Despite having a pro-technological lean, this report appears to be objective in its approach by offering opinions from those who oppose high-technology in the classroom and being candid about the results noting, “Handheld devices such as personal digital assistants (PDAs), tablet PCs, palmtop computers...are increasingly available and affordable. The authors could locate no rigorous studies conducted on the effect of these devices on learning” (Fadel 8).

The report states “today’s schools cite a myriad of purposes for technology in schools, including improved teaching, leadership, and decision making, as well as...student-focused purposes” (Fadel 2). The report also points out the “reality” of advocates “over-promising the ability of education to extract a learning return on technology investments in schools.” The Cisco/Metiri Group report contends this error was due to “four miscalculations on the part of educators”: (i) that they were overly confident in the change they could accomplish with technology; (ii) their lack of documentation on student learning and teacher practices; (iii) overestimating the time it would take to “reach a sufficiency point for technology access”; and, (iv) underestimating the rate of change in technology and the impact on their practices.

Although admitting to a lack of “rigorous” research, the Cisco/Metiri Group report cites the results of three studies from California, Massachusetts and Germany that found “laptop students significantly outscored students in conventional classrooms in the areas of mathematics and language arts” (Fadel 13). Furthering the positive results of their report, they also suggest that just as technology is accelerating globalization, it will advance educational change for the better if it is used wisely.

In *The World Is Flat*, Pulitzer Prize winning New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, addresses globalization (which he refers to as “flattening”) and comments on the importance of education in today’s global cultural development and adapting to new technologies so Americans can compete globally:

We’ve been here before. Each century, as we push out the frontiers of human knowledge, work at every level becomes more complex, requiring more pattern recognition and problem solving. Somehow (we) still ended up with a higher standard of living for the vast majority of Americans. How did we do it? We began by making high school mandatory.” (Friedman 372-373)

Friedman further notes, “On such a flat earth, the most important attribute you can have is creative imagination, the ability to be first on your block to figure out how all these enabling tools can be put together in new exciting ways to create products, communities, opportunities, and profits” (Friedman 571). Friedman’s contentions seemed to distill the successful approach to two things, education and creativity, which he acknowledges are greatly supported by laptop usage and Internet access.

The detractors of technology in education state there is not enough data to support the claims of the supporters of technology in education or extensive investment of this path. One of these is Larry Cuban, a professor at Stanford University and author of *Oversold & Underused, Computers in the Classroom*, who examined classroom studies and ethnographies to compare claims to data. He states from his observations that “very few researchers enter classrooms to see how teachers and students actually use technology every day” and “teachers tend to overestimate frequency of computer use.” He summarizes his opinion in this way:

The introduction of information technologies into schools over the past two decades has achieved neither the transformation of teaching and learning nor the productivity gains that a reform coalition of corporate executives, public officials, parents, academics, and educators have sought. I have concluded that computers in classroom have been oversold by promoters and policymakers and underused by teachers and students. (Cuban 195)

In an apparent response to this conclusion, Cisco and the Metiri Group state “contrary to popular belief, much is now known about the effect of technology on learning and teaching in primary and secondary schools.” However, their report ultimately concludes any real potential for technology-in-education to improve learning remains “largely untapped in schools today” (Fadel 2).

The empirical summary of this debate appears to be a stalemate with technology-in-education advocates on one side claiming that children do indeed learn faster by adopting electronic enhancements in the classroom, but any failures in measurable achievements or data is due to the educators involved in the test studies (something akin to “pilot error”). If one were to read between the lines of the Cisco report, one might infer that teachers have been teaching the way in which teaching has been done for years despite having new technology in their classrooms. Is it then true that “old dogs cannot learn new tricks?” I don’t think so.

The other side of the debate has the detractors of computers-in-the-classroom arguing that learning (specifically language skills) is hampered by electronic instruction because human interaction is required and new technology does not warrant the investment. I suspect this is a generational challenge, not a technological one.

My personal belief is that technology-in-education is inevitable. If used properly by individuals who are trained to use it and welcome its value as an enhancement and extension of their own pedagogy, technology-in-education will be a great benefit in the classrooms. Younger generations are already primed to receive education from the devices of technology that also deliver their entertainment. Current analyses can only offer near-term impressions that may or may not be accurate over the long term. As with any new approach to anything, there will always be pluses and minuses that may not be fully realized until long after the “new” approach is no longer new. If this contemporary approach can work for education, it could work for cultural instruction as well.

In researching this paper, I consider how people of different past generations learned best and suggest how young persons today (and perhaps tomorrow) might best be approached with cultural learning. I suspect in time, someone will eventually prove that students who were educated using PDA’s learned better than those whose education excluded these devices. Indeed, the familiarity young persons have with new technology and corporate entertainment may also be the key to introducing the cultural arts to them early. Corporations successfully use PDA’s to deliver their entertainment products. Perhaps the time is now for cultural organizations to do something similar.

### **Introducing Culture to Young Americans**

What are the ways to balance or offset corporate entertainment’s high-level presence? Perhaps collaborative cultural arts centers are a reasonable approach to do this. In order to offer a new way of engaging young people, these centers often embrace an entertainment styled approach to their programming and to their facilities’ environments. They synthesize theatre arts,



literary arts, and visual arts in a manner that provides a unified effort for the cultural arts to balance the ubiquitous influences of corporately produced entertainment. They also embrace current technologies rather than eschewing them.

Such a facility is **ImaginOn: The Joe & Joan Martin Center** in Charlotte, North Carolina that is devoted to children of all ages and features a partnership between the Children's Theatre of Charlotte and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library system.



Figure 1. ImaginOn: The Joe & Joan Martin Center (exterior)

Source: <http://holzmannmossbottino.com/imaginon-the-joe-joan-martin-center-2/>

In 1997, Bruce LaRowe, the Executive Director of Children's Theatre of Charlotte, realized his thriving non-profit arts company had outgrown its long-standing home and needed to expand. Learning that the Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library was interested in also creating a new space that was also dedicated to children, LaRowe saw an opportunity. He approached Bob Cannon, the former Executive Director of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library (then named

Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County), with an idea. What followed was eight years of trail blazing through the bureaucracies of private arts and public government in order to marshal all of the proper stakeholders to overcome frustrations created by funding, planning, design, building permitting, development and of course, construction (LaRowe).

Melanie Huggins is currently the Executive Director of the Richland Library in Columbia, SC. She was the youth services coordinator for CML and appointed by Bob Cannon to be the owner's representative on the ImaginOn project. She helped define what ImaginOn would be and the how to develop the partnership including staffing and legal arrangements. She notes that the project team considered joint library/theatre models in Baltimore and Houston, but dismissed them because they functioned more like separate entities that were "co-located" rather than cooperative allies in the same home. ImaginOn aspired to be a "true collaborative partnership" versus two organizations sharing one location. The visionary leaders at CML knew they had to "take the focus off the book and place the focus on the child. We couldn't start with what we knew, we had to start with what we wanted. For six years we built the partnership without a building. The building came out of the partnership" (Huggins).

ImaginOn has seen an average of 300,000 visitors each year since opening October 2005. Malcolm Holzman was one of the architects who designed ImaginOn. He proudly notes the 102,000 square foot facility features two state-of-the-art theatre spaces (a 550-seat proscenium theater and a 250-seat studio theater) that are located at opposite ends of the building and accessible by navigating through and alongside discreet library spaces (one dedicated for youths eleven years old and under and another just for teens). There are also four multi-use classrooms, rehearsal spaces, a multimedia production studio as well as full production facilities and offices.

The large, multi-story central public space contains hands-on display exhibits and serves as a gathering area and reception venue (Holzman). (*see Figure 2*)



Figure 2. ImaginOn: The Joe & Joan Martin Center (interior)

Source: Mark A Nichols

Holzman notes the importance of story-telling and describes ImaginOn on his architecture firm's website in this way:

Serving the youth of Charlotte, the Center, combining library and theater functions, is dedicated to creating an environment where visitors experience the written, spoken and electronic word in an integrated environment. Users respond to stories in multi-sensory ways, and interactive features encourage them to participate in creating their own stories. The nurturing of young people at every stage of their development to allow them to discover their individual potential and

to challenge their intellect is at the heart of ImaginOn. (Holzman Moss Bottino Architecture)

ImaginOn is not the first partnership between two cultural arts organizations. This approach has been tried both domestically in the US and internationally and partnerships appear to be increasing in number. Holzman notes that performance art and mixed media events are occurring more and more with traditional theatre, music and dance. “Contemporary spaces for events must be multipurpose. Partnerships between users of an auditorium are growing exponentially” (Holzman). Is the creation of these collaborative cultural arts centers a trend?

The intent of this paper is to research the offerings various collaborative cultural arts centers provide and suggest potential influence on childhood development. The data offered here is intended for the review and conclusions of arts practitioners in general and theatre for young audience practitioners specifically.

## CHAPTER 2 – WHAT’S OUT THERE?

### Existing Collaborative Cultural Arts Centers

Efforts to provide cultural arts in a mainstream manner have existed for decades. Two notable successful large-scale European projects were conceived and created in the 1970s. Both were very expensive and facilitated by governmental subsidies.

Kulturhuset (in Swedish, “the house of culture”) is located in Sergels torg, Stockholm’s most central public square and is now the hub of contemporary Swedish culture.



Figure 3. Kulturhuset (Stockholm, Sweden)

Source: [www.mediagruppen-karlstad.se](http://www.mediagruppen-karlstad.se)

Since opening in 1974 as “one of Northern Europe's largest cultural institutions” it has hosted over three million visitors each year. These visitors can choose from three visual arts galleries, eight performance venues, six libraries (including one dedicated to children and another devoted to the performing arts, photography, architecture, fashion, etc.), and other public spaces. Features include theatre, dance (including a resident dance company), music, debate forums, story telling for children (in English!), and special events (e.g. conventions, fashion shows, commercial design exhibits, etc.). Kulturhuset is a publicly funded cultural institution that

for a while after it first opened was also home to the Swedish Parliament. It is currently led by a chief executive officer plus eight artistic directors representing the previously noted artistic disciplines as well as Skärholmen (for children and teens) and Parkteatern (the Park Theatre), a program that offers performing arts in Stockholm's parks during the summer months with no admission fees. Within the facility are also a cinema, an international newsstand, three cafes and restaurants (including a coffee shop designated just for teens to gather), a game room and even a laundromat that are owned and operated by “external partners” (Kulturhuset).

In 1977, France finally opened its own signature cultural arts center in Paris, the Centre Georges Pompidou.

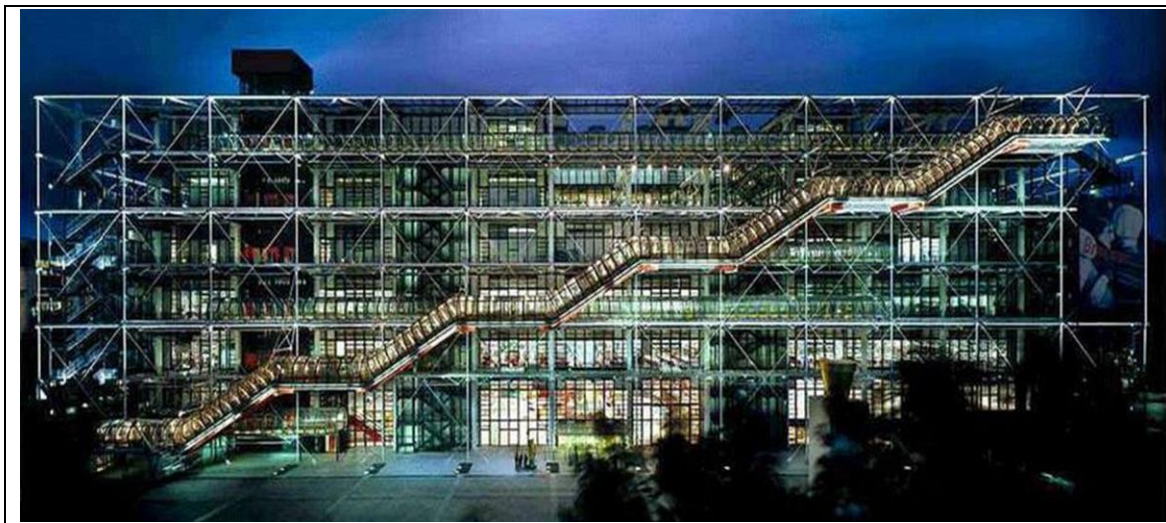


Figure 4. Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, France)

Source: [www.centrepompidou.fr/](http://www.centrepompidou.fr/)

It is a massive facility, over a million square feet, situated on five acres that is home to the Musée National d'Art Moderne, the Bibliothèque Kandinsky, the Centre Pompidou-Metz (with visual arts galleries and performance spaces for theatre, dance and music), the public library, and cinemas. Like Kulturhuset, the Centre Pompidou is also government owned and subsidized. It provides cultural offerings to over ten million visitors each year (Centre

Pompidou). Both of these multi-faceted cultural centers are almost forty years old, still in business, still government-owned with subsidized funding and have actually become tourist attractions. Is their source of funding the key to their longevity and/or success?

Here in the United States, many partnerships in performing arts centers have been projects that included architect Malcolm Holzman, who designed ImaginOn. He was a principal contributor to the 2009 book, *Theaters 2, Partnerships in Facility Use, Operation, and Management*. In his forward comments for this book, he states:

The arts influenced the cultural ethos of an era and then years later reflected to future generations. Gathering in an auditorium has moved beyond the bounds of performances for theater, music, dance, film, and opera. Contemporary spaces for events must be multipurpose to accommodate the widening range of offerings, the variety of presenters, and the shifting boundaries of performance itself. Partnerships between users of an auditorium are growing exponentially.

(Holzman & Delinger 10)

The book is a beautiful compilation of essays and photographs representing some of the finest jointly used and funded performing arts facilities in the world. These include Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center (New York, New York), the Dallas Center for the Performing Arts (Dallas, Texas), the Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay (Singapore) (*see Figure 5*), the Tokyo International Forum (Tokyo, Japan), and also, ImaginOn (Charlotte, North Carolina).



Figure 5. the Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay (Singapore)

Source: [www.adventurerob.com/](http://www.adventurerob.com/)

Although principally showcasing the stunning architecture and the positive cultural impact on their respective communities, this book also offers insight into each project's various approaches to the partnerships required to conceive, fund, design, and ultimately produce these performing arts centers. In the book's Introduction, the first thing stated is that the cost and complexity of designing, building and operating complex contemporary performing arts spaces today almost necessitates partnering. Two or more parties collaborating invariably means different goals and needs and, if the partnership survives, compromises. All of the venues featured in *Theaters 2* had this fact in common and managed the circumstances well.

It is notable that each partnership was a little different from the others, but singularly tailored to the needs of the project and the community in which it was located. Some projects were joint ventures of county and/or city governments with private non-profit organizations such as a performing arts group or a university. Some projects were generously endowed by wealthy private donors who carried the standard for smaller partners (almost always including local governmental participation).



Narrowing the focus within the United States to smaller collaborative cultural arts centers like ImaginOn, I was fortunate to find and interview (both in person and by correspondence) several persons professionally associated with the creation and/or operations of some of these centers. The results of these conversations provided insight into common challenges and successes.

In order to keep the data somewhat consistent, I used similar questions in my interviews. These questions included topics such as (i) what the market and demographics for collaborative cultural arts centers is, (ii) speculation on what motivates these partnerships, and (iii) what the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of such partnerships might be. I was also interested in what type(s) of business model(s) would need to exist to make such a partnership viable and what steps might someone expect to take if they wished to create a collaborative cultural arts center in the United States.

ImaginOn, with its fascinating meld of public library and children’s theatre, was the first innovative partnership to catch my attention and spur my interest in collaborative cultural arts centers. From the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library (CML) side, I met with one of ImaginOn’s founding leaders, Lois Kilkka and its current Library Manager, Jason Hyatt. Their input to my research offered perspective from ImaginOn’s earliest days to now. When first asked why they thought there was an increase in joint ventures, they noted that funding for many museums and libraries is linked via a mutual source, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and suggested that factor facilitated these partnerships. Over the past decade or so, budgets for public sector and non-profit organizations have been tightening. If there are opportunities to join forces, share overhead and reduce expenses, these opportunities are pursued. Hyatt and Kilkka noted examples of these joint ventures “in the Charlotte area in the recent past have included libraries

attached to schools and libraries co-located with police stations.” They went on to say “the individual elements of ImaginOn (a library for youth and families, a new home for Children’s Theatre of Charlotte) would most likely not have been successfully funded if broken apart into separate facilities. The collective momentum behind the ImaginOn project – both as a shared facility and a programmatic partnership – helped propel the project to completion” (Hyatt & Kilkka).

From the Children’s Theatre of Charlotte (CTC) side, the focus was more programmatic than pragmatic. Adam Burke, CTC’s Artistic Director, observed how this particular partnership was a “win-win”, in large part to the two organizations having the exact same marketing demographic, but not being competitors. He said, “Since the CMLibrary doesn't charge admission for library cards or services...we aren't in competition for the resources of the families and children that visit the facility. Therefore it is in both of the organizations best interest to draw people to the facility” (Burke).

Steven Ivey is one of the core artists for CTC and also heads their touring company that visits and performs in local area schools. He attributes the increased number of collaborative cultural arts centers in recent years to deep reductions in operating budgets which has prompted various non-competing arts organizations to pool their resources. He also acknowledges that families are tightening their belts as well and are seeking fewer places to spend time and money.

Many parents have always known that the arts was a great facilitator for learning and growth in their children...but since their schools no longer provide that artistic outlet for them, they began looking outside of the system. The arts provide an

outlet for growth, stability, nurture, and overall community involvement for children; parents are beginning to find these outlets. (Ivey)

ImaginOn meets the needs of those parents seeking a “one-stop-shop” for literary, visual and performing arts fare for their children. Although recently trending in the United States, partnerships between cultural arts organizations and government in one location like ImaginOn are not new.

The April 2014 issue of *tya today* (the periodical for ASSITEJ-USA) included an article specifically focused on partnerships between public libraries and theatre companies. The article’s authors surveyed thirteen professionals from across the United States (six from children’s theatre companies and seven from municipal and academic libraries) to understand why and how these partnerships were pursued. An important fact to note is that these organizations share a common demographic and yet are not competitors. Because of this fact, most of them are able to offer cross-promotional activities (show tickets were a common premium), sharing specialized book collections for theatrical research, and joint usage of large gathering venues for events like cooperative summer camps for children.

ImaginOn’s Jason Hyatt was a participant in the *tya today* survey. He believes creative partnerships permit each party to provide more than their usual fare of services, reach a broader audience for greater community awareness, and engage their existing patrons with otherwise new and unique experiences.

Another survey participant, Julia Oglesby of the Kansas City Public Library, describes her organization’s partnership with the prominent Coterie Theatre, “They (Coterie) send teaching

artists out one Sunday a month to do a dramatic story-time, where they share a story and use improve with the kids to get them acting out portions or elaborating on scenes” (Eckert et al).

Survey participant and librarian Emily Scharf, who works at Webster University collaborates with the Conservatory of Theatre Arts in Missouri is quoted in the *tya* article saying, “I teach students how to do research for their assignments and also for the shows (topics like theatre history, costumes, set design). I also meet with students individually and am working on a partnership with the student dramaturgs” (Eckert et al).

Indeed, a common benefit for theatre-library partnerships is the function of dramaturgy. Although a longtime staple of European theatre, dramaturgy is slowly gaining traction in American theatre as an important aspect of the creative process. As more American libraries with specialized dramatic collections partner with more theatre companies, American audiences and communities will also benefit.

### **What Do They Have In Common?**

Not only are partnerships between arts and other cultural organizations not new, neither are the novel approaches various organizations have taken in order to be current, inviting and competitive with entertainment offerings. Science museums have been reinventing themselves for decades as “participatory” and “hands-on science centers.” In the following section, I will attempt to discern the commonalities in most partnerships of non-profit arts organizations that are easy to determine.

#### Partnership motivators and pro’s & con’s

The research in arts collaborations by the authors of “Stories in Partnerships” article in *tya today* revealed two common motivators from their library and theatre survey participants.

First, partnering arts organizations were motivated to becoming destinations for families and second, they were striving to “fulfill their missions and stay on budget” (Eckert et al). Indeed, most of those I interviewed knew or speculated that the chief motivator for forming partnerships was dwindling resources, specifically funding and space.

#### The marketing demographic for collaborative cultural arts centers

The responses to my interview inquiries regarding marketing demographics for collaborative cultural arts centers were understandably skewed considering the common field of my interviewees. Obviously, their replies would reflect marketing demographics to be generally “arts for young persons.” However, the creators of ImaginOn were clever in master planning for a broad-spectrum attendance from toddlers to high school seniors and yet providing discreet areas for different age groups. There are dedicated areas that are physically and thematically distinctive from one another by catering to teenagers (13-17 years old), adolescents (10-12 years old), and young children (5-9 years old). These areas function almost like mini-clubs or what might be called a “third place”.

#### The business model for collaborative cultural arts centers

When seeking what type(s) of business model(s) would need to exist to make partnerships for collaborative cultural arts centers viable, the most often cited topic was the spaces should be “multi-purpose”. This does not mean being all things to all people; that is a common errant goal made by some organizations that always ends up satisfying no one’s needs well. Multi-purpose here stipulates a business model in which shared resources are in use so much of the time that they readily pay for themselves. Emily Scharf summarized it thus, “The most successful ones seem to be theatres that have programming for students, art galleries that

house other things like music and concerts, and community centers that house many different things” (Scharf).

Sharing resources in order to reduce overhead costs was the chief business goal. Resources include not only space and equipment, but also staff. At ImaginOn, both the CML and CTC maintain separate staffs managed and funded by independent entities and budgets. However, they also share all expenses for two jointly funded staff positions reporting to the ImaginOn library manager and the theatre's executive director. These individuals manage the regular meetings conducted with staff from both organizations.

Jason Hyatt says these sessions provide a forum where teams from both organizations consider upcoming theatre productions and library programs and brainstorm ways to actively involve visitors that promote both organizations' events as well as enhance the overall experience engaging to young people. In addition to these gatherings, committees comprised of staff and board members from each partner and the comprehensive shared facility agreement all support a solid and successful partnership. Community input and leadership was key to tailoring the facility's programming to meet local needs.

Well-planned policies are the foundation upon which business practices are built, but it is the personal relationships between the individuals in each partner organization that really defines success. At ImaginOn, the CTC staff regularly seeks input from the CML staff regarding what children's books are currently popular or trends in literature for young people. CML staff may suggest a book title that has yet to be adapted for the stage. If viable as a show concept, CTC commissions a script, which eventually is produced and staged in one of ImaginOn's two theatres. “The finished product on stage will be a direct result of the collaboration that happens at

ImaginOn. Throughout the year theatre artists may visit the library to browse the collection, observe story time programs, talk with staff, or brainstorm new ideas” (Hyatt).

In this way, the two disparate and non-competing arts partners collaborate to generate a synergistic activity resulting in a unique creative arts product to be enjoyed by a common demographic.

#### The conditions required to create a collaborative cultural arts center

One of my most pressing questions to those I interviewed was, “Assuming it is possible to replicate a collaborative cultural arts center model like ImaginOn in other areas in the United States, what are the challenges in undertaking this project?” The replies ranged from the general (“pray that all the stars align!”) to the specific (assemble a project team comprised of key players from the public and private sectors).

Everyone agreed that proper time and money was required. Due to the unusual nature of such collaborative partnerships, more time (than “normal” projects usually require) was needed just to navigate around bureaucratic red tape. Further, it was not enough that there should be sufficient funding, it was also important from what sources funding came and for what purposes this funding was earmarked (e.g. public funding for capital efforts or an endowment to cover on-going operating expenses).

Perhaps the most inspirational opinion was Malcolm Holzman’s, “It requires a leap of the imagination and a lack of jealousy. No set formula exists for these shared undertakings. They are initiated and achieved by the sheer power and pioneering motivation of individuals and organizations that want to serve their communities in better ways” (Holzman & Delinger 12).

Jason Hyatt and Lois Kilkka observed an unexpected challenge that a decade after opening still continues to be an issue: what is ImaginOn? A library? A children's theatre? Something else? Hyatt and Kilkka shared that if they had more partners it would be even more confusing.

In 2008, Benton Delinger of Theatre Projects Consultants wrote encouraging words in his forward comments for *Theaters 2, Partnerships in Facility Use, Operation, and Management*:

We are in the midst of a large and sustained era of building visual and performing arts centers, with new facilities arising all over the USA and around the world. In the future, we believe others will consider our present time as a significant period for the arts, similar to the vaudeville and movie palace eras of the last century.

These buildings are being realized by both large and small communities as part of redevelopment/regeneration measures or as a significant investment in the arts.

(Holzman & Delinger 22)



## **CHAPTER 3 – MAJOR INFLUENCES**

I have now considered how corporate entertainment is competing with cultural arts for the attention of America's youth. I have discussed how some countries and cities developed centralized cultural arts destinations and also how some private/public partnerships created synergistic cultural attractions, both of which have proven successful in their efforts. Before moving forward, I would like to take a look at the major influences that brought our American culture to where it is today and ponder tactics to address various impacts, ranging from the socio-political to the commercial to the cultural.

America grew considerably over the twentieth century with major impacts from two world wars, a major economic depression, and cultural sculpting that began with the Industrial Age and culminated with the advent of the Information Age. Also instrumental were evolving economic policies, developing technologies and perhaps also, a cyclical generational pattern. Some of these were predicted long ago; none of these is a surprise.

### **Post-Modernism and Late Capitalism**

As observed earlier, America is often characterized by its entertainment industry and the major entertainment brand names that are now synonymous with American culture worldwide. Think for a moment how that came to be. The short answer is capitalism. In an endless quest for profits, experts in capitalism found ways to not only influence culture, but to create it and then service their creation for financial gain.

It may be that American literary critic and cultural theorist, Frederic Jameson's predictions about post-modernism have come to pass.

Capitalism has neither triumphed nor magically transformed itself into some perfect social system that leaves nothing else to be desired. What has happened rather, is that capitalism has expanded past its previous limits, penetrating and subsuming all the remaining enclaves. It has entered a Third Age as Marxist historian Ernest Mandel termed it in his path-breaking book *Late Capitalism*, which (as Frederic Jameson readily acknowledges) provides the template for Jameson's account of postmodernism." (Buchanan 83)

In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson argues that postmodernism is "the cultural logic of late capitalism", which he believes came to be in the mid-1970s. He based this on his perception that the "massive expansion of the productive capacity of the three economic superpowers of the era, the USA, Germany and Japan, finally exceeded the capacity of the market to absorb their output and after nearly two decades of astonishingly high levels of growth fell into a profound slump" (Buchanan 83). In order to sustain growth (and greater profits), it was not enough for corporations merely to meet the needs of their customers; they had to create new needs. This action is evident in two prominent American corporations, the ©Walt Disney Company and Apple® Inc.

Apple® fabricates, markets and sells personal digital devices. It creates and develops the software with which to operate these devices. It provides fashionable physical locations worldwide where these devices can be purchased and serviced. It possesses a marketing brand so pervasive and so culturally aligned with a specific demographic as to inspire blind loyalty.

During the late 1990s and into the turn of the century, the music industry was suffering as digital versions of songs were being shared person-to-person on the Internet without any

payments made to the music producers or the song composers. Rather than join the status quo in its fight against this new practice, Apple® embraced the rebellious paradigm of the prime market and created a rogue persona of their own.

In May 2003, Apple® introduced® iTunes, the first successful online music business model with pay-per-download and in very small monetary increments. Apple® brilliantly practiced a customer-oriented philosophy by meeting their customers needs and developed such loyalty as to be able to actually craft the cultural habits of that demographic. However, this is only one comprehensive media-content-to-delivery-system model.

The 1996 Telecommunications Act lifted many restrictions on the ownership and control of media. This single legislation permitted the premonition of late-capitalism to come into being. Following its ratification in Congress, a surge of business mergers ensued leaving only a few major corporations controlling entertainment from creation-to-delivery with product reaching the American public from “cradle-to-grave” (Bettig). It is more fiscally prudent for a larger corporation to spend money to purchase a smaller competitor than it is to fund a battle with it. This trend developed over the next decade. Now, roughly ninety percent of American entertainment is in the hands of only six media corporations: Time-Warner, NBCUniversal (GE), News Corporation, Viacom, CBS and The Walt Disney Company. The total 2010 revenue for these six corporations was \$275.9 billion (Business Insider). The portfolio of corporate assets each of these corporations possesses is remarkably similar and far-reaching.

Table 1- American communication corporations and holdings

<b>DISNEY</b>	ABC * ESPN * Radio Disney * ESPN Radio * ABC News radio * Disney Channel * ABC Family * Lifetime * A&E * DisneyXD * Disney Music Group * Walt Disney Pictures * Marvel Entertainment * Miramax Films * Pixar * Disney theme parks * Disney resorts * Disney Consumer Products * Hyperion Printing * ABC-owned affiliate television and radio stations
<b>TIME WARNER</b>	The CW * TNT * TBS * CNN * CNN Headline News * HBO * MAX (Cinemax) * Boomerang * The Cartoon Network * Adult Swim * Kid's WB * TheWB.com * Warner Bros. Entertainment * DC Comics * Hanna-Barbera * New Line Cinema * Castle Rock Entertainment * Warner theme parks * Time, Inc. * Time Warner Cable Systems
<b>NBCUNIVERSAL</b>	NBC * Telemundo * CNBC * MSNBC * USA Network * Bravo * E! Entertainment * SyFy * Lifetime * Style Network * Oxygen * Sleuth * G4 * VERSUS * The Golf Channel * AZN TV * FEARnet * NBCUniversal Studios * Universal Pictures * Universal theme parks * Comcast Sports * NBC-owned affiliate television and radio stations * Comcast Cable Systems
<b>VIACOM</b>	Comedy Central * Nickelodeon * MTV Networks * VH1 * BET * CMT * Spike * Palladia * TMF * Comedy Gold * VIVA * Xfire * Atom Entertainment Group * Neopets * GoCityKids * Quizilla * Paramount Pictures * Republic Pictures * Viacom International
<b>CBS</b>	CBS * Showtime * The Movie Channel * Flix * CBS Television Studios (at Paramount) * King World Productions * CBS Outdoor (billboard advertising) * CBS/Paramount Television * CBS Consumer Products * Simon & Schuster * CBS-owned affiliate television and radio stations
<b>NEWS CORP.</b>	FOX * Fox News Channel * Fox Business Network * Fox Sports Channel * Fox College Sports * Big Ten Network * Fox Soccer Network * SPEED * Fuel TV * FX Network * National Geographic Channel * National Geographic Wild * MyNetworkTV (MNTV syndication) * Hulu.com * MySpace * AskMen.com * Foxsports.com * SKY * STAR * Foxtel * GameSpy * Twentieth Century Fox Pictures * Twentieth Century Fox Television * Fox Searchlight Pictures * Fox-owned affiliate television and radio stations * <i>The Wall Street Journal</i>

## Media and Culture

The Walt Disney Company is a good example of the various types of media assets these communication giants own and control. Disney owns several television and cable networks, radio networks, Internet/mobile networks, a music group, film studios, the largest theme parks in the world, several destination resorts, a cruise ship line, and a division dedicated to merchandising all of the intellectual properties they own from toys to books to software (Bettig). If a typical American were asked which company's brand was synonymous with family entertainment, chances are excellent their answer would be "Disney." Is it any wonder that a three-year-old American child with an Apple® iPad can sing "Let It Go" from the animated Disney film, *Frozen* in tune and know all the lyrics by heart?

Referencing again the prophecy of Marshall McLuhan, I can now see clearly what he articulated more than fifty years ago about the world becoming "a global village". For McLuhan, this village is the outcome of the speeding up of social relations through the use of electronic media and how this acceleration affects both the material and perceived integration of space. It is, he said, communicative speed that breaks down barriers between the local and the global, private and public, proximity and distance. Thus, for McLuhan, the global village constitutes an experiential reality—one that mimics a sense of universal immediacy (Comor).

Providing an example to validate this notion, McLuhan pointed out that the railway did not introduce transportation, but it did accelerate our way of life or the "scale of previous human functions." (McLuhan 23-24) It can be argued that the same technology-influencing-culture shift is what is happening right now with the ubiquitous usage of personal digital devices (e.g. smartphones, tablets, laptops, etc.).

Were McLuhan able to peer from 1964 into the future that is our world today, he might perceive what he considered a dystopian result where the media *is the culture*. Children in the rising generation today (5-17 year olds, born 1998 to 2010) are growing up in an age unlike any previous with devices capable of advancing their cultural development (in as yet undetermined ways) both positively and negatively.

### **Generational Theory**

“Understanding generational diversity allows...educators to maximize student learning because it promotes the educators’ and students’ valuing each other’s personal histories, characteristics, and learning needs” (Johnson & Romanello).

In 1992, public policy consultant, William Strauss and political satirist, Neil Howe, co-authored a book titled *Generations* in which they noted major events in America since 1584 and speculated what might lie ahead using “Generational Theory,” an idea that has existed in various conceptual states since the early 20th century. Briefly summarized, their Generational Theory contends two things: (1) that history has repeated itself in the same sequence for centuries in blocks of time that can be divided into four sub-eras called “turnings” (roughly twenty years in length) and (2) that the era (turning) in which a person is born and then grows up affects his or her world perspective. Generational Theory further suggests that this acquired world perspective as well as certain personality traits are shared by almost everyone else born and raised in that same era. In summary, generations have a unique familiar bond in how they view the world and how they learn (Johnson & Romanello).

In their 1997 sequel book, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*, Strauss and Howe suggested how recent dates can be ascribed to the current cycle of four turnings as well as

what generations were born and then challenged in which turnings. The most recent living five generations are listed here (current ages in 2015):

The Veteran Generation	ages 69 and older
The Baby Boomers	ages 51-69
Generation X	ages 33-51
Generation Y/Millennials	ages 14-33
The 9/11 Generation <sup>1</sup>	ages 1-13

Table 2. - The recent four turnings of Generational Theory

<b>First Turning</b>	<b>Second Turning</b>	<b>Third Turning</b>	<b>Fourth Turning</b>
<b>HIGH</b> - An upbeat era of strengthening institutions and weakening individualism, when a new civic order implants and the old values regime decays	<b>AWAKENING</b> - A passionate era of spiritual upheaval, when the civic order comes under attack from a new values regime.	<b>UNRAVELING</b> - A downcast era of strengthening individualism and weakening institutions, when old civic order decays and the new values regime implants.	<b>CRISIS</b> - A decisive era of secular upheaval, when the values regime propels the replacement of the old civic order with a new one..."an era of community & civic commitment".
<b>1946 - 1964</b> Truman; Eisenhower; Kennedy  Korean War; Cold War; Rock n roll.	<b>1964 - 1984</b> LBJ; Nixon; Ford; Carter; Reagan  Vietnam War; campus revolts; Civil Rights activism; Summer of Love; drugs; tax revolts.	<b>1984 - 2004</b> Reagan; Geo. Bush; Clinton; Geo. W. Bush  Fall of USSR; rise of terrorism; 9/11; The Information Age.	<b>2005 - 2025</b> Geo. W. Bush; Obama; _____  2008 depression; terrorism; Iraq War; Afghani war; _____
<b><u>The Baby Boomers</u></b> 1945-1963	<b><u>Generation X</u></b> 1964-1981	<b><u>Gen Y/Millennials</u></b> 1982-2000	<b><u>The 9/11 Generation</u></b> 2000-2020
52-70	34-51	15-33	One to 14
Idealism * Optimism * Personal growth * Personal satisfaction * Youth * Health & Wellness * Excellence * Self-expressive	Change * Choice * Global awareness * Individualism * Lifelong learners * Immediate gratification * Thrill seekers * Self-reliant * Informal * Diversity	Never give up * Civic minded * Conformity * Stable * Predictable * Frugal	Dedicated * Duty before pleasure * Hard work * Law & Order * Cautious * Modest * Patient * Sacrifice * Delayed reward

<sup>1</sup> No documents researched offered a formal name to this generation, so I have taken the liberty to do so.

I consider philosopher Georg Hegel's dialectic (Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis) as a form of "evolve or die" natural law that is applicable to most things. Take for example an object in orbit of a planet (*see Figure 6*). Without a periodic "boost", its orbit will decay, the object will fall into the atmosphere, and it will burn to a cinder. I see this example as a metaphor for life on Earth. Without periodic evolutionary boosts, species will cease to be viable and become extinct.

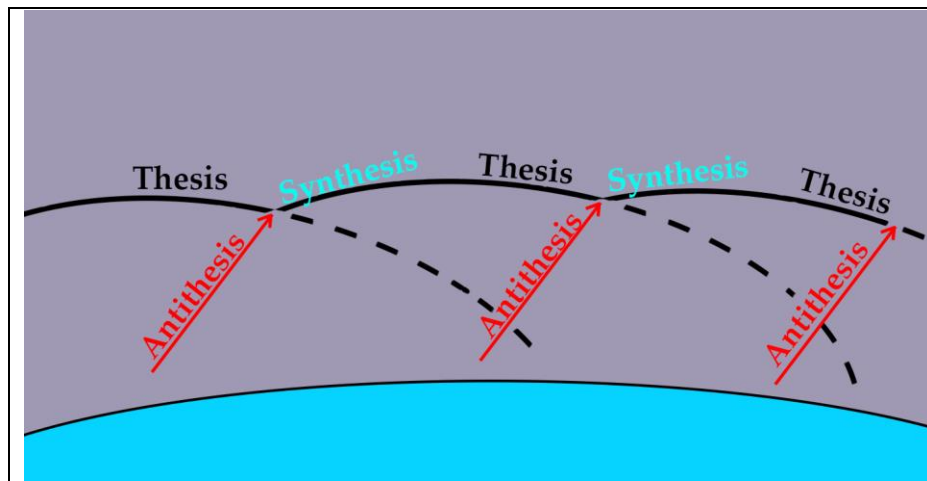


Figure 6. the Hegelian dialectic

Source: Mark A Nichols

I believe that most things in the Universe are a macrocosm or a microcosm of something else in the Universe. With this mindset, I consider how the four-part cycle of Generational Theory might be seen through the lens of Hegel's dialectic. In doing this, I perceive a parallel that bolsters my opinion of Generational Theory as a natural law of evolution. The existing Thesis (the first turning, "High") is addressed by Antithesis (both the second and third turnings, "Awakening" and "Unraveling" respectively) which yields a Synthesis (the fourth and last turning of the cycle, "Crisis") which in short time settles into a new Thesis and the cyclical pattern repeats. (*see Figure 7*)



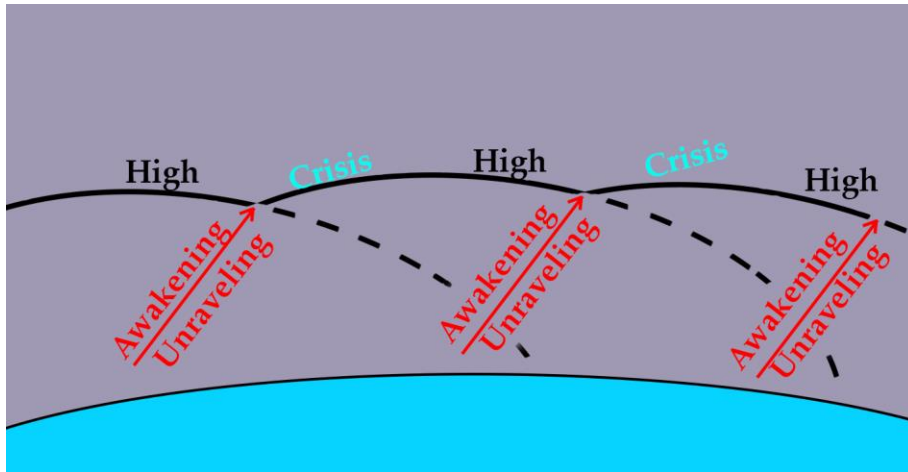


Figure 7. the Four Turnings as Hegel's dialectic

Source: Mark A Nichols

Presuming the veracity of Generational Theory, both The Veteran Generation and The 9/11 Generation were born during the Fourth Turning (Crisis) and theoretically grew up with similar historical events, which therefore produced similar developmental traits and generational characteristics (*see Table 2*). This is relevant to this paper only in suggesting that, in considering Generational Theory, educators might be able to anticipate today's youth a bit better and adjust our pedagogy accordingly. "Faculty have to view generational characteristics and beliefs not as right or wrong, but as different. As with religious or cultural differences, generational differences can be acknowledged" (Johnson & Romanello).

The rapid advancement of technology has had a varied impact on most Americans. One of the best ways to assess these impacts and to discern a trend (if any) is to analyze data by age groups. Given this, Generational Theory provides a reasonable lens through which to observe technological advancement's impact on various generations and what trends it might determine. As an example, by analyzing the usage of various personal electronic media devices by age

groups, we can discern a trend. Understanding this trend provides a basis for how to reach younger and future generations through cultural education.

Studies of measurable trends in technological advances (that include data by age group) include consumption of news, information, entertainment and advertisements. These studies are an excellent indicator of how each generation uses various delivery systems (e.g. newspapers, radio, television, the internet via smartphones and tablets, etc.). A 2013 article published by the Pew Research Center reported that print revenues and newspaper advertising has been in a steady decline for many years. “Print advertising revenue is now just 45% of what it was in 2006” (Edmonds). This implies a decrease in the consumption of print media.

A few gross generalizations vis-à-vis age groups can be made from the results of various research studies: the Veteran Generation, whom Tom Brokaw dubbed “The Greatest”, depended upon radio and newspapers for their mass media; the Baby Boomers (those born 1950-1963) and the successive Generation X (born early 1960s-early 1980s) also had radio and newspapers, but grew up with television as their primary mass medium. Those three groups today utilize a variety of sources for their news, information and entertainment. Typically, their media consumption habits look like this: they seek (i) important news from television, radio, newspapers and the Internet (in that order); (ii) general information from the Internet; and (iii) entertainment from television and radio (mostly in their cars).

The opening lyrics of the 1988 song, “The Living Years” (written by Mike Rutherford and B.A Robertson), popularized by the English rock band, Mike + the Mechanics, state a recurring truism: “Every generation blames the one before” (Rutherford). It appears that each generation is determined to rebel against their parents’ generation by either a wholesale discard

of their methods or cherry-picking what they think works while also “fixing” what they think is wrong. Strauss and Howe summarized this perspective in one of many excerpts from a series of interviews posted to a website bearing the name of their 1997 book:

History creates generations and generations create history. The cycle draws forward energy from each generation’s need to redefine the social role of each new phase of life it enters. And it draws circular energy from each generation’s tendency to fill perceived gaps and to correct (indeed, overcorrect) the excesses of its elders. (The Fourth Turning)

Assuming Generational Theory has merit, I think it is not prudent to use methods of educating a generation predicated upon the framework of the preceding generation or even the generation preceding that.

The most recent adult group is today’s Generation Y (aka “Gen Y” [or “the Millennials”] born early 1980s to the early 2000s). They bear stark contrast to their predecessors. There are three characteristics evident within this demographic who grew up in the “Information Age” and the rapid growth of the Internet: (i) the usage of newspapers virtually vanishes; (ii) they listen to the radio only in their cars and usually then only to get their news and information; and (iii) the manner by which they watch TV programs is achieved not by the airwaves or cable service, but rather the Internet (e.g. Netflix, Hulu, videos on demand, Amazon Prime, etc.).

A 2013 report issued by the Pew Research Journalism Project notes that “roughly half of both Facebook and Twitter users get their news on those sites” (Holcomb). An article also published in 2013 by the Newspaper Research Journal states the majority of young adult participants favored “breakout text and local event listings, more local news, variety of stories,

conversational writing with less inside humor and advertising and more political coverage” and that these results “can be applied to any news platform—including mobile apps, social media and news websites” (Zerba).

While the nature of the content this generation consumes has changed somewhat (to be expected), the nature of the delivery of this content has changed dramatically. This change in media delivery systems is so dramatic that it influences the very character of how the content is conceived and produced in the first place.

I do not believe instructors should be reactive in their approach to education and culture arts by merely attempt to “improve” on the methods by which they themselves were taught. I believe Generational Theory has enough credibility to provide instructors insight to be proactive in their approaches to the education and the cultural development of our youth. If we endorse Generational Theory, we should look backwards eighty years before looking forward into the next twenty.

By embracing Generational Theory, instructors can apply proactive measures to education and culture arts offerings in order to be ahead of curve of natural human development. Perhaps the two generation types that are currently populating our primary education schools and our cultural arts organizations are not succumbing to a tidal wave of late-capitalism, but rather are becoming facile at a new manner in education and cultural enrichment. This new method, although alien to the three generations that preceded them, is absolutely in keeping with the characteristics expected of this “Fourth Turning” of the cycle. Perhaps the educators of today can learn from their students how better to teach them using the tools and methods most suitable to them.

In order to effectively reach younger generations, we must communicate with them on their terms. The corporate entertainment media industry figured out how to best reach a new market and has successfully capitalized on it. On 28 January 2015, “Apple just announced the highest quarterly earnings of any public company in history: \$74.6 billion in revenue and \$18 billion in profits” (NBCNews.com). That’s a lot of PDAs.

### **Convergence Culture**

The age-old aphorism, “The head wags the tail” is usually applicable. If the tail of the capitalism dog is the consumer, the Gen Y/Millennial marketing model is backwards with the tail wagging the dog. The effect this generation has had on the large communications corporations and the evidence of their growing control over content determination in recent years is significant. It has been dubbed “convergence culture” by Henry Jenkins, the Provost’s Professor of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California. Jenkins is also the author of several books on media and popular culture. One of these is *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* published in 2006 in which Jenkins discusses his theory:

By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they wanted. Convergence is a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes. (Jenkins)

Gen Y/Millennials are adept at using a wide array of personal digital devices to obtain their news, information and entertainment. Indeed, they prefer these delivery systems, because

they insist on having their mass media the way they want it, anytime and anywhere, often while they are doing something else. They want their freedom and they want it for free. This generation has been revolutionizing the entertainment industry with its influence. With proper guidance by cultural partners, Gen Y/Millennials are likely to initiate a similar paradigm shift in the arts as well.

In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins discerns that today's youth are active participants in the marketplace, and greatly influence decisions made by corporations, thereby blurring the lines of who has the greater control and influence:

Right now, convergence culture is getting defined top-down by decisions being made in corporate boardrooms and bottom-up by decisions made in teenagers' bedrooms. It is shaped by the desires of media conglomerates to expand their empires across multiple platforms and by the desires of consumers to have the media they want where they want it, when they want it, and in the format they want...." (Jenkins)

Apple's initiative to create and market Apple iTunes was a classic representation of how convergence culture works and how it can be successful.

Jenkins' book also prompted the creation of an annual event whose participants explore media, entertainment companies, brands, and the consumers with how they interact with one another. A non-profit organization, The Futures of Entertainment (FoE) hosts a website (<http://www.convergenceculture.org>) where various publications regarding these changes in the media industries, newsletters, research and other resources can be accessed. On-going discussions and data found there tend to reinforce Jenkins' theories.

By accepting the principles of the Convergence Culture theory and ongoing technological paradigm shifts, educators should be encouraged to collaborate with their students concerning how best to embrace their students' proclivity (perhaps even necessity) for the usage of technology in learning and how best to construct and communicate lessons in academics and culture. Today's students and those who follow them will learn arts culture if they are permitted to use the technologies with which they have become so familiar. This single act will be the quantum leap towards offsetting the overwhelming influence of corporate entertainment on the younger generations.

## CHAPTER 4 – ANTITHETICAL APPROACHES

We might concede that we cannot stop the tide of capitalism or the advancement of technology. We might acknowledge that media in many forms has been woven into the very fabric of our day-to-day lives, thereby defining the tapestry of our culture. We might accept the differences of each generation and also accept that there is validity to the idea that each generation learns and develops differently than its predecessors. What then do we do with all of this?

Revisiting the Hegelian Dialectic, if one is to believe that any thesis is doomed to extinction without the interruption of antithesis to spur it to a synthesis (evolution), can this same principle not be applied to cultural development? If so, then the need to educate children about studies and culture in a manner different than what has been and is being practiced is essential. Has this been attempted before and with what results?

### Progressive Education

One century ago, John Dewey wrote *Democracy and Education*, in which he discussed the importance of education in the survival of the human species. “With the growth of civilization, the gap between the original capacities of the immature and the standards and customs of the elders increases. Mere physical growing up, mere mastery of the bare necessities of subsistence will not suffice to reproduce the life of the group” (Dewey 4).

Dewey further described the distinction between training and education. He suggested that instruction that encourages rote memorization [or, what we today lament as “teaching to the test”] is less learning and more training, as one would modify the behavior of a domesticated pet. “Now in many cases -- too many cases -- the activity of the immature human being is simply



played upon to secure habits which are useful. He is trained like an animal rather than educated like a human being. His instincts remain attached to their original objects of pain or pleasure” (Dewey 11).

Dewey asserted several factors to genuine learning. First, he believed that students must be devoted to learning subject matter that has relevance in their lives. Second, students should have an active democratic role in determining the manner in which they are taught. Third, there is great value in pairing “theory” with “practice” believing the combination of the two creates an experience towards providing real understanding. However, Dewey held that even experience alone was insufficient, thoughtful communication (reflection) was needed. “We do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience” (Dewey 78). He further stated that communicating our reflections was the key to the process of sharing experiences until they became “a common possession” (Dewey 9).

This linear string of logic summarizes that progressive education is necessary for the survival of our species. This fact alone should be sufficient motivation for educators (particularly in the cultural arts), administrators and elected officials to ensure that progressive education is implemented. If the students of today and tomorrow are permitted to participate in the methods by which they are taught, they will learn arts culture better.

### **The Third Place**

Humans are herding animals. Generally speaking, we tend to congregate in groupings of people that are similarly typed to ourselves during most of our waking hours. In his 1989 book, *The Great Good Place*, American sociologist Ray Oldenburg explains this phenomenon as an actual societal necessity. Oldenburg believes for a civilization to be successful, it requires

informal public gathering places where the connectivity of our culture expresses itself. He dubbed these gathering places, “The Third Place”.

Oldenburg notes that members of an industrialized society have two fundamental places: their home place and their work place. He asserts the need for a third place where individuals can congregate with other individuals who share values, mores, and interests. Although like-minded people often tend to gather at these third places, they do not always agree. It is in “neutral ground” places such as these where dialogue freely takes place and ideas are born. This free dialogue includes the public discourse that occurred in colonial taverns in the mid 1700s (*see Figure 7*), which he viewed as “essential to the political process of a democracy” and ultimately led to the American Revolution (Oldenburg 67).



Figure 8. Colonial American tavern

Source: [www.blog.swig.co/](http://www.blog.swig.co/)

Oldenburg believes these third places are the nascence of our very culture even today and can be found in coffee houses (*see Figure 8*). “They must be places where individuals may come and go as they please, in which none are required to play host, and in which all feel at home and comfortable” (Oldenburg 22).



Figure 9. Present-day café

Source: [publiseek.tumblr.com/](http://publiseek.tumblr.com/)

He feels that present-day designs of American suburbia have woefully neglected to include these unstructured places and the demographic that has suffered the most for this omission has been children. Indeed, he laments that the American child is over-scheduled, quoting Norman Lobsenz from his 1962 book, *Is Anybody Happy?* “From the moment he enters nursery school at the age of three, (the child’s life) is tightly scheduled for the next fifteen years. Boys and girls go solemnly from dancing class to judo class, from swimming school to riding school” (Oldenburg 270).

If we believe that informal public gathering places are essential for cultural development, even in young persons, then it is essential we create venues best suited to young persons today to

facilitate the development of these interpersonal communication skills. These venues should include, even encourage, the usage of personal digital devices.

If we believe the tenets presented by Generational Theorists, we can presume that the methods of education and/or cultural growth that have been typically practiced in the past are not necessarily suitable for young persons today. Cultural education should look to the children, not the parents or grandparents in how best to reach them and share the fundamentals of our cultural arts. These children will in turn create innovations upon these foundations.

If we believe these things, is it not therefore reasonable that cultural leaders of a community should create Third Places for children to better learn about themselves, each other, our culture, and how they fit in it?

The trend of many cultural centers is exactly this. Libraries, museums, houses of worship and other cultural arts centers are making efforts (consciously or not) to become third places for their communities. In the next section, I will explore how museums in particular have continued to reinvent themselves in order to better reach their markets.

### **Participatory Museums and Science Centers**

For decades, many cultural arts centers (especially science museums) undertook different approaches to refashioning their brands, their facilities, and better targeting their market demographics. Many of them have made aggressive efforts to populate their facility with interactive features putting Dewey's balance of theory and practice into play. Some have mindfully made moves towards becoming large-scale versions of Oldenburg's Third Place specifically for younger families with pre-school children. The motivation to make these changes has almost always been for business reasons. As competition for discretionary dollar spending

has become greater, the need to be more attractive to changing markets is a high priority for any non-profit cultural facility.

The National Endowment for the Arts has conducted six comprehensive surveys in the past twenty-six years, assessing how Americans participate in the visual and performing arts. In their 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, the NEA released a sobering report on the state of arts attendance in the United States. The authors were not vague in their assessment; in the preface, they wrote, "the 2008 survey results are, at a glance, disappointing... a smaller segment of the adult population either attended arts performances or visited art museums or galleries than in any prior survey" (Williams).

The report objectively accounts that thirty-five percent of all U.S. adults (about seventy-eight million Americans) visited a visual arts facility or attended at least one arts event of the type the NEA has tracked since 1982. Subjectively, comparisons to earlier years tell a clearer story. The percentage of adults attending performing arts events dropped on average four percent from 2002 to 2008 (the figures varied based on specific types of music, or dance). Attendance at popular visual arts events (including museums and craft fairs) also slipped three percent from 2002 to 2008.

In all fairness, it should be noted that at the time of this most recent NEA survey (2008), the US economy was in a serious slump and consumer spending on arts admissions closely matched indicators in the U.S. economy at that time versus recent prior years. So, data comparisons between 2008 and earlier SPPA reports (e.g. 1982), might be more indicative of long-term trends. An example would be the percentage of eighteen to twenty-four year old

Americans who acknowledge having received any music education in their lives has dropped by a third since 1982.

Museum consultant and exhibit designer Nina Simon analyzed long-term trends in the arts and summarized her conclusions about how museums have been changing in her 2010 book, *The Participatory Museum*. In it, Simon defines “a participatory cultural institution (as) a place where visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around content” (Simon). She believes that these cultural centers are reconnecting with their communities in new ways (at least to the museum) in order to show value and relevance by inviting them to be actively engaged as participants, not just consumers. This approach to cultural arts offerings sounds very similar to how John Dewey envisioned progressive education.



Figure 10. Digitopolis interactive (the Science Museum, London, UK)

Source: <http://www.ssplprints.com/>

Simon’s book echoes the NEA’s SPPA report, but also identifies an additional factor about the ethnicity of arts participants by saying:

Audiences for museums, galleries, and performing arts institutions have *decreased*, and the audiences that remain are older and whiter than the overall population. Cultural institutions argue that their programs provide unique cultural and civic value, but increasingly people have turned to other sources for entertainment, learning, and dialogue. They share their artwork, music, and stories with each other on the web. (Simon)

Simon also states “when people can actively participate with cultural institutions, those places become central to cultural and community life. People use the institution as meeting grounds for dialogue around the content presented” (Simon). This sounds very similar to how Roy Oldenburg sees the Third Place functioning in our democratic society. Consideration of this information suggests that collaborative cultural arts centers are all the more necessary in order to bring America’s diverse cultures together in the real world, and in order to pave a unified path into the future, instead of a segregated one in the virtual world.

An early innovator that has done this is also one of America’s oldest museums, the Museum of Science in Boston founded in 1830. Peter Garland manages all exhibits for the Museum of Science whether produced in-house for their use or for touring around the world to other museums. Working in leadership at a museum with such a long record of transformations, Garland has a good perspective of what has succeeded over time. He describes an institution that shifted its focus from natural history one hundred eighty years ago to science and engineering today “by varying degrees and those have been driven by the (museum) presidents at the time” (Garland).

The Museum of Science in Boston has been successful at surviving by periodic metamorphosis and remaining a solo provider. However, smaller cultural arts facilities with limited resources have been prompted to join forces with others forming partnerships in collaborative centers in order to survive markets with finicky cultural, economic and social conditions.



Figure 11. The Museum of Science (Boston, MA)

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museum\\_of\\_Science\\_\(Boston\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museum_of_Science_(Boston))

Proper determination of the mix of collaborative partners is key in this effort. Garland notes that sciences and the arts may mix well, but theatre and zoos might not: “basically the accounting and payroll people can be the same, but leadership will require different skills, and operations will want different skills, and those that oversee and work with the content will be vastly different” (Garland).



Participatory museums have shown for decades that a progressive approach to the arts with hands-on interactive features is the best means by which to reach their young audiences successfully and also to maintain healthy financial ledgers. Other cultural centers have succeeded by embracing today's generations and using progressive education techniques in Third Place environments. This approach, on a grander scale, may be the means by which cultural arts can best compete for the attention and interests of young Americans today and tomorrow and may allow us to continue to develop our cultural arts in ways we cannot imagine.

## **CHAPTER 5 – SYNTHESIS**

### **Compilation and Analysis of Data**

At the beginning of my research, I posed questions in regards to the ubiquitous incidence of tablets and other personal electronic devices in the hands of American children at very young ages. I questioned how these devices and their content (carefully crafted by only a few entertainment corporations) are actually molding the culture of Americans from cradle to grave. In order to know more about the influences that personal electronic devices and their content might have on the cultural development of American children today, I delved into a few relevant topics within the for-profit world of technology and entertainment. Specifically, I contemplated the technological advancements in the areas of personal digital devices, entertainment and communications:

- How these advancements in both media and their delivery systems have been embraced by the general American public (especially the younger generations);
- How these advancements were achieved by entertainment corporations who, understanding convergence culture, listened to their younger marketing demographics and acted upon their feedback with success;
- How this mutually satisfactory capitalistic relationship has increasingly defined American culture.

Research on the cultural development of American children would be incomplete if it did not also include exploration into the non-profit world of cultural arts and education. Through my research, I was introduced to methods of providing cultural arts that offer balance to the onslaught of corporate entertainment. These methods employ the very technology that

entertainment corporations use, including media, their delivery systems, and environmental (themed) design approaches. I learned about Progressive Education, Generational Theory, and inter-active participatory experiences. I also came to understand that the application of these methods in cultural arts centers has produced positive results in attendance (and subsequently, the bottom line).

Further, I saw commonalities and parallels in the ways for-profit and non-profit organizations have succeeded. One of the effective methods employed by many non-profit centers has been to transform their previously staid institutions into vibrant “third places” where visitors interact with one another. It is in such places that hands-on practices are encouraged, inspiration takes place, and ideas are born. Relevant topics here include:

- Partnerships in the creation of cultural arts centers both large and small;
- How museums are adopting interactive “participatory” approaches in order to boost their attendance numbers and their bottom lines;
- Progressive Education’s contention that students should participate in their lesson planning (not unlike corporate entertainment does with Convergence Culture);
- How understanding Generational Theory may assist educators and cultural arts providers in reaching young persons today;
- The presence (appropriate or not) of technology in the classroom.

From my examination in these areas, I attempt to summarize what I have discerned in the five synopses listed here:

First, huge corporations that specialize in communication and entertainment make it their business to stay abreast of technological advancements and generational trends. They do this in

order to capitalize on them at the earliest opportunity and achieve greater profits. This practice is particularly true when the same company owns both the media content and the delivery systems and also “real world” applications of their content. These corporations have done so for many years with great success without much competition from the arts. The business marriage of media and technology is a huge train that has left the station. Fueled by profit seeking, technological advances will continue to develop and progress rapidly (even relentlessly) in ways only imaginable. These entertainment corporations have also been able to leverage their ubiquitous virtual presence via PDAs with marketing for their real world assets such as cinemas, theme parks and events (example: a Mickey Mouse video game on a tablet is accompanied by advertisements for Disney films, theme parks, and resorts).

Second, it is undeniable that technology in the form of personal digital devices is omnipresent in mainstream United States, especially the hands of young Americans. Indeed, contemporary young persons, who have grown up with this technology, are less familiar with other means of communicating, discovering, and sharing information. Young Americans will almost assuredly continue to embrace new technology as it develops and is released in order to “upgrade” what is already now essentially innate in them.

Third, well-intentioned companies specializing in technology-in-the-classroom have encountered resistance from the introduction of their products. Excuses and inconclusive studies abound on both sides of the debate as to whether or not approaches in this area are a benefit. I believe this debate is moot; the eventuality that technology-in-the-classroom will become commonplace is a certainty. Educators who embrace this change sooner than later will promote success for their schools, their students and themselves.

Fourth, large-scale mixed-use cultural venues such as Kulturhuset in Stockholm and the Pompidou Center in Paris are both long-term proof that such collaborative business models can work. In both of these venues, the co-location of various cultural arts providers together with other businesses in a symbiotic relationship under strong governmental leadership and funding has been commercially successful for decades.

Fifth, smaller collaborative ventures in the United States such as ImaginOn in Charlotte, NC show that enlightened cultural partnerships are possible and successful in effectively creating a cultural (and educational) experience if conceived and managed well. These partnerships are predicated on participants who share the same demographic and similar goals, but are not competitive for discretionary dollars; who share resources (spaces, materials and staff); who dream big; and who do not let their egos get in the way. Many organizations that provide young persons with the literary, performing and visual arts have continually and successfully reinvented themselves in order to keep up with ever changing needs and interests of each generation.

### **Where do we go from here?**

After synthesizing this research, I now believe that collaborative community arts centers are highly effective venues by which to infuse and develop culture in young Americans today. I believe this to be particularly true when the private sector side is populated by arts organizations, by families, and by motivated influential individuals. “Families” must include children because their input is significant to the relevance of the programming offered and ultimately the achievement of the partnership.

Traditionalists are likely to consider this approach to be “counter-cultural” (maybe even heretical). The challenges for these innovative centers are rooted in fears of not doing things the

way they have always been done, of not trusting in achieving true ego-less partnerships, of not embracing technological advances, and of not listening to the children. I believe strongly that, despite these conservative fears and despite the influence of corporate entertainment, these counter-cultural changes will lead to great progress in imbuing cultural arts into our youths.

Additionally, I believe that if Education as an industry can better understand the various influences on childhood development and can also adopt similar counter-cultural changes, they might also enjoy the same success that non-profit arts organizations have achieved in reaching young persons and thereby improve the efficacy of teaching and learning. Why not? Without becoming small versions of theme parks, for decades many cultural arts organizations have enhanced their offerings by reinventing themselves in family friendly facilities that utilize technological advancements and creating more accessible approaches to reaching their patrons. These organizations continue to pay attention to what their younger demographics want (as entertainment corporations do) and are thriving because of this.

In the U.S., there are many design and production firms who specialize in creating entertainment-based approaches and hands-on activities. The effort of these firms have improved museums, zoos, aquariums and other cultural arts centers, creating more exciting and fun learning experiences. What would happen if Education partnered with the same resources as cultural arts providers did in the reinvention of their facilities and methods? Perhaps one day, Education will embrace this same approach and become more effective in teaching young Americans not just the arts, but also everything else in the primary school curriculum.

The first step towards this counter-cultural approach is embracing technology-in-the-classroom. Alas, I believe resistance from traditionalists in the school systems is debilitating this

effort. I suspect deeply entrenched paradigms and habits in academia will take generations to shift and I believe it will require public/private partnerships (like many collaborative cultural arts organizations) with adequate funding and inspired leadership to achieve such change.

### **Wrapping it up**

With all of this in mind, I envision a “progressive collaborative convergence” initiative for the cultural arts industry that fosters partnerships between arts providers, young consumers and private supporters. In this program, these arts providers with “top-down” approaches will be connected with today’s children and “bottom-up” ideas. I’m confident this initiative will yield (among other things) new software applications for laptops, tablets and smartphones. On devices with which they are already intimately familiar, young Americans will use these “apps” to achieve easy access to the arts providers and their programs. They will also have an opportunity to influence the development of these and future programs thereby encouraging their personal participation in them (and in-person). The arts providers gain greater audiences (conceivably with growth potential), the private supporters gain a return on their investment both financially and morally, and best of all, young Americans ultimately becoming enriched by cultural offerings.

The initiative begins on the local level where various neighboring arts organizations that share demographics, but do not compete for market share, will find it easy to create progressive collaborative convergence partnerships. In time, an alliance of these local chapters can collaborate as part of a national initiative that will benefit from sharing their resources with fellow national members to mutually enhance their virtual offerings.

Eventually, the initiative can grow to global scale involving international arts providers from all over the world with further diversified content and enriched virtual experiences. The chat rooms and forums on the international initiative's website will become the virtual Third Place for international arts sharing content and ideas around the world and inspiring people to visit locations (theatres, museums and events) to enhance their experiences.

With this initiative born of grass-roots necessity and developed with technology, the youth of today will be given the opportunity to shape the cultural arts presence of tomorrow on a global scale that will rival corporate entertainment's reach and redefine arts and culture world-wide.



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