



Welcome to the....

## Artistry for Learning

By  
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*Question:* "What's this all about? I'm a teacher, not an artist!"

*Response:* "Not so! All fine teachers are artists!"

Some years ago you began to look at "schooling" in a different way. You started to reach, teach and engage students with that (hard-to-describe) process known as "Tribes." You painted a different picture in your classroom and demonstrated that learning can be interactive, meaningful and exciting.

Your friends at CenterSource Systems have believed for a long time that national goals to accelerate achievement for all levels of today's students are attainable – if and when *learning about learning* becomes a priority. The field of education has been striving to define school reform for several decades. We have pushed through the School-Site Council Era, the Computer-Tech Era and now the Era of high stakes Standards and Testing. Each era has been replete with different policies, funding, research, complex plans, costly programs, curricula and consultants. For the most part, decades of past efforts lapsed into "predictable failures of school reform."<sup>1</sup> Through it all, the most important resources and logical approaches have been largely ignored. Yet to be valued and deliberately applied is the wealth of research, studies and literature on *human learning as related to children's development*. The historic focus has been on equipment, curriculum, instruction and testing, but seldom on students and how they learn. At last, prominent voices are saying, "The time has come *to learn about learning*. How can we know how to raise test scores (or raise capable and healthy kids) if we do not understand and know how *today's children* learn?" Ray McNulty, senior fellow at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation writes, "In the end it is all about learning – not teaching and not assessment. [edit] Assessment is not about students' futures as it's about understanding their past. [edit] We've breezed through the Information Technology Era and have arrived at a new period, which I call the "Learning Era."<sup>2</sup>

At the same time other esteemed educators and researchers are announcing "the place to begin is with a hard look at the evidence against conventional reform and improvement efforts -- and at the evidence that argues *for* the right kind of 'learning communities.' The *most promising strategy* for sustained, substantive school improvement is building the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community."<sup>3</sup> It's well proven that "productive teams in which *teachers* rigorously plan, design, research, evaluate, and prepare teaching materials together" lead to:

- higher-quality solutions to instructional problems,
- increased confidence among faculty,
- increased ability to support one another's strengths and to accommodate weaknesses,
- more systematic assistance to beginning teachers, and
- the ability to examine an expanded pool of ideas, methods, and materials.<sup>4</sup>

The elements, in combination, can't help but produce "remarkable gains in achievement."<sup>5</sup>

Building capacity? Learning communities? Learning about learning?

Now we hear you saying, "It sounds a lot like Tribes!" Yes, for years the folks at CenterSource have been:

- integrating studies on learning and human development, and
- working to build the capacity of teachers and school leaders to *learn together* and use the *research-based process* of Tribes TLC.

It follows that the purpose of the Artistry for Learning course now is to deepen our understanding of learning, and increase the capacity of teachers to work together as productive learning teams. Knowledgeable teachers, principals and school leaders in their own schools need to be recognized as the best leaders – the “artists” for school reform. It is by intensifying your implementation of the process of Tribes with its underlying synthesis of *research on learning* that educational excellence can be achieved. As “teacher-artists” you will be selecting and blending a *palette* of colors to create meaningful learning experiences that connect to academic standards. As artists you and your colleagues will work together to make certain that the *canvas* (the school culture), on which you are painting, *is and stays* strong and supportive.

Tribes schools have come a long way. Most teachers are using inclusion and cooperative learning strategies. The four agreements are honored in classrooms and school communities. Energizers light up smiles every day. All of these components are based in comprehensive studies, yet there is much more – more that, if applied, can reach all those “being left behind,” give all students the opportunity to grow in their social emotional development and resilient attributes – and to achieve as never before.

So, put on a smock and pick up a brush. Your friends at CenterSource and the friendly Tribes trainer in your studio are very glad that you are here. As always –

*Trust the process!*

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## References

1. Sarason, Seymour. (1990) *The Predictable Failure of School Reform*, San Francisco. CA: Jossey-Bass
2. McNulty, Ray. *New Era Ushers in Deeper Understanding of Learning*. Education Update, ASCD. 2004, V.46, #2.
3. Smoker, Michael. *Tipping Point: From Feckless Reform to Substantive Instructional Improvement*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Beta Kappan International. April 2004
4. Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker, *Professional Learning Communities at Work*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 1998), p. xi.
5. Smoker.