



Spring 2010 AEP National Forum States of Change: New Leadership in Arts and Education

Opening Plenary Session Remarks Sandra Ruppert, AEP Director

**Friday, April 9, 2010
Omni Shoreham Hotel
Washington D.C.**

Good afternoon. I'm Sandra Ruppert, Director of the Arts Education Partnership, and I am delighted to welcome you to our home city of Washington, DC, for AEP's first National Forum of 2010. There are a number of you who are attending your first AEP National Forum. And, to you, I want to extend a special welcome and share a little about who AEP is and what we do.

The Arts Education Partnership is a national coalition of more than 100 education, arts, cultural, government, business and philanthropic organizations committed to ensuring that every young person in America has an education in and through the arts. Our mission is to achieve on-going, high quality arts learning opportunities for all children and youth from preschool through grade 12 in school and out of school.

At AEP, our primary goal is to harmonize the fields of arts and education through research and policy analysis and, ultimately, to inform effective practice. We are considered by others in the field to be the premiere "honest brokers" of objective and nonpartisan information about current and emerging arts education research, policies, issues, and activities of national significance.

Through the work of our partner organizations, AEP is able to reach tens of thousands of arts and education leaders, including teachers, administrators, community and business leaders, policymakers, teaching artists, researchers and parents. Together, our collective energies have the potential to touch the lives of literally millions of school-age children and youth in every state across the nation.

We at AEP consider ourselves especially fortunate to be based in Washington, DC, and to work in this richly symbolic city. The great buildings of the District are tangible

metaphors of the vision and imagination through which this new country was formed. I think it fair to say that this vision lives on in many of the people with whom we work. Whether you live and work here, or whether you are visiting today for this very special Forum, I'm sure that you share the feeling that this is the perfect place for us to be, for this historic discussion of arts education.

Each day, on my morning and evening commute, I pass near the place where George Washington climbed up a knoll, 220 years ago, looked out over a broad and sweeping vista, and identified the site for the new Capitol of the fledgling nation. It was Washington's vision that this seat of the Republic would be a center for the wise formation of policy, a place where well-intentioned people from all walks of life would peaceably assemble and have their many voices heard.

Of course, we know that over the next two centuries, that vision sometimes proved elusive. Often, the democratic process has been noisy and contentious, and progress has been halting. Yet out of this noisy and often ungainly process, our nation has always found ways—through courageous and visionary leadership—to summon its best inclinations and to continuously and creatively forge a better future.

Our nation again faces such challenges. Our economy continues to climb out of a deep recession. States and school districts struggle with strained budgets. Educators work sometimes against all odds to meet the needs of learners who will enter a workforce and society significantly different from the ones we have known. And families grapple with the personal and financial costs of ensuring that their children will receive the complete and competitive education they must have to succeed in a 21st century economy.

Despite these challenges, I believe this is also a time of historic opportunity. Researchers and scholars have provided us with new knowledge about how children learn; about how we can transform schools into vibrant centers of knowledge; and about how wise policy can animate the vigorous reinvention of our education systems.

Yet, just as George Washington did when he forged his vision for the new Republic and turned it into a reality more than 200 years ago, we, too, will need to exercise bold leadership from the schoolhouse to the statehouse and beyond if we hope to realize our vision for an education in and through the arts as an essential tool for shaping a better future. That is why we have chosen as the theme for this National Forum, *"States of Change: New Leadership in Arts and Education."* Because now more than ever, we need new leaders at all levels and in all sectors to come to this task with a mandate to bring change.

In putting together the program for this Forum, we recognized that leadership comes in many forms and can be demonstrated in myriad ways. Leadership is not synonymous with power. Nor is it synonymous with status. And it is certainly not synonymous with

age. All of us must be prepared at one time or another to step up and become leaders, to use our knowledge to solve problems at the level at which we work.

As I think about our excellent program and presenters for this Forum, I am particularly inspired by this vision as it applies to new leadership in arts and education:

“Leaders must help people believe that they can be effective, that their goals are possible of accomplishment, [and] that there is a better future that they can move toward through their own efforts.”

Those are not my words. Those prophetic words were written more than 20 years ago by John W. Gardner, who was truly a remarkable leader in his own right as well as a distinguished participant in America's educational, philanthropic, and political life. Among his numerous accomplishments, Gardner served as president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and was the founder of not one, but two, nonprofit organizations: Common Cause and Independent Sector. During his lifetime, he was a trusted advisor to 6 presidents, and in 1964, he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

John Gardner knew a thing or two about leadership.

His reflections on leadership, based upon his unique experiences and achievements both as a leader and as an observer of leaders, were published in 1990 in a slim volume, which he titled simply, *On Leadership*. This book remains a staple in the curricula of business schools and education schools everywhere and I highly commend it to you as worthy of your attention.

So, what is this elusive quality we call leadership? According to Gardner's research, leaders distinguish themselves in at least six respects:

First, Leaders think long-term—beyond the day's crises, beyond the annual report, beyond the horizon.

Second, Leaders understand the larger context in which they operate – the external conditions and global trends that affect their work.

Third, Leaders reach beyond their jurisdictions, beyond bureaucratic boundaries to influence fragmented constituencies and bring them together to solve problems.

Fourth, Leaders put heavy emphasis on the intangibles of vision, values, and motivation.

Fifth, Leaders think in terms of renewal. Gardner understood that leaders must teach—that teaching and leading are indistinguishable occupations. “Every great leader is clearly teaching,” he said “and every great teacher is leading.”

And, **sixth**, Leaders must not be afraid to take risks. I'm certain some of you can relate to just how difficult that can be at times. As Gardner put it: "Every leader willing to take risks has moments when he isn't sure whether his people are following him—or chasing him."

John Gardner enjoyed a long and storied career before his death at the age of 90 in 2001. But especially relevant for our Forum today, is the pivotal leadership role John Gardner played as the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare in 1965, under President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

In 1964, the year prior to his appointment as Secretary of HEW, President Johnson appointed John Gardner to chair a White House task force on education. The panel issued a report recommending federal aid to public schools to equalize education in areas of poverty and to encourage qualitative improvements and innovations in local communities. Many of that report's recommendations were enacted in the first Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and remain the cornerstone of that legislation today.

So it seems especially fitting, some 45 years later, with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 on the horizon, that we recognize John Gardner both for his teachings on leadership but also for his demonstration of leadership in the crafting and implementation of this landmark legislation, which redefined the federal role in education and has sought to level the playing field for generations of this nation's children.

In closing, let's again keep in mind those inspirational words as we think about our work together over the next two days and in the weeks and months to come:

"Leaders must help people believe that they can be effective, that their goals are possible of accomplishment, [and] that there is a better future that they can move toward through their own efforts."

It was true for George Washington 200 years ago as he forged his vision for a new Republic and made it a reality and, I believe, it is true for us today: That by exercising the capacity for bold and courageous leadership that resides within all of us in this room, to ensure that the arts remain an essential component of a well-rounded education, together we can shape a better future for all of America's children.

Thank you.

As we set up for this next part of our session, I want to say just a few more words about what I referred to earlier as a historic discussion of arts education.

Sixteen years ago, in 1994, then U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley and Chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Arts Jane Alexander convened more than 100 national organizations to signal an unparalleled joint commitment to arts education. The occasion was prompted by the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which included recognition of the arts for the first time as a core area of study. The purpose of bringing all these stakeholders together was, in the words of Jane Alexander, “to envision a future in which the arts are in the educational mainstream as a genuine and vital part of every child’s education.”

That vision became the catalyst for the formation of the Arts Education Partnership and it continues to serve as a guidepost for the organization today.

In 1995, the year following that seminal meeting, the current governance structure for AEP was formed when the two federal agencies for arts and education—the National Endowment for the Arts and the U. S. Department of Education, respectively—entered into a cooperative agreement to manage the Partnership with the two national organizations representing arts and education at the state level—the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and the Council of Chief State School Officers, respectively. Those four entities—the Endowment, the U.S. Department of Education, NASAA and CCSSO—have endured as the four foundational pillars of AEP’s governing structure.

I am honored that we have the chief executives of all four of those agencies with us today. And I am especially honored that for the first time in the 15 year history since the Partnership was established, we have both the current U.S. Secretary of Education and the current Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts joining us at an AEP Forum. This is indeed a historic event and I am very grateful that these four leaders were able to coordinate their busy schedules so they could be here today. I think it sends a powerful message to all of us about the importance of the arts *and* education.