

Broadened Abilities

They say that thinking has its own grammar, its own structure, and its own rules. A Liberal Arts education builds a mind in which varied studies help to build the habit of organized thinking and of rational analysis. A study of diverse topics allows students to see the relations between ideas and philosophies, drawing experiences from each when necessary. The mind is like a muscle, and exercising it in one area will strengthen its aptitude for learning in another. With a more developed education, these students will become prepared to bring to light and solve the toughest problems, both big and small.

Knowing this, should I have been surprised to find out that one of the most beloved Language Arts teachers at my local middle school was an Art major in college? I remember walking into his classroom while his wall displays created a curiosity and expectation that this Language Arts class might be more creative and interesting than most. How he encompassed the creative part of his mind using visual imagery whenever possible kept many bored students engaged. His class was a great springboard for so many disengaged eighth grade students who thought that reading and writing were boring and dull.

The creative problem solver needs more than just an intelligent mind. It is the use of varied sections of our brains that creates the best solutions.

When I think of problems facing the state of Washington, water supply issues always come to mind. With increasing development and changing weather patterns, it will be difficult to manage water with the past technologies and solutions. Are there better ways of capturing rainwater, or more efficient ways of managing storm water? What if there was a solution to floodings in the Skagit Valley and ways to help farmers in Eastern Washington? Dealing with these issues requires a mind that is seasoned with the knowledge of various topic areas.

In the 1940's, Abraham Luchins came up with a term called the "mental set". Using water jug experiments, he gave a group some problems that could all be solved with a single solution. Later he gave a new problem that could be solved using that same technique or a new and simpler method. Despite a simpler way, the group tended to use the same technique that they had become accustomed to. This "mental set" describes our inclination to attempt to solve problems in a way that has worked in the past. With a broader horizon in education, Liberal Arts students will become citizens with an enhanced ability to detect and solve big issues.

Whether it is water conservation or other future challenges, our state needs creative minds and problem solvers who will think "outside the box" and use all the parts of their brain. The Liberal Arts education builds leaders of good judgment with the abilities to think independently in the face of pressures and distortions.