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## An interview with Richard Burrows about the Media Arts Standards: A pathway to expression and knowing the world

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### ABSTRACT

Media arts has been familiar to many through television, film, and digital graphics, and often appears as an extension of the four traditional arts disciplines: music, arts, theatre, and dance. As media arts continues to acquire its own unique identity, particularly through technological means, it has been included as a stand-alone discipline in the National Core Arts Standards with its own set of K–12 standards. However, K–12 educators and administrators may be unsure of what constitutes media arts, how to teach it, and how to address the Media Arts Standards within a K–12 arts curriculum. Richard Burrows, Media Arts co-chair to the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards and member of the Media Arts Standards writing team, recently provided his thoughts on how media arts can be defined for curricular purposes. The interview also included a discussion of the construction process of the Media Arts Standards, certification and licensure for teaching media arts, a possible media arts teacher education curriculum, and the purpose of Model Cornerstone Assessments.

### KEYWORDS

Arts education; media arts; Media Arts Standards; Model Cornerstone Assessments; National Coalition for Core Arts Standards; National Core Arts Standards; national standards

### Introduction

Richard Burrows is currently Director of Community Outreach and Programs for the Fort Vancouver National Trust in Vancouver, Washington. Previously, he was Executive Director of ArtsEd Washington, the statewide service organization for arts education in Washington, district arts administrator for Newark Public Schools in New Jersey, and Director of Arts Education for Los Angeles Unified School District, where he was the conceptual architect and organizational strategist for reinstating the arts in all 1,100 schools. Prior to that, Burrows led the Institute for Arts Education in San Diego, California. He was also a tenured professor of dance at The Ohio State University and performed as a professional dancer/choreographer for 17 years in several worldwide tours. Richard received his fine arts degree in modern dance and choreography from the University of Utah.

Richard serves as Media Arts co-chair to the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards. I recently spoke with Richard regarding the new Media Arts Standards and their implications for the four traditional art forms and general education. As Media Arts co-chair, Richard was intimately involved with the creation of the Media Arts writing team and Standards. I was curious about his thoughts given my

11 years of public school teaching experience using media arts in my middle school instrumental and general music classes. I was aware of the development of the Media Arts Standards during my final years in the public schools and was curious to understand how they may affect arts education policy, as well as teaching and learning in the arts. In this interview, Richard discusses the creation process of the Standards, responsibility for implementing the Standards, media arts certification for teachers, teacher resources for inclusion of the Media Arts Standards, and potential barriers to the inclusion of media arts in a general education curriculum.

### Interview

*There are varying definitions of media arts. How do you define media art for curricular purposes?*

I think the most important phrase in the question is “curricular purposes.” There are plenty of definitions for media arts within the professional world of media arts outside of public instruction. In this particular case, we refer to it as media arts education, which speaks specifically about the opportunities to learn within a particular discipline in public schools. According to the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards Media Arts

Committee's *The Inclusion of Media Arts in Next Generation Arts Standards* document (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2012), of which I was a contributing member, media arts can be described as:

- serving a nexus-like, or intermediary position in education; media arts serves students both as a stand-alone art form and as a form that can integrate with and connect all the arts and other core content disciplines;
- capable of creating synthetic events and experiences that can be immediate and animated or “live” and transferred with exactness in representation;
- an integrative synthesizer; media arts brings together expansive varieties of content and forms for tailored and enhanced presentation across platforms (“transmedia”) and experiences (e.g., “augmented reality”);
- ultimately plastic and available to utter pliability; media arts can be reorganized infinitely;
- interdimensional; media is immersive, virtual, and interactive and address merging and emerging dimensions.

At the outset, we see media arts education as the synthesis of what it means to invent. I think that is particularly important because, both inside and outside public instruction, when it comes to media arts, there is some confusion that technology, which is, in the broadest sense, representative of the instruments that we use, that we devise to use to communicate, is the primary form of activity in media arts. In fact, you can do media arts without technology.

I think it's important that we talk about what its intention is, and that is to invent. Up until now, within the first 40,000 years of human history, media arts has been known to us as such items as popular forms of films, television, and digital graphics. These forms have appeared historically as extensions of the four traditional art forms of dance, music, theatre, and visual arts.

Now we discover, in our new world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, that media arts is revealing itself to have a unique set of creative tools, opportunities, and endeavors. Now, and I think that this is really the crux of the reason for media arts education in K–12 instruction, we have added the recent development of virtual design, interactive design, the kind of augmented realities that immerse us in entirely different realms. The new media arts standards bring a whole world of new expressive and purposeful ideas that are unique to the form itself. So, it's just not your mother's media arts anymore. It's a whole new ball game.

*Why did the National Coalition for the Core Arts Standards decide to include media arts as a stand-alone discipline? Is there a body of research knowledge that supports media arts as an emerging arts discipline?*

I think these are primarily practical concerns from the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards. In fact, the media arts standards had not been included at the outset. Dance, music, theater, and visual arts had already been meeting for about a year discussing what the new Standards would look like. They asked questions such as, “How they might be different from the previous Standards?” “Will they be more idea-based rather than as skill focused as the previous Standards had been designed?” and, in particular, “What are the ways that all four arts forms might come to consensus across common overarching anchors?” Even in the old Standards, which were produced in 1994, even though the process titles are the same, there really hadn't been any national vetting process as to how each of the art forms related to each other.

Therefore, in that conversation, the idea of what was new in arts instruction, arts learning, arts teaching, came up in their discussion. Part of that revelation to them was that, perhaps, media arts in its newest form should be included in this process. There were two ways that this was going to happen. One was to explore in what ways each of the four traditional art forms incorporated, used, or could identify the intention of media arts within their own new Standards, work, and development. Then, the challenge was to bring together a team that would write media arts standards as a stand-alone discipline, and then have a conversation with questions such as, “Is it one?” “Is it the other one?” “Is it both?” “Is it neither?” There was the potential circumstance that we would look at the media arts work and say that it doesn't meet the rigor of a new National Arts Standards, so we should just let that go. In this particular case, it wasn't responding to, at the time, any particular research that had to do with the advocacy of media arts or that it's a burgeoning new field. It was really just recognition that there were already places in the United States where standards for media arts had already been developed. Those places included Los Angeles Unified School District where I was Director of Arts Education. I initiated that work when I was there. New York City Public Schools had their efforts in moving image and other technologies. The states of Minnesota and South Carolina had already developed media arts standards. Some of those were developed quite a while ago, so they really needed to stay up-to-date.

Already recognizing that work was afoot, as they would say in the field, it seemed appropriate to, at least, make an effort to see what it was that media arts might be able to come up with. Naturally, we looked back into the practice of the traditional art forms and recognized that they had some interest in media arts, but it wasn't necessarily well defined across each of the art forms. There was already a group of people who were involved

in this work who were in technical education, some in the visual arts field, some in the performing arts, and then, certainly, places that weren't even art related, such as communication, television production, all little bits and pieces of that artistic pie, but not coordinated around the central theme of teaching and learning expectations. So, we took it upon ourselves. Let's have media arts. Let's write standards. Let's see if they encourage or support the type of rigor that the other art forms aspire to. I am happy to say the Standards did.

*Are there states that you know of that require certification and licensure for teaching media arts?*

No, there are not as an art form. However, there are many states that have requirements regarding technology and career technical education. If teachers are already teaching media arts, they're already teaching it in ways or forms or situations or structures that are hugely different and varied across the United States. I visualize teachers who happen to have a passion for media arts, or visual arts teachers who incorporate media arts into their work, or theater teachers who look at film video production as a way of realizing great works of arts, imbedding media arts in their music and technology courses that are taught throughout the United States in K–12 education. And then, there's television, which has always been an important element of dance.

In these cases, there were already people teaching media arts. There wasn't an overall, overarching consensus about what that meant or what that included. Even from the outset, what we recognized in this work is that it's not likely that new Standards will prohibit those people from teaching those experiences. In fact, the new media arts education standards are set out to help whoever is teaching improve their practice and set rigorous expectations for students. So, that means they are already teaching, no matter what their licensure is, and this just helps to bring a greater depth to the instructional practice around media arts. Do I think that the next step will be licensure? I think that depends on the states.

If the states adopt a viewpoint, after a certain period of time, that media arts really is evidencing itself as an important new edition, then they will have to look to colleges and universities to establish licensure programs in media arts that would be effective, vigorous, and recognized by the states as having met the expectations of other kinds of teaching inside public education. I would encourage that.

*When the day comes when states are going to require licensure, what, in your opinion, should be taught in these teacher education programs? Are there certain qualifications that teachers should possess pedagogical knowledge of to teach aesthetic sensibilities that are integral to media arts in teacher education programs?*

It's not going to be any big surprise that the answer will be the same as whatever it is qualifies teachers to teach in any content or subject matter area that currently exists in schools. There needs to be five primary components of any solid credentialing program, which I will outline. I am sure there could be more or less, depending on your particular experiences in terms of credentialing:

1. The field must necessarily be able to describe its theory and its critical analysis of its field so that you can explain and name what it is and how it organizes its thinking.
2. There needs to be a well-defined pedagogy for what that looks like so that it's not driven by technology or how many laptops you have. What are the ideas that you hope to uncover, unpack, or teach as being a media arts teacher and what does that pedagogy look like? What are the definitions of expression and creativity in media arts? There are lots of people and administrators who think that media arts is arts education on the cheap and that its going to take over the other four art forms because students are much more interested in media arts than studying the four traditional art forms. I couldn't disagree with that notion more. If administrators' expectations are that their arts teachers are placed in their schools to ensure that there is a performance and exhibition or a show, then they've really missed the point of what teaching the arts can be all about. If it's just about making sure that there's something that only a certain number of students can participate in at the high end of the experience, that's not what teaching and learning in public education is about. These opportunities to learn in the arts and, in particular, media arts, need to be about all students having access to those particular experiences. If principals only want to make sure there is a show or an exhibit, they are missing the broader opportunities for what arts do to change the cultural and learning environment of school.
3. Media arts—and this goes back to the idea of expression and creativity—sees the other four traditional art forms—dance, music, theater, and visual arts—as important content sources for media arts work. I think that is important to recognize: that we couldn't really replace those art forms by saying media arts now does those things or it is easier to do or students are more interested in it because it seems more facile, or quicker, or more exciting than the four traditional art forms. But then, in fact, in order to do media arts, you need dance, music, theater, and visual arts content to reorganize and redevelop around the central ideas, themes, or stories that you are trying to develop in

media arts. Now, you say, it sounds like you are stealing content from the four art forms. Maybe, but maybe not so much different than any other art forms have done traditionally in their own works. Dance has borrowed from other cultural experiences. Theater has relied on scripts, and to a lesser degree, on improvisation and creativity. Each of the traditional art forms has appropriated from other experiences and other subjects in order for their work to be successful. And so, this creativity and expression piece, I think, is going to be very interesting.

4. Number four may be a little harder to come by and in the “newness” of the form. That is the historical and cultural influences for media arts. So few things have only just occurred in the last hundred years. We are still taking our time to analyze, discover, and unpack what the history and culture of media arts looks like. But, I think the media arts may be something that falls into the category of how language was developed as one of the first tools by humans. Language was developed so that humans could convey meaning in limited space, such as a room. Not that you couldn’t share all the experiences of your life, but if you develop language, you could, in a room or in a cave or around the fire, express with those who could hear your voice what it was that you were looking to impart as important meaning. Then, humans wanted to reach further. They invented amusing things like shouting and town criers. Those people are the ones who could broadcast the information to a much larger group. Fast forward a couple of thousand years, you find printing and writing made all of those expressions a little more portable. And suddenly, they were more people who could understand, hear, and absorb your ideas. They developed roads and people had to send speedy messengers along to get those new thoughts that were recorded on paper. Even carrier pigeons made the work easier.
5. Now, people are dancing, people are making music, people are putting on plays, peoples are displaying drawings... all of them conveying the messages of the ages to ever-newer consumers. And, suddenly, media arts steps along in this new history of cultural influence and can actually reach multitudes more people because of the technological display of the Internet, television, iPods, iPads, radios... whatever the technology is. This is an exponentially larger group of people who can participate in the experience. So, then, number five, in order to develop good licensure here, you have to be able to

have the ability to read, write, and talk about the media arts as a way to not just do the thing, but to actually communicate its literacy to others. That intellectual process needs to be clear.

*Media arts is seen as both a stand-alone discipline and an integrative tool in the other four art forms. How did you solicit input from those other areas of the arts during the creation process? Did you have writing team members that were selected in part for their expertise in those art areas?*

We certainly tried to honor the other four art forms by selecting people inside the media arts writing team who had backgrounds in other traditional art forms, mostly because we knew that there would be strong content that would be drawn from those forms. We needed to recognize the natural, powerful alignments between the four traditional art forms in media arts. We didn’t set out to make sure we had a strong representative in each case, but, as it turns out, there were plenty to choose from. We were able to include a broad range of people’s experiences. Again, because the media arts writing team came from across the United States, you can imagine that there were many factors that were taken into consideration, including geographic distribution, backgrounds, experiences, varied art form opportunities, and whether or not they had public education experiences, which, thankfully, all of our team members had.

Then, another question: What were their post-secondary experiences that defined their particular point of view about media arts? We tried to balance that effectively on the writing team. Did the other four traditional art forms take the challenge writing media arts standards by themselves independently of the media arts works? They did not, and I think not because they did not want to. They were primarily concerned with redeveloping those standards in their own disciplines to reflect the anchor standards and big ideas that we’re transporting across all arts forms. To be quite frank, I think it’s probably harder work to adapt, change, revise, and invent standards if they’ve existed in your art form for many years than it was for media arts to decide what it was as an art form and what it would look like. I think, as the Standards reveal and unfold for the American public, the opportunities for individual teachers, schools, or districts to be able to incorporate media arts standards, stand-alone or incorporated into the other arts, keeps all the works vital, but we will just have to see whether or not it actually changes the practice of the four traditional art forms.

*How will the Media Arts Standards be “unpacked” to K–12 teachers and administrators, particularly since some of them may not be familiar with what media arts is? Are you and/or SEADAE (State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education) planning to provide any print*

*or multimedia resources to help educators understand and teach media arts or get a better understanding of how to address those standards?*

Great question. The challenge before us is that there is not currently a media arts education national association. There are plenty of media arts organizations who deal with young people, but also media arts and adult practice. And so, because of the newness of the form, media arts education organizations don't exist, but there are plenty of people who have an abiding interest in this work because I think they see themselves in it. But, as of yet, we will have to wait and see if the media arts standards bring forward a kind of a coalescence of a new group of people who want to look for a different kind of support for media arts inside public education. I think that will take time. But until then, there are a couple of strategies that I think we are going to employ.

One is that, at every opportunity, at every request, and, sometimes, at every insistence on our part, we will be making presentations at national conferences: inside media arts, inside dance, inside music, inside theater, inside visual arts, and so on—any manner of groups who do not know about media arts standards. We will take this as an opportunity to share those experiences. The leadership of the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS), media arts committee, individual members of the media arts writing team are regularly and continually getting themselves on the stage to talk about this work. It's happening in lots of places. The 2014 National Art Education Association (NAEA) [Conference] in San Diego had two presentations from media arts writing team members. The media arts committee presented a session for the 2014 National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC) conference in Philadelphia. Then the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) had a media arts strand in its grant program and worked with NCCAS to develop a presentation at South by Southwest Education (SXSWedu) in Austin in 2015. NCCAS also presented a session at the March 2015 NAEA conference in New Orleans. We are not just going to stand in a corner and talk about it. Just like any good proselytizing, we will keep on doing this until we find our passionate disciples who will carry it forward.

Additionally, through the resources that were put up on the Media Arts Standards homepage, there is now a blog in conversation that has been started between interested parties across the United States. We've got traction and the great thing about the new Media Arts Standards being out there for people to see is that they are really looking at them for the grade level specific changes ... to see what it looks like in kindergarten, to look at what 12th grade looks like. It's already pointing to some of the research that was done by the College Board on media

arts education, not only in the United States, but also internationally.

*Now that we have these National Core Arts Standards that contain media arts as a core strand, what is your or the writing team's vision for media arts in the schools? What do you hope to see in schools, or see students accomplish, now that media arts are enshrined in these new National Core Arts Standards?*

I think the first thing we have to remind ourselves, even though we have done all this very important work across all five art forms, is that the new Core Arts Standards are entirely voluntary. There is no prescription that has been laid out for this work. I think, just because of the nature of how public education looks now, it was decided that another set of expectations that would be mandatory might not be the best way to go. We should offer this revision of new big ideas in the arts, but it doesn't have the same power behind it in the sense of being a mandatory experience, which also means that it might have a new power to it because it is seen as good work and not just another prescription. I think that all arts standards should be available for use by general classroom teachers, by art specialists, by art administrators, parents, communities, businesses, even their affiliated post-secondary institutions. For the first real time, the arts are coordinated around a common set of practices that occur in classrooms in all five art forms. But, they unfold differently because of the discrete disciplines' particular ways of making meaning.

We also have the Model Cornerstone Assessments, which provide a much deeper connection to understanding because we are taking a look at what student work looks like in real time. The other content areas outside the arts have tasks that are attached to their work, which are separate from their standards. In the case of the arts, the cornerstone assessments that we are creating are actually used as supplementary resource materials to the Standards themselves. How do I think things will be different? I think that things will be less fragmented if people take the opportunity to adopt the new voluntary National Core Arts Standards as a comprehensive view looking at their work and to also just update the work, the last twenty years of work, that has been going on in the United States and figure out how to customize the standards to move them forward in the teaching and learning process.

*You just mentioned from the outset of your answer there that the National Core Arts Standards are, indeed, voluntary. Do you or the media arts writing team have an opinion or vision as to who should incorporate those standards? Should it be only those who are licensed or qualify based on teacher education program preparation,*

*or should it be all art educators across the board who should incorporate them the standards into their practices?*

I don't think we can provide a perfect scenario for that because every state and territory has its particular structure for how not only the arts, but the rest of the content in public education, unfold. So, in our minds, the voluntary National Core Arts Standards serve as a mechanism for improving teaching, no matter who is teaching, when they are teaching, how they are teaching, or what they are teaching. It identifies what the expectations that students should know and be able to do at every grade level. And, that is at every grade level, including three levels of high school, so that there is a common expectation of what student work looks like that is expressed through the Standards, as opposed to, "Well, you are in your tenth grade media arts class. It's the first time you have any media arts experience." Should we teach tenth grade media arts? Well, how could we? You never had experience before this.

But, we do have to recognize that learners come from a variety of experiences and we can wrap that opportunity around who they are and what their other kinds of art experiences are in order to give them a tenth grade media arts experience that is whole. That is true in any art form across the United States and I think that is important to know: there are very few opportunities in the United States for a comprehensive, sequential, grade by grade standards-based art education in any of the art forms. We are always doing remedial work and re-teaching to bring students up to capacity so that they can actually do a standard-based teaching and learning opportunity. So, I say anybody who wants to use this material, anybody who can use this material, and anybody who should be using this material, should use it.

*Can you speak more about the process of creating these Model Cornerstone Assessments and what they could look like in media arts?*

In all the art forms, we are establishing a set of a benchmarks at grades 2, 5, and 8, and a high school competency. That's just to give us some sense of what the breadth looks like. As we gain experience for how this works nationally, we will start to back fill in the other grades. It was our idea that we wanted to make sure that the Model Cornerstone Assessments, whether in media arts or others, did not become the definition of the test that you now teach to. We made the Model Cornerstone Assessments pretty large, pretty juicy, and impossible to do in one sitting. What it did is it provided you with a lens for what the culminating set of learning experiences might look like. Not something you can demonstrate in a single moment, but what the students would learn over a period of time. Teachers would have a set of key traits

that were attached to the Model Cornerstone Assessments that you would have to test for, examine, or explore all along your instructional path.

The Model Cornerstone Assessments are really just that. They are models of the potential big pieces of understanding that would launch you to the next grade level, but they are not the test for whether or not you have taught correctly or whether the students learned appropriately. It's really just a way to guide you through unpacking what your pedagogical practice looks like. I think that is going to be the big difference here. We want to make sure that no one is taking the Model Cornerstone Assessments and just backwards planning out of them to figure out how to teach to that particular test. So, the size of those particular cornerstone assessments, I think, is the unique feature. What does that look like in media arts? We worked really hard to make sure that they were endowed or imbued with a sense of creative expression and that they were not tied unnecessarily to technology or the equipment that should be available in your schools, because that is so wide ranging. Those Model Cornerstone Assessments in media arts are really about what examples of creative expression are about, regardless of the technique that gets you there. That is the only difference I can say is unique in media arts because I don't think there is anybody in the world who wouldn't say that you can't have an instrumental program without instruments. But music has been around for a lot longer, so there is already an inventory of those experiences, of those opportunities out there. The inventory for media arts equipment, supplies, and resources is still not great. We can still make media arts even if it's Claymation and flip books that create little images that just fly by as you thumb through the pictures. There are lots of different ways to get to media arts expression without having all the tricks and toys. I should note that Model Cornerstone Assessments are *not* required for teachers or school districts to use. They are samples or examples that can be used as is, modified, or used as models for teacher-generated arts assessments. Additionally, they can be deconstructed into smaller assessment units as needed.

I think the standards really help, particularly in media arts, by also defining what the expectations for students are for outside organizations, individuals, or teaching artists who come to the school as supplements to the regular instructional practice. The good thing about that is this means the resources that are coming in, which may not regularly be provided by the schools, could be augmented by collaborative conversations with outside media arts experts. They should be talking at the same expectations about what media arts should look like and shape their residencies, as well.

*Are there practical challenges that you see in having media arts become an even more widespread and formally established part of the curriculum for American children and, if so, what are some of the steps you can take to overcome those challenges?*

I don't think there are any challenges. It's really just gaining exposure and becoming confident in meeting student needs as well as raising expectations in a new art form. Media arts has the advantage of being new and fresh in this environment and people are looking at it newly, but it also helps to take a look at all five art forms and their opportunities in public education, newly reformed. It's not that media arts in and of itself is going to have any particular barrier or obstacle to step over, except just being clear about what the teaching and learning looks like. As much as it is important for us to be looking at how the arts in total fit into public education and happily now that we work over through a set of eleven overarching anchor standards that reach all five art forms, is that we are really a bigger team now than we were before. So, if there were one dollar on the table, it wouldn't be each individual art form fighting for the dollar. It would be all five art forms are now looking for how can we leverage that dollar to support all of our work and make it more meaningful. I think that's an important change.

Media arts education and the new Media Arts Standards put us on an ever-widening pathway. Media arts is offering an opportunity to be much more inclusive of lots of different ways of knowing the world and expressing oneself. Those who can't keep up will miss the exciting new outcomes and possibilities that media arts affords. Some people will move too fast and try to and incorporate media arts without appropriate planning because it looks really exciting and sexy, but they'll risk impermanence because they won't understand just exactly what it takes. Media arts really has the challenge

of being old and new at the same time. It has been around for a while. People have their opinions about it. It's also newly being described, and so, one's old opinions and old ways may also need to be updated in order to come to terms with this. So, are we already there? What is the next step? I think media arts is already ten steps ahead. It's just we haven't walked the path yet.

## Final thoughts

Media arts, historically an extension of the traditional four art forms, is now being recognized as a stand-alone discipline in its own right that opens up new avenues and means of creative expression. Although the creation of the Media Arts Standards places media arts on an equal footing with music, theater, visual art, and dance, it remains to be seen how the new Standards will influence arts instruction and arts education policy. The new Standards, however, provide guidance to arts educators and administrators with creating meaningful learning experiences in media arts and for integrating media arts into existing arts courses. The Model Cornerstone Assessments that are currently being developed will offer ideas on authentic assessment outside of a high-stakes testing context. The discipline, given its integration in everyday life and the stature of now having its own standards, may have substantial influence on the public's conception and support of arts education in the days to come.

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