

## **A Whole New Mind**

**Dennis L. Calkins**  
**Head of the Upper School**

In his recent New York Times bestseller, *A Whole New Mind, Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*, Daniel Pink describes a new world of the 21st century – a world that he claims will belong to “creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers.” Mr. Pink presents a well-researched and compelling argument that skills that were prized and most instrumental for success in the Information Age are giving way to a new set of aptitudes that define what he calls the Conceptual Age. Those who will “reap society’s richest rewards and share its greatest joys,” he claims, are the artists, inventors, designers, storytellers, caregivers, consolers and big picture thinkers.

Brain researchers have known for many years that our brains are divided into two hemispheres. The brain’s left hemisphere is sequential, logical and analytical while the right hemisphere is nonlinear, intuitive and holistic. It is also well known that we all use both hemispheres of our brains for even the simplest tasks. Mr. Pink argues that success in the Information Age relied heavily upon those skills that left-brainers possess. These skills remain necessary but they are no longer sufficient for success and fulfillment in the new Conceptual Age. The right brain qualities once thought of as frivolous - “inventiveness, empathy, joyfulness, and meaning – will determine who flourishes and flounders” in the Conceptual Age.

Pink’s idea of a “whole new mind” has powerful implications for individuals, families, organizations and, perhaps most important, educators. Some of our students are far more comfortable with logical, literal, sequential, computer-like thinking. Pink argues that these skills have long been emphasized in our schools. Other students have an easier time with thinking that is holistic, aesthetic, contextual, intuitive and nonlinear – skills that Pink argues have been neglected or underemphasized by schools. The key for educators, of course, is to provide experiences for every student that engage both right-brain and left-brain ways of thinking. The left-brain aptitudes, the kinds of things primarily measured by the SAT, will always be necessary. Pink argues convincingly that the right brain aptitudes of artistry, empathy and taking the long view will “increasingly determine who soars and who stumbles.”

It is fair to ask what kinds of learning experiences we are providing for our students in the Upper School that necessitate right-brain thinking, those skills that Pink argues will help to formulate the “whole new mind” that our students will need to be successful in the 21st century. The answer to that question will be the subject of another article. Stay tuned.