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Benefits of the Arts in Schools

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### Abstract

What are the arts? What does the art do for students in the school system? Is it just about visual and performance? Is it just about self-expression or does it do something more?

Research, art instructors and teachers believe the arts are a fundamental way of helping students develop skills that help them with not only their educational skills, but also develop skills for their future in business and personal lives.

The article examines on why the arts are a fundamental learning tool that starts at childhood and must be a major curriculum in school throughout their education. This article gives arguments on why the art is important in a person life, especially during their education years in the school system.

This article explores the different research, studies and with strong results from educators that prove that the arts needs and should be a considered a major with all the other majors such as English, Math and Science in the educational system. Also, this article has statements from different sources that explain the basic fundamental needs the arts represent in a person life. This paper defines the arts as the beginning stage of teaching and why students who have had the arts throughout their education, do better in achieving their goals. This article gives statements and results from educators that firmly believe that the arts are one of the most important teaching tools in the overall development in a person.

## Introduction

The arts, a fundamental way of teaching is very important for students in the school system to have arts as part of their major studies. Many different studies and evidence has been shown that the arts lay a foundation which helps the brain develop in a person (Lester, Reinking, & von der Osten, 2011). This development compliments how they learn in the school system. There are educators that strongly support the theories that the arts enhance students developing thinking skills and these skills are needed for students to be high achievers in education. Not only does the arts help with self-expression and creativity, but develops the mind in which helps the students in their curriculums. The arts improve a students' comprehension of culture, history and enhances their study habits. The arts also develop students' strengths, practice how to persevere in the face of adversity, and be inspired by the education received to learn more. The arts are a fundamental learning tool that students of all grades need throughout their education. Without the arts in schools, studies have shown that students have greater challenges in understanding the curriculums such as Social Studies, English, Science and Math. When students are involved in a variety of arts experiences, especially when the arts are aligned with their curriculum, research reveals they do much better in decision making, grades, study habits and more. With the evidence being revealed on how important the arts are, the arts should be acknowledged and enforced to be a major curriculum in schools. Let us now look at the research that has been done by educators, authors, and others that provides evidence that the arts truly do enhance learning and educational achievement. Also, reinforce the belief that the arts needs and should be a major part of the overall educational system and not constantly have to deal with budget cuts.

As a parent, I am always concerned about how my children minds will develop that will enable them to do well in school. As an educator, I see the difference with the students that have art influence in their lives compared to other students who do not. The difference is very obvious in many different areas such as discipline, focusing, following instructions, study habits and character. Students who have art in the schools have a better foundation in their overall educational needs. Before we go into the reasons why the arts should be a major curriculum in education, let us understand on how the arts lay a foundation which helps the brain develop in a person. The arts are a fundamental learning tool that starts at childhood. Arts help with building character and understanding their culture. The arts are important in a students' social development (Potter, 1999). In this article, "How the Brain is Developed by Using the Arts," according to Sousa (2014),

Cognitive Growth. During the brain's early years, neural connections are being made at a rapid rate. Much of what young children do as play — singing, drawing, dancing — are natural forms of art. These activities engage all the senses and wire the brain for successful learning. (para. 6)

This just reinforces my belief that the brain needs the arts to help the early development of a child. With this development, the child, who becomes a student has a head start in understanding, processing and comprehend what he/she is being told. Also, gives them a major advantage among their peers that do not have arts in an early stage.

The greatest strengths that the arts have to offer are to help with creativity, give the mind alternate ways of thinking, processing information and how to take what is processing and put into action. It is important that educators use the arts to connect with other academic subjects.

Finding how to align the arts with their curriculum will help the student better understand what they are learning in other curriculums. Young (2005) refers to the "Champions of Change" (Fiske, 1999). This is a report that Young was able to get to help his beliefs on how the arts is important. Young informs us that in 1999 the report that was done by the National Arts Education Partnership, the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, the GE Fund, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, compiled seven major studies that provided evidence of enhanced learning and achievement when students are involved in a variety of arts experiences.

The seven major studies that were focused on were, *Involvement in the arts and Human Development: General Involvement and Intensive Involvement In Music and Theater Arts.* James S. Catterall, Richard Chapleau and John Iwanaga. *Imaginative Actuality: Learning in the Arts during the Nonschool Hours.* Shirley Brice Heath with Adelman Roach. *Learning In and Through The Arts: Curriculum Implications.* Judith Burton, Robert Horowitz, Hal Abeles. *Chicago Arts Partnerships In Education: Summary Evaluation.* James S. Catterall and Lynn Waldorf. *Artistic Talent Development For Urban Youth: The Promise and the Challenge.* Barry Oreck, Susan Baum and Heather McCartney. "Stand and Unfold Yourself" A Monograph on the Shakespeare & Company Research Study. Steve Seide. *Why The Arts Matter In Education or Just What Do Children Learn When They Create an Opera.* Dennie Palmer Wolf. The report shows us how the arts provide learning in different ways that help students in their education with the help of the arts. In each category that is listed, research and the outcome from those researches proves that the arts should be recognized as a major factor in education.

An article written by the Educational Leadership, "Educating for the Workplace through the Arts." (1997) writes about the national conference at the Getty Education Institute for the Arts. This conference had leaders in policy, administration, education, and community focus on

the issues of arts in the educational system and workforce. In this article, there are different comments from people that had attended on why they feel that the arts education is a critical key to developing a person. The overall concerns were that art education develops certain skills and these skills as is developed will be an effective tool as they are able to make better decisions in dealing with problems and issues. Many that had attended the conference believed that the arts is crucial not only in education, but also as students grew into adulthood, their decision making process was better compared to those who have not had the arts. In this article, some of the recorded comments were made that expressed the concerns about the arts and why the arts are needed. There were many comments that were made from people that attended the conference.

Bill Press, Commentator, Crossfire, CNN. Everywhere I look, I see the lack of connection. In this country, the arts are flourishing, and yet in too many school districts in this country, art education is still floundering. No connection. (para. 3)

Gerald N. Tirozzi, Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education. We are no longer an agrarian and manufacturing society, and today all children need a broad set of skills to be successful in higher education and the workplace. (para. 4)

John L. Anderson, President, New American Schools Development Corporation. The only way to address multiple kinds of intelligence is through an integrated curriculum with the arts, but most schools fund the arts as a separate program, rather than as part of an entire school transformation. (para. 5).

Jay R. Gates, Director, Dallas Museum of Art. We can build support for the arts by demonstrating how children have benefited specifically from individual programs.

Children who have been taught to learn with their eyes perform at a higher level than children who have not developed this skill. (para. 12)

Reading these comments and there is much more from the article, there is an understanding of their concerns and desires to have people understand how the arts are crucial in the development of a person. Also, how the arts are a fundamental structure in helping students in their education.

To embrace on more of the belief that the arts is essential in the development of the person and the benefits that it has in education, in their article “The Arts and Learning” (Catteral & Darby, 1994) states that “the purpose is to bring together recent theories, research, and developments in arts education in order to broaden the base of discourse” (para.3)

While doing their research and collecting different theories, Catteral & Darby refers to one person who broke down the different forms of intelligence in which art helps.

It was stated that “Gardner's work on multiple intelligences and how children learn adds new dimension to these issues of educational equity. This work has advanced and extensively researched the theory that instead of the commonly held belief that human beings possess (and thus are tested for) one general intelligence, there may exist seven intelligences, "intelligence" being defined by Gardner as biopsychological potential. (pg. 39)

Besides visual and performing arts, there is also a growth of the technological arts, with that, there is more focus on areas that deal with the importance of the arts in a students' education.

Areas that can be focused on are:

1. the growing consensus that the arts are an integral part of education;

2. the role of the arts in the cognitive revolution;
3. the arts and equitable access to meaning;
4. the arts as ways to promote student achievement, engagement, and persistence in school;
5. the arts as ways to provide authentic multicultural voices, validate students' cultural heritage, and promote cross-cultural understanding; and
6. practice, assessment, and inquiry that recognize the complexity and importance of the arts (Catteral & Darby 1994).

Gardner list seven different intelligences, the seven are linguistic intelligence, musical intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence. Schools tend to stress only logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligences. According to Gardner (Multiple Intelligences, recognizing multiple intelligences has important implications for American education because Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory emphasizes potentialities for human growth that may be stunted by the present educational system.

In their past research, (Rosier, Locker and Naufel 2013) have indicated that “art education can benefit students' education by increasing their learning and memory abilities.”<sup>(3)</sup> Helping with this theory, Rosier, Locker and Naufel found current studies that examined these effects by exposing participants to various conditions involving writing, viewing works of art, a presentation of shapes, tracing, and active art engagement. Once the studies were completed, the results reinforced what they believed. Results showed a significant difference in memory scores between conditions, with the drawing condition yielding the best memory scores. In their research Rosier, Locker and Naufel investigated the extent to which engagement in visual art would benefit verbal memory. It was hypothesized that individuals that engaged in artistic

processing would exhibit better performance in a subsequent memory task relative to those that engaged in non-artistic processing. Rosier, Locker & Naufel also includes that a recent study by (Finnan-Jones 2008) found that children who were learning English as their second language while involved in an art-education program displayed greater gains in both mathematical achievement and their language learning than those who were not involved in an arts-education program. That study confirms how the arts help students in other academic classes. Another research that Rosier, Locker and Naufel mentions have also been aimed directly at investigating the general cognitive benefits related to the processing of art. Rosier, Locker and Naufel states that (Goldberg 2005), had examined the relationship between art and metacognition and found that third grade students who were trained in specific art tasks showed improvements in metacognition (defined as the extent to which an individual is aware of his/her own thoughts and the factors that influence thinking). Once again, showing that the arts are essential in the thinking process, and proving that the arts should be used in the academic curriculum.

The Author Mr. Potter who wrote “Arts in General education - revisions due” (Potter 1999) comments that “general education arts curricula in America's colleges and universities rest on underpinnings that are rapidly disappearing.”<sup>(4)</sup> From his book, he makes the comment that “he believes that students who entered degree programs in the 1990s have had fewer opportunities to explore and learn about music, dance, theatre, and the visual arts, and those now teaching arts courses in general education have come to realize that minimal arts understanding is carried over from public school educations.”<sup>(4)</sup> He also states that “major area of concern resulting from minimal experience comes about when that lack of exposure fosters a view among students that the fine and performing arts are elitist and without merit in the learning process.”<sup>(5)</sup> The school system seems to be more dedicated to careers in professional areas. Young feels that faculty members are faced with the very important responsibility of developing in these students

a desire to know more about the arts and the important role that they can play in one's life. This is important because the arts develop a students' mind on how they think and gives them stronger development in the thinking process. Potter also states that "one of the most complex problems existing in this arena is the uneven preparation that entering college and university freshmen bring to the classroom."<sup>(6)</sup> This statement comes from the idea that too many students' have little involvement with the arts. When instructors deal with an art classroom, they have to deal with students that have a strong knowledge and understanding of the arts compared to those who have very little or none at all, which makes it difficult to teach a class. To help instructors, Potter feels that arts educators need to discuss and decide on what arts programs in general education must include and how those objectives are best achieved. Once that has been accomplished, a screening process should be put into place that allows for placement in offerings best suited to each student's previous arts experiences (Potter 1999). If this is accomplished, the classroom will be better balanced in teaching the arts. You would have a classroom that have students with a strong background and another classroom with students who have very little or none at all. This would give the instructor a better curriculum structure to teach the arts, which the students can get full benefits of what is being taught.

The arts give students the tools to better achieve their goals in the school system and that the arts should be looked upon as a major curriculum. To better use the arts, align art disciplines within the curriculum to help students better understand their subject. For example, in Social Studies, students read about slavery. In studying different areas on the subject, bring in an art discipline that would help them understand, using theatre. A particular situation is studied and deals with the freedom of slaves, than the students than study all that was involved in the freedom of slaves. From there, they decide a particular situation to write a script about, using fictional and non-fictional characters, locations and laws. The students will do scenes that

represent what they have studied from the curriculum. When they were tested later on written and oral presentation, their grades shown that the students had a higher understanding on the subject matter. By involving the art discipline, theater, the students was able to analyze slavery from a different respective and enabled them to use different techniques in their study habits. Theater provides the skills and knowledge to deepen a student's understanding of the many forms and genres of theater. Students explore theater history and the multiple roles that theater plays in society. They use theater vocabulary when making and responding to performance, and develop critical, analytical and writing skills through observing, discussing and responding to live theater and dramatic literature.

What are the arts? Catteral & Darby, Rosier, Locker, Naufel, Finnan-Jones, Goldberg, Potter, Educational Leadership & Young all believe that the arts are a crucial educational tool to help with the overall educational needs of students. Not only does the arts help with self-expression and creativity, but develops the mind in which helps the students in all of their curriculums and even their lives. The arts give students the tools to better achieve their goals in the school system and that the arts should be looked upon as a major curriculum and not have to face budget cuts. The arts, like all other curriculums, such as Math, English, Science and Social Studies should be used in schools with the same importance as all educational courses. Also, should be used within the curriculum to help students better understand their subject. The overall goal for our school system is to find ways to increase student academic achievement. Studies have shown that using the arts will help that achievement.

In my experience as a child growing up, my mother, was an artist in the areas of visual and performing arts. She always involved me and my younger brothers during her art life, to show us how the arts can benefit us in not just expressing ourselves, but also how we think overall. That guidance and experiencing firsthand how students are without the arts, with

researchers/results and educators beliefs, the strong belief remains the same. The arts must be part of the mainstream of education if we want our students to be great achievers.

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## Conclusion

The arts are essential in the development of a students' mind and must be acknowledged and enforced to be a major curriculum in schools. With research that has been done by so many educators in different fields of education and the arts, the results have shown every time that students, especially when art is introduced to them at an early stage, are more successful in achieving their educational goals and do better as adults when it comes to decision making and problem solving. The arts must be looked upon as a major in schools and not have to constantly face budget cuts. The state and federal government need to completely understand the importance of the arts, areas in development of the mind, social skills, cultures, and how the arts influence education. People need to write to their representatives to demand action to protect the arts and make it one of the major curriculums in the education system.

All forms of the arts are important to every culture. The arts are one of the first basic steps first taken in teaching. If one is a parent, a parent will give a child a rattle to play, or have the child listen to music to put them asleep; buy a drum so they can understand rhythms or watch a child dance and sing a song that they like. People need to take that same desire; dedication and satisfaction of watching a child develop and continue that in their overall education. Imagine a child that does not experience the arts and see how they grow. Take that same experience and put it in their continued education. See the difference immediately between a child with and a child without the arts in their lives. The arts are essential. Let us not lose what gives us the pleasure and make us high achievers.

- I. The arts lay a foundation which helps the brain develop in a person. <sup>(2)</sup>
  - A. The arts are fundamental teaching to help with the development of a child's mind.
    1. The arts are a fundamental learning tool that starts at childhood.

2. The arts allow a person to find ways to express themselves.

B. Arts provide students the tools they need for development of the brain.

1. Arts allow a person to develop thinking skills.

2. Arts help with building character and understanding their culture.

3. The arts are important in a students' social development.<sup>(3)</sup>

II. The arts help students achieve in their academics.<sup>(2)</sup>

A. The arts give students exposure to a wide range of new ideas, concepts, encourage self-expression and confidence.<sup>(4)</sup>

1. Art programs facilitate the acquisition of critical thinking skills that are applicable to other subject areas.<sup>(6)</sup>

2. Arts are a beneficial component of the educational curriculum and can promote positive outcomes in academic achievement.<sup>(1)</sup>

B. Art Encourages the development of skills, these skills may then be transferable to other areas, such as the sciences (Winner 2007).<sup>(5)</sup>

1. Art education benefit students' education by increasing their learning and memory abilities.<sup>(5)</sup>

2. Aligning the arts with curriculums such as Social Studies, Math, English, students' have a better comprehension of subject matter being taught.

III. The arts are a beneficial component of the educational curriculum and can promote positive outcomes in academic achievement (Rosier, Locker, & Naufel 2013).<sup>(2)</sup>

A. The arts will improve a students' comprehension of culture, history and will enhance in a students' study habits.

1. Arts give history through culture.

2. Arts give students' a different perspective on how to study.
- B. Art programs have a dramatic influence in students' performance on standardized tests.<sup>(6)</sup>
1. Art influences learning and memory techniques.<sup>(5)</sup>
  2. Students exam results show higher grades with art influence compared to those without arts.
- IV. Students who have art in the schools have a better foundation in their overall educational needs.<sup>(2)</sup>
- A. Without the arts in schools, students will have greater challenges.
1. Arts help with the development of the mind in which influences their overall education.
  2. Studies have shown that students that do not have arts struggle more within their education.
- B. Research provides evidence of enhanced learning and achievement when students are involved in a variety of arts experiences.
1. Art education develops certain skills and these skills as is developed will be an effective tool in dealing with life and work related problems.
  2. Arts should be looked upon as a major curriculum.

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