

The national movement for Art and Education advocates the need for improved public school programs in the fine arts, which include music, art, theatre, and dance. Supporters of the movement cite the far-reaching benefits available to school-age children who are exposed to various types of artistic expression. In a collaborative statement by the American Association of School Administrators, the National Education Association, and the National School Boards Association, the organizations explicitly proclaim that “every student in the nation should have an education in the arts” (MENC: National Association for Music Education [MENC], 2007). However, due to increasingly stringent academic requirements and numerous budget cuts, students generally receive a very limited education in the arts.

Research Findings

A broad base of research exists to show that an education in various types of art can have positive effects for children. Generally, the goal of teaching art is to supply children with various skills that can be utilized in other aspects of life. Children who express themselves through music, art, theatre, or dance tend to possess better reasoning and academic skills and develop better social skills. Through art, for example, children learn to express themselves in an appropriate manner. They begin to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and view school activities more positively. Furthermore, it has been suggested that educating children in fine arts can bridge the performance gap that exists between different socio-economic groups (Arts Education Partnership, 2002). Numerous studies support these claims, mentioning that disadvantaged students especially benefit from the integration of fine arts education (The Principals’ Partnership, 2006).

Stanford University, in a 12-month research project, documented the academic activity of young individuals who participated in fine arts for at least three to four hours a day, three days a week. These students were:

- 4 times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement
- 3 times more likely to be elected to class office within their schools
- 4 times more likely to participate in a math and science fair
- 3 times more likely to win an award for school attendance
- 4 times more likely to win an award for writing an essay or poem

(Americans for the Arts, 2006)

Shady Brook School in Bedford, Texas, recorded the effects of integrating fine arts into a school’s curriculum. Administrators had recently initiated an ambitious art curriculum, making art the central focus of the learning process. Over five years, the students’ academic skills improved in all areas. Test scores increased by:

- 49% in math
- 63% in reading
- 36% in writing

Travis Elementary School in Dallas, Texas demonstrated the many benefits achieved after integrating reading classes with a theatre program. After two years, TAAS test scores increased by

- 71% in reading
- 39% in writing
- 215% in math

(Casanova and Merriam-Gourley, 2001).

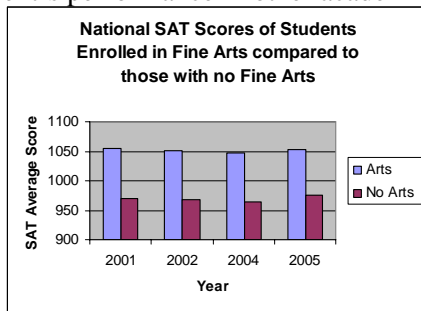
An education in the arts not only benefits children in the academic realm, but provides individuals with skills that are useful in the workforce. Individuals who major in music during college are more likely to be accepted to medical school over students who studied biochemistry. Employers recognize that exposure to the arts allows workers to become creative thinkers and use higher order cognitive skills. A New York accounting

firm, after hiring four MIT graduates with a minor in the arts, commented that the candidates were set “apart from the others in terms of creative thinking, flexibility, and presentation and that the firm is now using the arts minor as a screening criterion” (Casanova and Merriam-Gourley, 2001).

Benefits of an Education in the Arts

Research suggests multiple benefits associated with receiving an education in the arts. In general, skills taught through the arts transmit to other aspects of a student’s academic life. Students improve study skills, communication skills, cognitive skills, and learn to act more appropriately during school. This success in school also transfers to success in life. Children learn self-discipline and attentiveness, as well as develop critical emotional, social, and cognitive tools. A fine arts education allows children to express themselves and learn to connect with others (MENC, 2007).

Learning music helps individuals develop skills that are essential in other school subjects. SAT scores provide clear evidence that an education in music improves a student’s performance in other academic arenas.



(Texas Music Educators Association, 2007)

Students’ SAT scores are correlated to the number of years during which they study music – those who study music longer consistently earn higher scores. According to Americans for Arts (2007), students who took four years of fine arts classes scored 103 points higher on the 2006 SAT (verbal/math sections only) than their counterparts who took one half year or less of fine arts classes.

Since 2000, those who were ranked as All-State musicians in Texas, scored, on average, 22% higher on the SAT than those who were not (Texas Coalition for Quality Arts Education, 2007). In Texas, the average 2008 SAT scores for students ranked as All-State musicians were consistently about 300 points higher than the Texas average and 200 points higher than the national average (Texas Music Educators Association, 2008). Some research indicates that the link between SAT scores and fine arts education is not causation, but simply correlation. Nevertheless, many researchers agree that the unique skills taught in fine arts classes, which are neglected in the instruction of other subjects,

help students flourish academically by balancing out the learned tools. The cognitive skills emphasized in the fine arts are setting those students apart, as is shown, particularly, through academic achievement (Winner & Hetland, 2007).

Elliot Eisner (2002) lists ten lessons that the arts teach:

1. To make good judgments about qualitative relationships
2. Problems can have more than one solution
3. Celebrate multiple perspectives
4. Complex forms of problem solving
5. Limits of language do not define the limits of cognition
6. Small differences can have large effects
7. To think through and within a material
8. To say what cannot be said
9. Experience what can be had from no other source
10. The arts’ position in the school curriculum symbolized to the young what adults believe is important.

Public Policy: Art and Education

Motivated by the growing body of literature that illustrates the many benefits associated with learning in the fine arts, the federal government has established basic criterion for schools to follow regarding fine arts education. In 2001, the “No Child Left Behind Act” mandated that all teachers should be highly qualified to teach core academic subjects, including the arts. The act also founded the Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination Grant Program, which seeks to incorporate the arts into elementary and middle school curricula. The program supports high quality teaching instruction in the arts and seeks to improve students’ performance in the arts (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Unfortunately, however, as an inadvertent result of the emphasis placed on improving test scores by ‘teaching to the test’, fine arts programs are consistently being cut from budgets (Newman, 2007).

In Texas, Senate bill 815 implemented TEKS, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, for all school subjects. In essence, TEKS is the standard for what students at every grade level should understand and learn with respect to the curriculum, including fine arts (Texas Education Agency, 2008).

To meet these standards, it has been mandated that the fine arts must be offered for all grade levels in Texas. Mandatory time must be allotted for students to take classes in the arts until grade 9, at which time students

have the option to take a fine arts course or not (Texas Statutes, 2009).

Students in Texas must graduate from high school under the Recommended Program (default plan) or the Distinguished Achievement Programs (advanced placement), both of which require one credit of fine arts. Students also have the option to graduate from high school under the Minimum Program, which does not require fine arts, but only with the consent of the student, the student's parents/guardians, and a campus administrator. There is no arts requirement for college admission (Arts Education Partnership, 2008).

Art Education in Bexar County

"The Arts Dynamic," a survey commissioned by the San Antonio Arts in Education Task Force, revealed that during the 1999-2000 school year, nearly 238,000 students were enrolled in 13 San Antonio public school districts. Over 70% of this student population was economically disadvantaged (Casanova and Merriam-Gourley, 2001).

The study demonstrated that only certain school districts provided students with fine arts instruction. The most disadvantaged schools offered minimum instruction in the fine arts, and elementary school children received the least amount of exposure in all areas of the fine arts. At the middle school and high school level, the emphasis on fine art education was limited and occurred only as an elective. Cultural arts organizations, in an effort to alleviate the lack of fine arts education in schools, provided outreach programs to students.

Despite state legislation that strongly recommends academic preparation in the fine arts, it is evident that students in San Antonio receive inadequate exposure to the arts. For the most part, San Antonio schools do not provide adequate time to teach students in the fine arts.

Elementary School, grades K-5

"The various symbolic ways of communicating through dance, music, theatre, and visual arts, along with the motor skills required in each discipline, heighten the on-going, open-ended development naturally occurring in elementary children" (Casanova and Merriam-Gourley, 2001, p5).

Within the surveyed school districts in San Antonio, nearly half of the elementary children received various exposure to the fine arts; 80% of students received some music education, 30% participated in theater, and 10 of the 13 schools surveyed had visual arts teachers that taught 60% of the students in those schools. The most disadvantaged schools did not have dance, visual arts, or theater. For those students who did

receive music education, instruction occurred for less than two hours a week.

Middle School, grades 6-8

"The fine arts provide ways for a young person to express complex emotions, make individual choices, and exercise decision-making in a safe, affirming environment" (Casanova and Merriam-Gourley, 2001, p7).

In San Antonio middle schools, more than 70% of the students surveyed participated in fine arts education; limited music education was provided to 40% of students, 10% of the students were enrolled in a theater class, and 18% of middle school students were enrolled in a visual arts class.

Fine arts programs in school were supplemented with field trips and other activities. Some students participated in artistic programs outside of school.

High School, grades 9-12

"At this point when students so clearly understand that the world is theirs to create, the fine arts become avenues for testing assumptions, exploring hypotheses, and inventing new systems" (Casanova and Merriam-Gourley, 2001, p9).

Less than one-half of San Antonio's public high school students participated in the fine arts in 1999-2000; 17% of the high school population received musical education, 8% of the students enrolled in theater, and only 16% of students were enrolled in a visual arts class.

Students are more likely to participate in programs to which they have already been exposed. While the percent of students involved in fine arts decreased at the high school level, the amount of time each participating student spent receiving instruction increased. Students enrolled in theater and visual arts received four hours of instruction per week. Students taking music classes received at least five hours of instruction per week, and dance students received about three hours per week (Casanova and Merriam-Gourley 2001).

The YouthARTS Development Project. This collaborative effort among Federal agencies, national arts organizations, and three local arts agencies was designed to identify, implement, and refine effective arts-based delinquency prevention programs. Urban smARTS in San Antonio, TX was one of the three arts agencies to participate (the others were in Atlanta, GA and Portland, OR).

Urban smARTS provided after-school art workshops designed to achieve:

- Improved social skills

- Improved academic performance and commitment to school
- Improved art skills
- Recognition for new skills
- Positive relationships with adult role models and peers
- Improved self-esteem and attitude toward the future

Student participants were primarily sixth graders who were experiencing academic failure, had poor school attendance, and engaged in antisocial behavior. 112 students from seven schools participated regularly in drama, dance, or visual arts.

For various reasons, evaluation data for this program was limited, however, during post-program focus group discussions students revealed that the program taught them (to):

- Appreciate things around them
- Get along better with others
- Deal with emotions in a constructive way
- Communicate through music and the arts
- Be more self-confident
- Believe in themselves

(Clawson and Coolbaugh, 2001)

Conclusion

In the end, an education in the arts is beneficial at every age level. It is evident that “the arts are dynamic: intrinsically dynamic by themselves in uplifting and transforming the human mind and spirit, and extrinsically dynamic, a force for invigorating learning in all areas of the curriculum” (Casanova and Merriam-Gourley, 2001, p4). The primary purpose of an education is to provide children with the academic and intellectual skills necessary to flourish. However, the classroom is an ideal place for children to develop good self-esteem by supporting activities that emphasize proper social behavior, self-management skills, and creative expression. An education that includes music and fine arts can accomplish this task.

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