

and imagining, problem solving, critical judgment and a host of other mental processes. The arts represent forms of cognition every bit as potent as the verbal and logical/mathematical forms of cognition that have been the traditional focus of public education.³⁶

– Eric Oddleifson

Studying the arts serves a much broader purpose than learning to paint a picture or play a musical instrument. Each art form is a unique language and symbol system that requires substantive and sequential learning, and comprehensive study of the four art forms develops “literacies” in a wide array of symbol systems.

Learning in the arts is real, tangible and powerful. Students in arts classes are often in a self-directed mode, motivated to exhibit focus and self-discipline by the opportunity to create and refine their own personally meaningful work. In arts classes students are both “doers” and “observers,” creating and evaluating as part of the same process. Arts education fosters conceptual learning through “hands-on” experiences and provides an enjoyable way of promoting reasoning and organizational and analytical skills. As students make their own art — transforming their own concepts, ideas and feelings into symbolic form — they engage in unique and challenging kinds of independent creative thinking and problem solving.³⁷

Students have a good idea of what parts of their schooling are of high quality. ... Most of them see quality in athletics, music and drama.³⁸

– William Glasser,
Educational Researcher

Glasser’s study of where students experience high standards of excellence, based on interviews with high school graduates, pointed strongly to the arts. That conclusion is no surprise to anyone who has received a first-rate arts education. Quality expectations in arts classes are very high: in most classrooms, a 90 percent correct performance is graded “excellent”; on stage, a 90 percent correct performance is a disaster. In fact, a quality music or other arts performance is based on a level of achievement that exceeds 99 percent accuracy, and goes far beyond simple “correctness” by demanding a high degree of both individual interpretation and exceptional teamwork. It is little wonder that students who study the arts learn to set high personal standards and achieve excellence in other areas of study.

In art, the genuine creator is not just a gifted being, but a man who has succeeded in arranging, for their appointed

end, a complex of activities, of which the work of art is the outcome.³⁹

– Henri Matisse, painter

Artistic problem solving is a divergent and open-ended process which, therefore, parallels the process necessary to make most important life decisions. Artistic problems can be solved through an infinite variety of personal and cultural strategies; there is no one “right” answer. Like most important life decisions, decision making in the arts does not rely on fixed rules, but rather on choices between various alternatives which each have advantages and drawbacks.

Students doing art work learn to value flashes of insight as legitimate sources of knowledge, as important as more linear, sequential ways of thinking and learning. The arts, therefore, build bridges between the coldly logical and the intuitive feeling, the obvious and the ambiguous.

A quality arts education (14) creates positive, inclusive school atmosphere, (15) develops teamwork and (16) enhances self-esteem.

The investment in a fine arts curriculum is repaid many times over by the quality of life it fosters in the community and by the growth it encourages in our most valuable asset: our children.⁴⁰

– William E. LaMothe, Chairman and CEO,
Kellogg Company

Successful schools are strong communities; quality arts programs help schools become stronger communities. Exhibitions, concerts, plays, musicals and dance productions are social occasions where friends, neighbors and relatives come to share in the success of students. By pulling communities together to share and celebrate student achievement, collaborative artistic events make an important contribution not only to the well-being of each individual student participant, but also to the school.

[An important goal of schools is to develop] positive self-image...based on the fact that the youth will at least be very good at something.⁴¹

– *Turning Points:
Preparing Youth for the 21st Century*

Glasser’s research verified that arts classes provide students with a niche in the school, where they have a feeling of belonging and with which they make a personal connection.⁴² Performing arts classes foster a kind of teamwork that tends to be less competitive and more inclusive than in athletics. Artistic performances are de-

veloped through intensive teamwork between teachers and students, a process that results in a unique camaraderie.

Many students find their main area of success and, therefore, their primary source of positive feelings about themselves and about school, in arts classes.⁴³ While arts experiences are essential for all students, they are, therefore, particularly important for those who are at risk. In fact, at-risk students are more successful in schools that offer quality arts opportunities.⁴⁴ Research also suggests that arts classes can help schools retain students who might otherwise drop out of school.⁴⁵

A quality arts education (17) increases learning in other subjects.

Childhood avocations like art and music, which are intentionally or unintentionally discouraged by parental and social forces, or else viewed solely as a relief valve to the pressures of scholastic success, could shape the lens through which children see and explore entire bodies of knowledge hitherto presented in one way. I did not like history in school, but I can date almost anything from milestones in art and architecture, versus politics and wars. My son inherited my dyslexia but nevertheless can read wind-surfing and ski magazines avidly, from cover to cover. For some people, music may be the way to study math, learn physics and understand anthropology.⁴⁶

– Nicholas Negroponte, Professor of Media Technology at M.I.T., in his book *Being Digital*

There is considerable evidence that students who study the arts, and schools that incorporate a rich component of arts study, perform better in other areas of the curriculum.⁴⁷ For example, The College Board reports that students who elect arts courses are more successful on standardized tests, such as the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), than those who do not.⁴⁸ Students who are excused from class to take instrumental music lessons perform as well on academic achievement tests as, or better than, students who remain in class.⁴⁹ Magnet schools that emphasize the arts often demonstrate higher over-all academic achievement than other magnet and regular schools.⁵⁰ There is also a strong correlation between arts study and high school grades: students who elect more arts courses in high school tend to earn higher grades in their non-arts classes.⁵¹ Such higher performance is consistent for arts students in all socioeconomic groups, including low-income students.⁵² Perhaps stu-

dents who are already motivated and engaged in school tend to be involved in the arts; but research increasingly suggests that arts study causes students to become more motivated and engaged in school.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin was a pioneer in the use of arts-intensive curricula in general education to create better schools. ... They launched Elm Creative Arts Elementary School in 1977. Though time spent in other classes was reduced to make equal time for arts instruction, student performance on the Iowa Basic Skills improved. ... Parents [lobbied] the board... in support of a second arts-based elementary school to reduce the long waiting list that had developed from the success of the first. They got it.

The success of the elementary schools led to development of an arts-based middle school and then high school. Josephine Koebert, principal of Roosevelt Middle School in Milwaukee, explains, 'When I came here, I threw out the remedial courses, put in arts classes, and we went from the worst middle school academically to one of the best in a single year.' The percentage of students achieving competency in reading increased from 30% to 80% and in math from 10% to 60%. The attendance rate is 92% and the suspension rate dropped from 50% to lower than 10%.⁵³

– U.S. Department of Education

There are varied theories about the reasons for this relationship between arts study and general achievement. The arts certainly provide multisensory, multi-intelligence ways of delivering instruction in other subjects, so their inclusion in interdisciplinary study can be very powerful. However, it seems that studying the arts purely for their own sake, in a disciplinary way, also yields positive effects on general learning.

In 1984, Charleston, South Carolina's District 10 school board, inspired by Elm Elementary in Milwaukee, converted a vacant elementary school building into a magnet school for the arts – the Ashley River School. While students must apply for admission, admission is on a first-come, first-served basis; there is no testing, auditioning or previous knowledge of the arts required. ... Students study

[the arts] for an hour a day without lengthening the school day. ...

The school has 475 students in grades K-5; one-third have learning disabilities, and the school is located in one of the city's poorest areas. But Ashley River has risen to the second highest academic rating in the city and county, trailing only a magnet high school for the academically gifted.⁵⁴

– U.S. Department of Education

To explain the relationship between arts learning and success in other subjects, some point to studies – such as those already cited – which focus on the degree to which the study of the arts develops self-discipline, teamwork and other general qualities. Some suggest that the arts make school a more enjoyable place to be, thereby motivating students to achieve. Others, such as Elliot Eisner, point out that the arts cultivate the imagination and the senses, both of which play an essential role in learning and thinking.⁵⁵ Still others point to studies suggesting that arts experiences enhance brain development.⁵⁶ Perhaps arts students become more effective learners due to a combination of these and other factors. Regardless, it is clear that schools seeking to encourage quality student achievement should develop quality arts programs.

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