

SCHOOLS & the Arts

How Schools Benefit from a Strong Arts Program

The Arts Education Partnership Working Group, under the sponsorship of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the J. Paul Getty Trust, issued a report in January 1993 called *The Power of the Arts to Transform Education: An Agenda for Action*.

The report cites multiple benefits for schools with strong arts programs including:

- Intensified student motivation to learn.
- Better attendance among students and teachers.
- Increased graduation rates.
- Improved multicultural understanding.
- Renewed and invigorated faculty.
- More highly engaged students.
- Development of a higher order of thinking skills, creativity, and problem-solving ability.
- Greater community participation and support.

Source: *The Power of the Arts to Transform Education*, developed by the Arts Education Partnership Working Group (Washington, DC: John F. Kennedy Center for the Arts, 1993)

How the Arts Humanize Learning Environments

In the fall of 1990, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) sponsored a study exploring the role the arts play in promoting excellence in education.

The study found that the following were some of the ways the arts humanized learning environments:

- The aesthetic environment of the school improves and relates better to the students.
- The intuitive, imaginative, and emotive aspects of the children are engaged in a complement to the sciences.
- History and geography are made more personal and real. Artists' perceptions add insight about life now and in the past.
- Students can develop empathy and compassion, the basis of relating to and cooperating with others.
- The multi-cultural/transcultural aspects of the arts afford appreciation and acceptance of diversity.

Whereas the focus on the "three R's" can often stress skills over personal development, the arts teach both.

Source: *Understanding How the Arts Contribute to Excellent Education*, Prepared for the National Endowment for the Arts by OMG, Inc. with Charles Fowler and Bernard J. McMullan, 1991

Art Education and School Reform

In addition to the intrinsic value of art itself, arts education has the potential to transform education in ways that no other discipline can, lending value to four different learning domains:

- **Cognitive Skills:** Studies have shown that the arts develop the critical thinking skills of problem posing, analysis, evaluation, and decision making. Arts education develops the ability to interpret and understand complex symbols in the same manner as language and mathematics.
- **Creative Skills:** Arts education plays a central role in fostering creativity, developing imagination, enabling students to envision alternative possibilities. The arts create the capacity for experiencing the sense of "moment," shaking up the consciousness and inspiring innovation.
- **Workplace Skills:** The arts develop "knowledge workers" – those employees who possess a pallet of higher-order thinking skills, delivering precisely what is wanted in the workplace.
- **Pedagogical Benefits:** Because an arts education develops a diverse range of cognitive abilities, it helps teachers promote achievement across disciplines, fostering the development of spatial, mathematical, logical, and physical abilities.

If all school reform is about improving teaching and learning, and if quality teaching and learning incorporate the best of the arts, then school reform must be connected to the arts.

Source: *The Arts: Dynamic Partners in Building Strong Schools*. www.artednet.getty.edu



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