

Arts Education: Benefits, Disparities, and Reaching for Equal Access

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Abstract

Arts education is a unique way to engage students. The arts include, but are not limited to, music, theatre, visual/studio arts, poetry, and dance; they are powerful bridges for students to knowledge and classroom contribution. They assist students with lower academic achievement, problematic behavior, or those who have a likelihood of dropping out of school. While there are plenty of resources displaying the student benefits, there remain inequalities in access to arts education among students across America. Often, areas and schools that generally receive fewer opportunities or less arts funding are ones with more at-risk youth. Disproportionate arts access negatively affects racial, ethnic, and socio-economic minority children. Learning about arts' benefits for children, then studying the reasons behind current inequalities, gaps, and failed solutions may offer insight into greater solutions.

Arts Education: Benefits, Disparities, and Reaching for Equal Access

An arts education is an important component of a well-rounded, quality education for all students, beginning in elementary school and continuing through high school graduation. It includes, but is not limited to, exposure and participation in studio or visual art, vocal or instrumental music, dance, theater, and creative writing or poetry. Typically, these subjects are the most common offerings within the American public and private schools. A student's arts education can be used to refer to several different forms of arts involvement and participation, but there are two major forms of inclusion of the arts within schools: these inclusions are the presence of or the requirement of separate, educational courses in the arts as their own entity and/or the integration of the arts into other content areas of a school's curriculum. While both types make up significant components of education for students, the inclusion of the arts within education must not be permitted to disappear. Rather, an arts education must enjoy the security of being a mandatory aspect of a quality, comprehensive school curriculum. An arts education is not a luxury; instead, it is a vital piece of learning that all students ought to have equal access to.

Eisner's Explorations and Lessons on Arts Education

Many different versions of arts education exist in schools across the nation, which is a concept explored by Elliot Eisner, a scholar in the field of arts learning. The most commonly used form for arts education is referred to as "discipline based arts education" (Eisner, *The Arts* 26). In this form of education in the arts, students are taught to behave as artists themselves, which increases performance skills, enables the recognition and discussion of art, allows for comprehension of the meaning of art's historical and cultural context, and provides students with space to engage with art's values (Eisner, *The Arts* 26; Linsin 130). Other forms of arts education teach students to closely study popular pieces of art with the goal of extracting meaning, which

further develops creativity within students. Often, these purposes and varieties of arts education are combined in school curriculum and classrooms to achieve as many of these goals within student populations as possible (Linsin 130). The presence and practice of arts education within schools has been extensively studied and contains strong pedagogical implications for its inclusion in students' academic endeavors.

In 2002, Eisner developed ten lessons that individuals can learn through the arts. He developed a manifesto with ten points that makes a concise, convincing case for the arts' inclusion within a comprehensive education. These ten points are observable in both discipline-based arts education and other forms of arts education that strive to enable children to interpret meaning from artwork for the development of creativity. The arts demonstrate to children that questions or problems are not limited to one solution, that there is a discipline of education where personal or collective judgment rules over one correct methodology, and that all people's perspectives on the world can be celebrated.

Learning in the arts requires students to be willing to work in complex scenarios while using unknown variables; these conditions demonstrate to children that there are no limits attached to the arts. Subtle differences or changes have the power to create large-scale effects. Students of the arts learn to attach deep feelings to words, ones that often go unsaid, and to think inside of and through a specific material or context. The arts allow for unique experiences that help humanity to discover the depths and variety of their emotions. By placing the arts within education curriculum and giving them as much significance as other academic disciplines, students are given lessons and symbols of what adults believe to be important in the world, past or present (Hall and Thomson 128; Eisner, *The Arts* 70-92). Eisner argues on behalf of the arts

themselves, explaining why their beauty ought to have a place within the world of education. In truth, the arts function as a microcosm of education as a whole.

National Decline in Access to and Participation in Arts Education

Currently, in many school districts throughout the country, a steep decline in arts education persists. Throughout America, the arts receive increasingly fewer resources and less teaching time in school systems. It is not a simple matter for schools to provide children with an arts education, because many schools lack the financial resources to justify the creation and continuation of quality arts programs. In the midst of shrinking school budgets and government mandates attempting to raise student standardized testing scores, American schools are trapped in a common trend of straining to keep their arts programs alive (Baker 255). Too frequently, school systems only devote instructional time to content areas that are included in standardized testing, ones that have easily measurable results.

Nearly all of America's fifty states have some kind of arts standards, but fewer than a third of the states have mandatory assessments for arts courses ("Reinvesting" 31). Due to the frequent lack of arts assessments, instructional time dedicated to the arts suffers greatly when compared to other areas. Data taken from 1982 to 2008 shows that the percentage of eighteen-year-olds who received any form of education in the arts during their childhood years dropped from around sixty-five percent down to fifty percent (Rabkin and Hedberg 44). The various rates of the decline of arts education in America continue to trend even lower as the years pass. The decline often occurs because arts education tends to hold the victim status under forces of society and political agendas, coloring the arts with political or social purposes and interpretations. Since education is expected to act as preparation for the career world, the arts are losing their place in education among other subjects (Roeger and Kim 121). There are not categories dedicated to the

arts on college entrance exams; thus, they are not a priority in college or career preparation. The decline in arts education across American public school districts will continue if measures are not taken to preserve their place within curriculum.

Disparities in the Overall Decline in Arts Education

Overall decline in arts education across the country is not the only issue surrounding the place the arts hold within school systems today. Although the arts are frequently championed as a welcoming, inclusive environment in popular culture, this is not the case in the everyday lives of students in the United States. There exists significant disparity, in both access to the arts in general and access to an arts education within the school systems and districts across America, which creates deep-running lines of division.

Racial/Ethnic Disparity

Even as the levels of arts education drop nationwide, racial and ethnic minority students experience this decline at a rate far more severe than their Caucasian peers. In 1982, sixty-five percent of Caucasian Americans reported receiving some form of arts education in their childhood. By 2008, the percentage had dropped to fifty. For African-American children in 1982, only fifty percent reported access to an arts education. However, the percentage of African-American children between the years 1982 and 2008 who received any form of arts education dropped to twenty-eight percent. In 2008, only twenty-six percent of Hispanic children received any arts education in their childhood, which is down from forty-seven percent in 1982 (Rabkin and Hedberg 46-47). The above percentages reveal a twofold issue in arts education. First, the overall rate of arts education for all children across America continues to decline further as time progresses. Second, the rate of decline disproportionately affects children of minority ethnicities and diminishes their access to the arts more significantly than Caucasian children's access to the

arts. This disproportion creates disadvantaged students in several categories, but disparities in arts access and arts education are clearly highlighted along racial and ethnic lines.

Data from Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts over more than twenty-five years revealed that African-American and Latinx students were just half as likely to have had access to arts courses or lessons in their schools as other students (“Reinvesting” 32). In the years since the 1980s, the declines in arts education in public school systems have been devastatingly steep. Studies reveal a forty percent drop for Latinx children and a forty-nine percent drop for African-American children (“Reinvesting” 32). Yet another measurement of disparity can be seen when looking at Hispanic students, who currently represent the American public school system’s largest minority population. Data taken from 1999 through 2008 focused on the differences and inequalities in arts access within education specifically regarding Hispanic students. About twenty-five percent of all students in public schools nationwide are Hispanic, and thirty-three percent of these Hispanic students also live below the poverty line; these qualities deem them significantly less likely to have access to an arts education, especially given the overlapping of two minority groupings in many cases (“Hispanics”). These studies display the glaring inequalities in access to arts education for racial and ethnic minority students, as well as clear evidence that the issue is not a new one.

Socio-Economic Disparity

Significant inequalities are also present among students who have a lower socioeconomic background than their peers or among students that attend schools in poorer districts that receive lower amounts of federal or state government funding. Students with a lower socioeconomic status, according to an assessment conducted on music and visual arts learning by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, displayed markedly lower scores than scores from students

with higher socioeconomic status. While students with higher socioeconomic status had a thirty-two percent likelihood of a high level of involvement in the arts, students with lower socioeconomic status only had an eighteen percent likelihood from a study done using data gathered by the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (Linsin 132). The disparities among different groups of students based on these differences have devastating effects on academic performance and ethical behavior. Students who are Latinx, African American, or Hispanic; are English-language learners; who require individualized education plans; who receive accommodations, modifications, or supports; or who have a low socioeconomic status are more likely to have lower scores on standardized testing; these achievement gaps reveal the presence of discrimination and social stratification within the communities (Dobb 5). Disparities in access to an arts education are contributing to the achievement gap among today's students across the nation, especially along divisions of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Grade Level Disparity

In terms of arts offerings, greater percentages of American secondary public schools offer a wider variety in arts course options than public elementary schools according to a U.S. Department of Education study conducted in 2012. Music and visual arts, when compared to theatre and dance, were the two arts content areas with the least amount of disparity between percentages of elementary and secondary schools that offered these courses. Elementary schools were actually more likely to have music available in their curriculum than secondary schools but only by a difference of three percent. However, evaluating the presence of other course options reveals that elementary school students often experience less of a variety in arts offerings. Considering theatre, just four percent of elementary schools nationwide offer the subject, while forty-five percent of secondary schools have theatre as a selection in their course offerings.

Three percent of elementary schools allow for dance instruction, but twelve percent of secondary schools offer it as an option for their students; the opportunity to be involved in a dance course is four hundred percent more likely to occur for middle and high school students than for elementary school students in the United States (“Arts” 18-19). Even in arts disciplines that are generally widely available, such as music, the six percent of elementary schools that do not offer it translates to 1.3 million students who do not have access to music instruction as part of their education (“Arts” 18). For the arts to have the best effect possible on students, there must be access to and engagement in high-quality arts instruction throughout the whole of student education.

History of the Inclusion of the Arts in Education

Ancient History

The Western tradition of education has promoted arts integration into school curricula, largely due to the influence of history’s revered classical philosophers. Aristotle, remembered largely for his writings and philosophies of education, is one of the most commonly known philosophers. The vision Aristotle had for students’ education, which influenced the education system in America because of its importance within the Western tradition, included art forms like music and drawing incorporated into other areas of curriculum (Aristotle 60). Aristotle, in his thoughts on music, wrote that music is incredibly influential to a person’s soul and character because it has the ability to inspire powerful feelings, namely enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is deeply integrated into the ethical part of human’s souls, and it creates feelings of sympathy towards and among other people (Aristotle 63). Aristotle also believed that students should be taught music not only to become critics, but also to become performers (Aristotle 64). In other words, students

must not simply observe the arts, but must also participate in the arts to experience its full potentials.

Aristotle's mentor and teacher, fellow philosopher Plato, wrote concerning the arts as a formative discipline. Although he held a more limited view of the arts than Aristotle, Plato does remark in the reformatory instructions of *Republic* that the arts ought not be removed from education. Plato's belief was that the right forms of the arts could be greatly beneficial for childhood development, since children were not mature enough to deal with or aspire to behold his "ideal forms" without an imitative resource, which was art. These ideal forms are sources of ultimate reality and are attained by mastering reason. Allowing children to be exposed to good artwork served as a beginning to moral education for children, according to Plato (Efland, Ch. 2). He instructs, "[L]et our artists be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and the graceful; then will our youth dwell in the land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything" (*Republic* III, 401c). Above all, Plato held music in the highest regard, believing it to bring pure beauty to the innermost soul of humanity (*Republic* III, 401e). Aristotle's view of the arts sprung from Plato's narrower acceptance of art forms as a tool best suited for children.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a philosopher in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, also held incredible value for the arts, even from the beginnings of his philosophies. He is most commonly known for his lectures on aesthetics, the science of feeling that reflects on the essence of art, or the philosophy of art (Andina 2). Hegel's definition of art included disciplines of "architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and literature, and ... dance" (Carter 163). For Hegel, art played an indispensable role in the absolute human experience, along with philosophy and

religion (Carter 164). Art, among other things, is that which reveals truth (Andina 3). Art, especially fine art, was necessary for being fully human.

American History

More recently, in American history, Benjamin Franklin, an industrious founding father of America, became one of the first prominent figures to support arts education in America by advocating for its inclusion in teaching. Franklin's support for the arts was based on his belief that the arts held a utilitarian value for the needs of a growing country. In 1749, he wrote that the arts should be used as methods to improve professional skills in students, as they ought to receive education in content areas that would be the most useful in their future vocations (Franklin). Franklin also promoted an arts education by saying that the arts improved the quality of jobs and manufactured products (Eisner, *Educating* 29). The arts incorporated into education function as tools for bettering occupational skills to meet the practical needs of a country.

Another founding father and President, John Adams, displayed support for the arts in communications with his wife. Adams believed that he bore the burden of studying war and political relations to allow his grandchildren the opportunity and "right to study painting, poetry, and music," which he viewed as finer education (qtd. in Hoffa 26). American author and art crusader William Minifie believed that the arts, particularly drawing, were beneficial to the public for economic prosperity. At the time, products in Europe were superior to American counterparts because European artisans and craftsmen were trained in proper design. He saw public practice and training in the arts as a means to balance world trade (Marzio 12). In 1854, during the art crusade, the inclusion of drawing in the public school curriculum was one of the goals Minifie held; he believed that drawing's inclusion in education "improv[ed] the taste of all [and]... create[d] in many and appreciation of the beautiful" (Marzio 59). Horace Mann was

another nineteenth-century advocate for the arts, writing in his reports to the Massachusetts Board of Education that the arts were an “asset to every rational being... useful to the inventive genius of our people” (qtd. in Marzio 60). Most recently, President John Kennedy held immense value for the arts, in education and in life for all Americans, saying a “nation which disdains the mission of the arts invites... the fate of having nothing to look backward to with pride and nothing to look forward to with hope” (qtd. in Hoffa 26).

Both ancient and American history uphold the arts as a valuable component of children’s education. The regard for the arts’ inclusion within education held by philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, and Hegel as well as American figures Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, John Kennedy, and more served as a foundation for the influences of more educators and leaders in modern American history.

Individual Benefits of Arts’ Inclusion in K-12 Education

The benefits students experience by receiving and participating in an arts education during both formative elementary and secondary school years are extremely significant for immediate, individual life and future career life. Frameworks for arts education from both The National Assessment of Educational Progress and the U.S. Department of Education affirm that an arts education is a necessary piece of total child development (Roeger and Kim 122). The arts not only better children’s education, they engage student minds, hearts, and skillsets in uniquely productive ways that influence them into their futures.

Relational, Emotional, Cognitive, and Academic Benefits

Students who engage in the arts, regardless of artistic talent or ability, experience social, emotional, cognitive, and developmental benefits. A 2000 study on two hundred eighty-six high schoolers used the Torrance Test for Creative Thinking to determine the effects of dance

instruction and creative thinking abilities (Minton 8). Those who were involved in dance revealed higher scores on measurements of their capacities for originality, abstract thinking, fluency, and reasoning—all components of the ability to think creatively and consider a variety of perspectives. Compelling evidence in further studies associates six main types of benefits that students experience when studying the arts, which are mathematical skills, reading and language skills, social skills, thinking skills, a positive learning environment, and more motivation to learn while in school (Ruppert 13, 10). There are also marked academic benefits that students experience that are correlated to exposure and participation in the arts. Students who engage in the arts generally tend to achieve higher test scores; this phenomenon can be seen most frequently on state or national standardized tests scores where the tested student has learned to play an instrument. High school students who took music courses were more likely to score higher on the SAT and other mathematics sections of standardized tests. This phenomenon is likely contributable to the technicalities and ratios involved in learning components of music, such as theory, rhythm, and performance (Vaughn 130). While the relation does not provide a direct causation, it does give evidence for an association with benefits that cannot be ignored.

Arts education courses offered as requirements for students tend to foster attention and interest in class, which in turn has the capacity to improve student in-class participation and attendance rates. Artistic education courses and integration of the arts into other academic disciplines offer students alternative methods of achieving greater academic success. Educators worldwide advocate on behalf of differentiated learning for visual, audio, kinesthetic, or gifted learners; thus, learning ought to be better differentiated to cater to more creative learners. The arts afford a greater number of students the opportunity to succeed while using their natural talents. Every student, especially those who suffer from disproportionate access to the arts,

should be given the chance to experience the benefits of a quality arts education. Benefits from the arts are not limited to certain children; therefore, the access of the arts must not be limited to certain children either.

Vocational and Career World Benefits

Aside from the tangible benefits of academic success, student engagement, and developmental benefits which the arts foster inside students, the backbone of America's future career world depends on the very characteristics that the arts help inspire in youth. When considering the importance of including the arts in educational curriculum, it is crucial to recognize the directions in which the world will be moving as current students seek employment. Administrators in high-poverty school systems located in Seattle, Washington, credit the place of the arts within core curriculum as the best way to aid high-poverty and refugee students in securing beneficial employment after their high-school graduation. Employment post-graduation enables these individuals to escape the poverty that they were born into and to grow in their skill levels, in order to succeed in their futures (Zalaznick 63). America is championed as a nation of opportunity; the curriculum in all schools must support that narrative and adequately prepare the next generation for a profitable future.

All children must participate in arts education during their childhood years to establish solid foundations for the career world and future employment. The National Center on the Education and the Economy writes that America's top positions in the areas of "technology and innovation [depend] on a 'deep vein of creativity'" ("Reinvesting" 35). An arts education provides students with benefits that are applicable to the growing demands of the current workplace. Creativity is perhaps the most important quality in a capable leader, which can be well cultivated through a study of and appreciation for the arts ("Reinvesting" 38). The arts are

not the only path to developing creativity in students; however, they contain the best approaches to do so. The arts' teaching methods are compatible with the development of the three abilities tied to creativity outlined in the theory of creative development from Sternberg and William, which are the generation of new ideas, critical thinking to select an idea for pursuit, and the ability to translate an idea into action ("Reinvesting" 39). The Conference Board and Americans for the Arts collaborated to release a study that utilized the opinions of more than eighty public school leaders and superintendents across the nation. Public school superintendents were asked how well they believed certain arts subjects could develop creativity in students. Ninety-seven percent of superintendents stated that both drama and music significantly built student creativity, but only four percent of the nations' public high schools actually require drama and just seventeen percent require music instruction. For studio arts, ninety-four percent of superintendents believed it developed creativity in students; however, only seven percent of public high schools in America require it ("Arts" 12-13). The nation's school districts house the next generation of workers and, thereby, the future of America. It is vital that the education systems utilize the arts to properly equip their students with every possible tool for success and innovation because the skills and characteristics learned from an arts education provide excellent opportunities for children to succeed later in life.

Benefits for Students with Disabilities

Integrating and including the arts in education are a powerful medium to benefit and educate all children, but they are incredibly helpful for better connection and communication in students with physical, emotional/mental, or social disabilities. Students with disabilities or those who have individualized education plans (IEPs) are considered a minority group, as these students are often marginalized in school districts. Zane North Elementary School in

Collingswood, North Carolina's special education program students participate in art classes, mostly visual art and music, at least three times weekly. Principal Thomas Santo described arts experiences as monumental due to the atypical fun in learning that is experienced through activities such as painting, singing, or dancing. When the arts are involved in education, learning is not limited to a student sitting at a desk, writing concrete ideas, or using one specific method to draw conclusions. The inclusion and use of the arts create an environment of exploration and creativity. The arts' ability to communicate emotions and connect to real life issues or concepts contributes to the positive effects on children.

The results from a 2005 study consisting of thirty-four teacher focus groups from sixteen different states demonstrated how the arts benefitted students with disabilities. The results included appropriate expression of emotions, the use of many approaches to access academic content, and the employment of analytical skills, while providing teachers with several opportunities to meet the unique needs of each of their students (Baker 267). American schools can employ the arts as a useful method for assisting students with disabilities and providing them with a more comprehensive, quality education. In order to provide children with disabilities equal access to arts programs, the arts, humanities, and special education organizations must unite to foster more opportunities for promotion of and access to the arts (Hourigan 35). The wide-ranging benefits of an arts education must be extended to all schools throughout the country to positively impact all students, including minority populations, such as children with any kind of special need or disability.

Tangible Effects of the Arts on Underprivileged Students

Looking specifically at at-risk, problematic, and disadvantaged students, the recent measurable benefits of an arts education are quite impactful in these situations as well. Often,

students who experience the most significant positive effects from an arts education are the ones who are commonly known for exhibiting problematic behaviors in the classroom or who are more at risk to fall into dangerous activities.

Absentee and Dropout Students

Students with lower levels of academic achievement are more likely to drop out of school or in general fail to receive a high school diploma. Since 2001, the national average percent of students who drop out of school has remained between twenty-five and thirty percent, not taking into account the much higher percentages in certain geographical or demographic regions in the country (“Reinvesting” 28). The Editorial Projects in Education Research Center estimated that about fifty percent of all male students who belong to disadvantaged or minority groups end up leaving school prior to their high school graduation. Looking at America’s public high schools in 2011, around two million students attended a high school in which fewer than fifty percent of the students graduated (“Reinvesting” 28). From recent data, the school systems across America have turned into institutions where students are disengaged, unproductive, and, often times, not even present.

However, a study conducted in the public high schools in New York City discovered that schools having the most difficulty in keeping students on the proper tracks for graduation were the same schools that were also offering the lowest number of options for courses in theater, dance, music, and visual arts. These arts disciplines are all course offerings with “well-documented success in motivating students to stay in school” (Israel 19). In fact, the National Endowment for the Arts discovered that when compared with classmates who had lower levels of involvement in the arts, students that were highly involved in the arts had five times the likelihood of graduating high school (Brown 1). While the relationship is not causal, students

who are afforded the opportunity to be involved in the arts may be more motivated to stay in school through graduation. Engaging students, done successfully through involvement in the arts, allows them to earn a high school diploma and the chance at a brighter future that education provides.

Students with a Lower Socio-Economic Background

Academically, in students with a lower socioeconomic status, test scores in science and writing were found to be higher among those students who had higher levels of arts involvement. High school students with a lower socioeconomic status but a high level of involvement in the arts had a higher mean grade point average, and they were also ten percent more likely to go on to complete a calculus course while in high school. Socioeconomic minority students, when significantly involved in arts programs or courses, decreased their chances of dropping out of high school from twenty-two percent down to four percent (Catterall, Dumais, and Hampden-Thompson 12-13). By providing an avenue for students to become more involved in school and lowering the probability of dropping out, the arts increase the likelihood of these high school graduates landing better-paying jobs than those of high school dropouts. A high school diploma also allows for the continuation of education for those in the work force, granting graduates a greater chance to rise from an economically disadvantaged background.

Receiving an arts education lowers the chances of students dropping out of school or not receiving a high school diploma because the arts are opportunities for students to diversify their skill sets, learn critical thinking, work in a cross-discipline manner, and solve problems in a creative manner (“Reinvesting” 28). Beyond a high school diploma, students from a low-income home or background that experienced high involvement or engagement with the arts have double the likelihood to graduate from college when compared to other low-income students who did

not have an arts education (“Arts” 4). Involvement in the arts while in school gives students a chance to gain inspiration from their work, giving the curriculum a new, engaging appeal to students. Engagement and participation in the arts is associated with significant benefits, particularly for youth who are more susceptible to lower academic achievement or dangerous or problematic behaviors.

Psychological and behavioral benefits can also be observed in students who participate in the arts, particularly in those with a lower socioeconomic status. Two hundred seventy-one students around the world were studied to reveal the impact of the arts on indicators of behavior and psychology. Arts participation has a significant impact on student wellbeing because it has been found to increase levels of self-esteem, resilience, motivation, self-efficacy, autonomy, and other positive traits (Caldwell and Vaughan 88). Lower socioeconomic status students who were included in creative arts programs that were focused on performance aspects displayed a marked increase in motivation and self-image that continued to develop from eighth grade through to their senior year. This increase in self-esteem becomes even more rewarding to discover because the students studied were twice as likely to be in uncertain home situations such as shifting parental relationships, moving frequently, going off or on welfare programs, or changing or losing jobs that would tend to increase insecurity in children (Caldwell and Vaughan 89). Another study focusing on specifically theater involvement in students with a lower socioeconomic status revealed that a high level of theater involvement in this demographic resulted in greater percentages of students with above average academic self-image, better race relations, and higher empathy for others (Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga 16-19). Students experience emotional and psychological benefits through engagement in the arts; perhaps even more encouraging are the studies demonstrating that these trends hold for students with lower

socioeconomic backgrounds who would be more susceptible to negative psychological and emotional states.

Previous Federal Attempts to Solve the Decline in Arts Education and Access

There is a correlation between the two categories of access to an arts education and a reduction in problematic behavior or academic success in students. While it cannot be proven to be a direct causation, it does display an associative effect that an arts education has benefits for students who are disadvantaged, at-risk, and/or problematic. Previous attempts by the federal government have been put in place that recognized the importance of the arts as an integral component of student education. These include President George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind Act" and President Barack Obama's "Race to the Top" initiative. While these educational plans sought to address the apparent inequalities in access to the arts, neither resulted in a successful equalization of funding or arts access as the issues still persist.

The No Child Left Behind Act

Arts education continues to suffer despite President George W. Bush's 2002 No Child Left Behind Act that mandated the arts as a core subject for children. Even after the arts inclusion, schools were still mainly assessed through the math and reading scores of their students, minimizing the arts' importance (Levin 21; Baker 258). Because schools were not held accountable for their instruction of the arts, neither the existence nor the quality of arts education has improved. This lack of accountability then forced the arts to compete with other curriculum subjects for student involvement and attention. In addition, the program placed increased focus on math and reading while lessening the emphasis on areas such as music and art, despite their position in a comprehensive education (Baker 258). National Association of Elementary School Principals director, Gail Connelly, argued that the No Child Left Behind Act placed a too narrow

focus on education, drastically ignoring the learning needs of the whole student (Baker 259). Art teacher Liza Linder agreed, stating that any student with visual or musical inclinations was left behind in education since music classes reportedly took place during lunch inside the school cafeteria or in a hallway outside a classroom (Baker 259). Under the No Child Left Behind Act, states were unable to use student scores from arts course offerings to show verification of attending students' Adequate Yearly Progress, nor could they use scores from courses in the humanities or foreign languages (Roeger and Kim 122). The No Child Left Behind Act, despite its good intentions, markedly diminished the classroom time dedicated to the arts; this reduction has resulted in an entire generation of people who lack an arts education (Levin 18). Unfortunately, the solutions put in place to solve the issues surrounding arts education were unable to fully address or solve the problems.

The Race to the Top Plan

More recently, President Barack Obama and The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities called for the addition of quality arts programs in American schools; however, the problems within arts education only became more drastically reinforced (Baker 263). The decline in arts education throughout America remains ongoing and continues to rapidly decline, even today. The gap between Caucasian and minority ethnicity students also continues to widen along with the gap between affluent and economically disadvantaged students. In 2009, the federal government plan, Race to the Top, emphasized science and math education by creating a competition between states to perform better than the other states in America; this competition decided which schools could receive educational grants from the federal government to boost their public school systems (Hourigan 37). However, Race to the Top failed to address equality and funding among students and schools in America, particularly along the lines of racial or

ethnic minority students. The focus on science and math learning demonstrated a contempt for social studies and learning methods that utilize interdisciplinary methods (Hourigan 35). The creation of a competition limits the number of schools that are able to receive funding, forcing schools who do not receive grants to cease offering programs that require extra funding or are deemed unnecessary. Unfortunately, schools' arts programs are nearly always the first ones in school curriculum to be cut. Racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic minority students typically attend poorly funded schools, which causes their education to become much narrower when grants are denied and arts programs are cut. Race to the Top did not solve the issues of inequality between privileged and disadvantaged students; rather, it served as a mechanism to perpetuate the injustice. Rather than motivating all schools in America to strive for academic excellence, Race to the Top has created a nation where schools fight for a limited amount of funding, and this often occurs at the expense of minority students.

Pedagogy for the Arts' Role in Education

The arts' benefits are most evident and impactful when they are taught using a pedagogy that is culturally responsive; arts participation demands that students express their lives. Students coming from racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic minority groups have the opportunity to utilize their unique backgrounds within an arts course that would not be present in other areas of a curriculum. A proper pedagogy for arts education, one that encourages the cultural or experiential differences among students, allows for students from different backgrounds to experience the academic and psychological benefits of the arts. This provides all children with an opportunity to have a voice in their education as artistic endeavors become vehicles for students' lives, experiences, and expressions to be a meaningful component of curriculum. As the arts are naturally environments for hands-on, challenging learning, students have the opportunity to grow

in reflective and processing abilities, critical thinking skills, and creative thinking (Sánchez and Tillotson 10). Every student, from every cultural background, from every neighborhood can be encouraged by the arts to be engaged in their education, creating an environment where the benefits coming from arts participation are evident.

Integration of the Arts into Educational Pedagogy

A correct pedagogy for instruction in the arts and the integration of arts subjects or concepts into the school curriculum must include components of arts education that are helpful and effective for every student. Participation in the arts without further classroom integration and cross-subject involvement has the potential to diminish the positive effects of the arts on children. If children in American public school systems are to develop solid critical thinking and problem solving skills, the arts must be integrated into all content areas of educational curriculum. Education's purpose is to spark curiosity in students, teach problem analysis, and convey skills and knowledge, all of which can be taught by the arts (Crawford 5). Academic content becomes markedly more accessible for students when joined with the arts because teachers state the majority of students are able to best learn with the use of all abilities, including speaking, creating, looking, or moving (Crawford 6-7). Students utilize the arts to learn better by employing every area of their brains to comprehend a subject.

An arts education creates a space for students to better comprehend and relay more abstract, difficult concepts that require higher-level thinking. According to writer Patricia Wolfe, the lack of a concrete experience connected with a subject matter could create a symbol with little meaning to students (Crawford 6, 10). Artistic forms such as drawing or other movements help in understanding science, and the concrete images of poetry assist in expressing larger ideas (Crawford 11). Effective learning happens when students can move from personal or familiar

concepts to more abstract ideas. Utilizing the arts can help students move from the known to the unknown with greater confidence (Crawford 11). A study organized at the University of Boston in Massachusetts employed the use of haikus to describe the neurological responses of drug addiction. The study revealed that the use of poetry and higher-order thinking allowed students to accurately portray scientific happenings and reactions (Pollack and Korol 42). Poetry composition was found to be an effective way in curriculum to connect the arts with science (Pollack and Korol 48). Student comprehension of complex or theoretical concepts becomes more effective through the benefits of an arts education.

Successes in State-Level Arts Inclusion in Education

State initiatives or endeavors have shown more specific pathways to success in implementing the arts within educational curriculum to benefit all students, especially those belonging to racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic minority groups.

Missouri Public Schools

In 2010, the Missouri Public Schools system discovered that their student populations experienced several positive benefits in education when they participated in fine arts classes. Specifically, the benefits measured were associated with better attendance, graduation, and classroom engagement rates; these positive student outcomes were consistent across lines of socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity (Scheuler 3). The state received support from both the Missouri Arts Council and the Missouri Alliance for Arts Education, which were designed to implement the arts as a standard of education for students in Missouri and increase overall arts participation (Scheuler 7, 8). By establishing art and music as curriculum standards for students in elementary school, Missouri public schools ensured that most schools offer instruction in at least these areas across age ranges; more than ninety-nine percent of districts offered courses in

these arts disciplines (Scheuler 10). Missouri has recognized the positive results and student outcomes associated with the presence of the arts in education, which in turn has made the presence of the arts in at least two disciplines nearly inescapable within their public school systems.

California Public Schools

While Missouri has mandated the presence of visual arts and music for students in their public schools until fifth grade, the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association wrote a report in 2010 to explain their efforts of growing and expanding arts education for both elementary and secondary schools in the state. Their ideal arts disciplines include visual arts, dance, theatre, and music as components; the board sought to target the whole state of California in addition to individual, local superintendents to create a stronger overall movement to grow the presence of arts education. The vision presented on the principles of arts education is that instruction in the arts would be a reality for all students, in every public school, each day (Sánchez and Tillotson 5). There are eight core principles involved in creating a comprehensive, high quality arts education for every student as a means to engage and involve students from all backgrounds. Two of the most significant principles detail that arts courses in curriculum, since they are treated as equal to other content areas, must have quality resources for instruction and comprehensive methods of assessment (Sánchez and Tillotson 6). These principles ensure that student arts education in California is high quality and meaningful; it is formed, presented, and evaluated using approaches similar to any other subject. Because the arts are the discipline that best allows for a wider variety of creative abilities and different learning approaches, they are the most effective discipline to make certain that marginalized students are seen as valuable to the classroom and not isolated (Sánchez and Tillotson 7). The arts foster a

learning environment where all students can know their value and discover new abilities, making education as a whole a more exciting experience that can lay the foundation for further academic success.

The Future of Community-Level Arts Inclusion in Education

Several American public schools in the country have begun to establish partnerships with community arts programs or institutions in order to reach every student in the system; these connections often occur and are most effective on the district level within states. Many public schools in America are already partnering with local artists or craftsmen, universities or colleges in their area, museums, community centers for the arts, cultural organizations, and schools for the arts in their own communities. In the 2008-2009 school year, forty-four percent of American public secondary schools partnered with a local cultural or community program, thirty-seven percent collaborated with local artists, and twenty-eight percent united with performing arts centers (Parsad and Spiegelman 12). Elementary public schools displayed similar patterns as their secondary school counterparts (Parsad and Spiegelman 7). Connections with local entities are often the most successful because the organizations working with the schools are closely familiar with the populations and cultures within the school hallways and surrounding communities, making them more suited to best cater to those specific needs. Local organizations are able to maximize their success by partnering with the school system in order to ensure every student in their community is reached by the arts.

Conclusion

Effective responses to the issue of disproportionate access to assist in bridging disparities in educational quality, particularly those divisions along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines, must become a priority. The implementation of the arts in school curriculum is a significant,

powerful method to fight these divisions and better focus on disadvantaged students. Arts disciplines ought to be treated as a vital component of curriculum just as other content areas are treated, requiring evaluated or graded showcases, performances, and constructive feedback. As the arts have a unique ability to engage and empower students in school, as well as cultivate opportunities for academic success, the issue of arts access in educational systems across America is significant. Federal government acts and funding initiatives have consistently upheld the arts as valuable and necessary to a holistic, beneficial education for all children. At the same time, national endeavors to bolster the arts have been largely unsuccessful, making it important to look at the success of both state and local involvements that have assisted schools in offering arts education and access. Smaller organizations and interventions at the state level are able to cater to the unique character and culture of their surroundings, neighborhoods, and populations. Access to an arts education and the integration of the arts have the power to create a better quality of education and life for all students.

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