

10 LESSONS THE ARTS TEACH

By Elliot Eisner

1. The arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships.

Unlike much of the curriculum in which correct answers and rules prevail, in the arts, it is judgment rather than rules that prevail.

2. The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer.

3. The arts celebrate multiple perspectives.

One of their large lessons is that there are many ways to see and interpret the world.

4. The arts teach children that in complex forms of problem solving purposes are seldom fixed, but change with circumstance and opportunity.

Learning in the arts requires the ability and a willingness to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities of the work as it unfolds.

5. The arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what we can know. The limits of our language do not define the limits of our cognition.

6. The arts teach students that small differences can have large effects.

The arts traffic in subtleties.

7. The arts teach students to think through and within a material.

All art forms employ some means through which images become real.

8. The arts help children learn to say what cannot be said.

When children are invited to disclose what a work of art helps them feel, they must reach into their poetic capacities to find the words that will do the job.

9. The arts enable us to have experience we can have from no other source and through such experience to discover the range and variety of what we are capable of feeling.

10. The arts' position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults believe is important.

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How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement

<http://www.nasaa-arts.org/publications/critical-evidence.shtml>

Why is it so important to keep the arts strong in our schools? How does the study of the arts contribute to student achievement and success?

These and other important questions are addressed in a new booklet published by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) in collaboration with the [Arts Education Partnership](#) (AEP). *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement* responds to the needs of policymakers, educators, parents and advocates for fact-based, non-technical language documenting the most current and compelling research on the value of arts learning experiences.

Critical Evidence updates and expands on the case made for arts education in NASAA's earlier collaboration with the Arts in Education Partnership, *Eloquent Evidence: Arts at the Core of Learning*, originally published in 1995. "Ten year's after its release," observes Critical Evidence author Sandra S. Ruppert, "the evidence is even more eloquent, and the need to demonstrate the link between the arts and student achievement has grown more critical." 2006, 20 pages.

View [Critical Evidence](#) pdf.

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/3270/>

Why Arts Education Matters

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A Conversation with Derek E. Gordon

Derek E. Gordon, Executive Director, Jazz at Lincoln Center and former senior vice president for the Kennedy Center, discusses the place of the arts in a comprehensive education.

"Look at the schools that have the highest test scores on standardized tests. Generally, you will find that the arts are a part of their curriculum. Now, is that just a coincidence?"

Q: The Kennedy Center's Arts Education Vision Statement asserts, "The arts are a critical and essential part of the education of every young person in America." Why is this true?

A: The arts are an essential part of American culture as a whole. It is very important that every young person comes into direct contact with the arts—not only as a passive observer, but also as an active participant.

The arts are also a great equalizer in terms of economic and social discrepancies. They have a way of leveling the playing field, allowing individuals to progress in life more effectively. There is also a lot of research that addresses the impact that the arts have on cognitive learning skills. For example, learning to play the piano can aid in developing mathematical skills. Visual arts and dance can affect the spatial perception of students—particularly young students.

Q: What value does arts-based learning provide to students?

A: The arts encourage learning as a process of discovery. We want every student to be a researcher who is asking probing questions—not only demonstrating their knowledge, but also testing and defending the assumptions that they are making. This is something that artists do all the time.

Also, when you look at early education practices, you see that they are filled with arts activities, because they offer the most basic and immediate ways to connect to a young mind. The arts challenge students of all ages, and engage them in a way that is often more kinesthetic, and perhaps more emotionally satisfying, than the "traditional" approach to teaching a text.

Q: How can one defend the role of arts in education when so much emphasis is placed on standardized test scores?

A: It's always interesting to look at the schools that have the highest test scores on standardized tests. Generally you will find that the arts are a part of their curriculum. Now, is that just a coincidence? Or is it part of the environment that makes the students more successful in their efforts to learn and compete on standardized tests?

A publication called *Critical Links* contains empirical data on a variety of tests and research initiatives looking at the impact of the arts on academic achievement—not in the domain of the arts, but in other academic areas. This material has made very compelling statements about the effectiveness of using the arts to teach other subjects.

Q: What is the classroom teacher's role in advocating for the place of the arts in education?

A: First, professional development is extremely important. Teachers from all disciplines can participate in programs to learn the techniques of an arts-integrated approach to education. The Kennedy Center offers a wide array of professional development opportunities and experiences that demonstrate this sort of integrated approach to learning. Educators can incorporate these techniques into just about any text or topic that they are teaching.

Second, teachers should look to the leadership in the school, as well as the general community, to discover available resources. If there is an arts specialist in your school, look at him or her as a collaborator in expanding your students' experience. Look to community cultural organizations that might present productions or have teaching artists willing to come in and teach a hands-on activity.

Third, teachers can talk to their school boards, PTAs, and decision-makers in their community to make sure that their schools have access to cultural resources, and that artists or teaching artists are on the faculties of their schools.

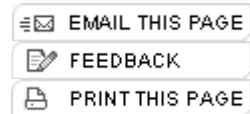
Q: If you could implement one initiative to improve American students' education in the arts, what would it be?

A: I think that I would create an initiative mandating that all of the arts would be available at every school, and that every student had regular opportunities to receive instruction and participate actively in a variety of art forms. I would like to see schools implement arts programs that give students the opportunity to develop fully in all of the artistic disciplines. Students should have ample opportunity to view, create, and critique all of the arts.

Three Rs Are Essential, but Don't Forget the A—the Arts

by **Elliot W. Eisner**

Advocating the implementation of the arts into the daily classroom, this article stresses the benefits of an art-enriched curriculum.



Recent efforts to assess and reform our schools—such as global education rankings released in December and the No Child Left Behind law—have focused attention on four so-called "core" subjects; reading, writing, math and science. No effort has been made to address more fundamental questions regarding what we teach and why.

Although we don't think about it this way, a school's curriculum is a mind-altering device, a means through which children's minds are shaped with ideas, skills and beliefs about the world. Because what we teach the young is so important, we need to be particularly careful about what we include and equally as careful about what we don't.

What we do teach is far more likely to be the offshoot of embedded traditions and our efforts to boost test scores, as if test scores were a meaningful proxy for the quality of education our students receive. They are not.

One of the casualties of our preoccupation with test scores is the presence—or should I say the absence—of the arts in our schools. When they do appear they are usually treated as ornamental rather than substantive aspects of our children's school experience. The arts are considered nice but not necessary. Just what do the arts have to offer to our children? Are they really important? Put most directly, what do the arts have to teach? Join me on a brief excursion.

First, the arts teach children to exercise that most exquisite of capacities, the ability to make judgments in the absence of rules. There is so much in school that emphasizes fealty to rules. The rules that the arts obey are located in our children's emotional interior; children come to feel a rightness of fit among the qualities with which they work. There is no rule book to provide recipes or algorithms to calculate conclusions. They must exercise judgment by looking inside themselves.

A second lesson the arts teach children is that problems can have more than one solution. This too is at odds with the use in our schools of multiple choice tests in which there are no multiple correct answers. The tacit lesson is that there is, almost always, a single correct answer. It's seldom that way in life.

A third lesson is that aims can be held flexibly; in the arts the goal one starts with can be changed midway in the process as unexpected opportunities arrive. Flexibility yields opportunities for surprise. "Art loves chance. He who errs willingly is the artist," Aristotle said. Creative thinking abhors routine. Routines may be good for the assembly line, where surprise is the last thing you want. As our schools become increasingly managed by an industrial ethos that pre-specifies and then measures outcomes, there is an increased need for the arts as a counterbalance.

The arts also teach that neither words nor numbers define the limits of our cognition; we know more than we can tell. There are many experiences and a multitude of occasions in which we need art forms to say what literal language cannot say. When we marry and when we bury, we appeal to the arts to express what numbers and literal language cannot. Reflect on 9/11 and recall the shrines that were created by those who lost their loved ones- and those who didn't. The arts can provide forms of communication that convey to others what is ineffable.

Finally, the arts are about joy. They are about the experience of being moved, of having one's life enriched, of discovering our capacity to feel. If that was all they did, they would warrant a generous place at our table.

These are but a few of the lessons that art teaches. What is ironic is that the forms of thinking the arts develop and refine are precisely the forms of thinking that our ever-changing world, riddled as it is with ambiguities and uncertainties, requires in order to cope. Can we make some room for the arts? Perhaps.

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To paraphrase, Jonathan Katz, executive director of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), "Long-term support comes from sharing the experience."

Engaging Your Audience

One of the surest ways to influence a group of people is to give them a firsthand look at the value of arts education. The more active you are in your approach, the greater the impact will be on your audience.

If you make a speech at a school board meeting, you will likely be greeted with polite nods and maybe a little applause. But it's quite possible that your message will be forgotten in the midst of other pressing issues.

If, however, you can get a few of those board members into your classroom to see how your students respond to an arts-integrated lesson, you will leave them with a far more vivid and real impression of the power of arts education. Your classroom is your own bully pulpit for arts advocacy.

Perhaps you can't get your desired audience to visit your classroom. Well then, why not bring your classroom to them? Try bringing students to the meeting. Have them talk about and demonstrate the impact the arts have had on their learning. In the absence of students, consider actually teaching a lesson or a workshop at your next PTA or board meeting. Your "students" will come away with a strong connection to your work, and an even stronger belief in your message.

For assistance in organizing these types of learning experiences, turn to local or national cultural organizations. The Kennedy Center's Partners in Education program offers a variety of workshops for community members and parents. These workshops are designed to allow participants to experience first-hand the benefits of an arts-integrated educational experience.

Enlisting Assistance

Finally, as you embark on your advocacy endeavors, don't be shy about calling on parents to help you. They can often be your best advocacy assistants. Remember, many of the people you are trying to influence (school board members, principals, teachers, etc.) are ultimately accountable to parents.

No matter what method you choose, do not undervalue your own role as a champion for arts education. You have a powerful voice—use it!

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/3951/>

Kennedy Center President Michael M. Kaiser was invited by Louisiana's Lt. Governor Mitchell Landrieu to address the Senate and House of the Louisiana Legislature on the importance of arts education and in support of Senate Bill 299. The Bill would require 60 minutes of instruction per week in both visual and the performing arts for students in kindergarten through grade 8 and also would require high school students to take a course in either the visual arts or the performing arts as a prerequisite to graduation. The following is a complete transcript of his speech.

I am grateful for the opportunity to address the distinguished members of the Senate/House on the importance of arts education in the lives of young people in Louisiana. I appreciate Lt. Governor Landrieu's invitation to testify and for his leadership of and support for the Cultural Economy Initiatives. This legislation will not only benefit the people of Louisiana, but will send a message to the nation about Louisiana's commitment to culture, to the arts, and to quality education.

I have the honor to serve as President of The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, our national cultural center. The Kennedy Center serves as the nation's memorial to President Kennedy. President Kennedy said that "when the dust of centuries has passed over our cities we, too, will be remembered, not for victories or defeats in battles or politics but rather for our contributions to the human spirit." It is this sentiment that motivates us to produce and present the best of the performing arts and to play a major role in educating and enlightening the nation's children. In fact, we are now reaching 25,000 teachers and 11 million people in all 50 states through a variety of activities including touring performances for children and families, teacher training programs, online resources for students and teachers, and a satellite network that beams programming to classrooms throughout our nation. We believe these programs play a vital role in supplementing the academic experiences of the young people we reach.

The condition of our education system today is the subject of much discussion—not just here in Louisiana, but throughout the United States. In an effort to improve the quality of American education, standardized tests have been put in place as the rule by which a school is measured. As a result, today's schools have too often become centers for the well tested, rather than the well educated. Achieving high test scores has frequently become the goal of our schools, rather than offering the kind of well-rounded education that is needed for success in today's increasingly competitive work places.

Let me share with you some of the findings of a recent report by the National Center on Education and the Economy. The Center commissioned leaders in business, education, and government to study our education system and make recommendations for reforms. In their publication titled "Tough Choices or Tough Times" they point out what is wrong with our current test-based educational policies. The report says "Too often, our testing system rewards students who will be good at routine work, while not providing opportunities for students to display creative and innovative thinking and analysis."

The report predicts that in the current and future economy, "the best employers the world over will be looking for the most competent, most creative, and most innovative people on the face of the earth. Candidates will have to be comfortable with ideas and abstractions, good at both analysis and synthesis, creative and innovative, self-disciplined and well-organized, able to learn very quickly and work well as a member of a team."

So where do we turn? What resources can we provide to our teachers and our students to help them develop the critical thinking, creativity, discipline, and analytical skills they need to succeed in the global economy?

The answer is the arts. The National Center on Education and the Economy's report further states, "the arts will be an indispensable foundation for everything that comes after for most members of the workforce." Learning through the arts reinforces crucial academic skills in reading, language arts, and math. But just as important, learning through the arts gives young people the skills they need to analyze and synthesize information, and to solve complex problems.

The connection between arts education and improved academic performance has been proven again and again. According to research by Americans for the Arts, young people who participate in the arts are:

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

And it works even in the most economically challenged communities. A study by the Arts Education Partnership, tracking the results in schools in these communities, shows that arts programs keep children in school—children who might otherwise act out or drop out become enthusiastic learners. The study also showed that arts education programs increase teacher effectiveness and reduce teacher turnover in these challenging schools.

At the Kennedy Center, we have seen first hand the dramatic impact that arts education can have on a school's bottom line. Including the arts throughout the curriculum is the key to success—creating the kind of education that keeps young people in school, keeps teachers committed and creative, and keeps families and communities united in support of an education system they believe in.

The benefits of arts education, in terms of skill building, are immeasurable. But if you want measurable data in the form of test scores, we can provide that as well.

Recently, the State of Maryland conducted an evaluation of three public schools. The evaluation focused on curriculum, instruction, professional development, and student and teacher outcomes, including test scores. The evaluation showed that in the school that had Kennedy Center arts education programs, fifth grade math scores rose 15.4% and reading scores were 4.1% higher. Third grade math scores were up 7.9% and third grade reading scores rose an astonishing 18.9%.

Now, there are many factors that can contribute to these results. But according to the findings of the evaluation, teachers most frequently pointed to the arts education courses given by the Kennedy Center as having had the greatest impact on their teaching and their students' performance. In addition to improved test scores, the teachers reported that their students were more confident, more comfortable taking risks, and more socially adept.

The arts prepare students for the workforce, and encourage and enable them to continue their education. Again, test scores offer proof. In a review of 2005 college-bound seniors, research showed that high school students who took arts classes had higher math and verbal SAT scores than students who take no arts classes. Specifically, those students who took four years of arts classes out-performed their peers by 58 points on the verbal portion of the SAT and 38 points on the math portion of the SAT.

Nationwide, the Kennedy Center has been one of the leading forces in arts education for many years. In fact, we work with schools and communities right here in Louisiana—in Lafayette, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans. The partnership with Acadiana Arts Council, the Lafayette Parish School System, and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette is one of our oldest and strongest. The synergy among these three organizations works beautifully to provide quality arts education for teachers, students, and artists of Lafayette and the surrounding parishes. We look forward to building on the work already accomplished and to serve as a resource in the restoration of the arts to every school and to every child in the state. Senate Bill 299 is a critical component of the Cultural Economy Initiatives. Without it, the future of young people and the future of the arts and culture in this great state will be severely diminished.

You face tough choices today. Problems are many and resources are tight. But here in Louisiana, music and dance and theater are in your soul. I urge you to draw on your state's rich artistic heritage as you continue to build your education system. If your goal is a vibrant, creative economy, there is no greater resource you can call upon than your young people; and arts education is the key to preparing those young people for the future. I can assure you that the Kennedy Center will be a willing and responsive partner in this endeavor.