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A Review of the Literature on the
Benefits of the Visual and Performing Arts
for Elementary School Children
By Melissa Pasa

A Capstone Project Literature Review
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
Liberal Studies LS 400
California State University Monterey Bay
Dr. Scott Waltz
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Abstract

This capstone investigates the importance of the visual and performing arts for children who are at the elementary school age. Due to the fact that the No Child Left Behind Act does not effectively recognize the arts as a core academic subject, many students are missing out on all that the arts have to offer. This capstone explores the extensive amount of lifelong benefits that the arts provide and the permanent place that they have in all schools curriculum. Based on numerous findings and studies from researchers in the field of art and education, the benefits that students gain are rich, meaningful and are sustained in and out of the classroom. Please note that the visual and performing arts are sometimes referred to simply as ‘the arts’ throughout this paper. Please also note that the visual and performing arts include activities such as: visually creating a piece of art not limited to a drawing, painting or sculpture, creating a plays, participating in structured and unstructured play where different roles are taken on by students, singing, dancing, playing instruments, and other activities where students are participating in activities that are in the subject area of art.

Introduction

Visual and performing arts programs have been noted through extensive research to be an extremely beneficial component in the education of elementary school children. Yet, due to the inclusion of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the arts are no longer being actively recognized as a core academic subject. The No Child Left Behind Act is a federally mandated program that was put into effect in 2001 and sought to improve schools by increasing the accountability of the states and school districts (cde.ca.gov; nea.org).

Essentially NCLB is an education act that is standards based which means that the progress and success of each student is measure by standardized tests. In exchange for receiving funds, each public school must participate in standardized testing and report their score and progress to the state (API – academic performance index and AYP – academic yearly progress) which in turn reports to the federal government. If the school does not make enough progress and/or does not have a proficient API and AYP score (of at least 800 on a scale of 200 to 1000), then they become mandated as a title one school and their federal funding becomes strictly allocated for them (cde.ca.gov; nea.org).

The title one school then goes under what is referred to as ‘program improvement’ or PI. Becoming a title one school means that the state takes control of the curriculum and implements what may be referred to as scripted teaching in which teachers are direct exactly what to teach and how. The curriculum that is given to the school to use follows the subject matter of what students will find on the standardized tests, so schools and teachers that are mandated title one schools, are often referred to as “teaching to the test” so that they can meet the required target score of at least 800 and make the progress required to receive necessary government funding (cde.ca.gov; nea.org).

The lack of government funding for many schools connects to arts education because NCLB does not recognize the visual and performing arts a core academic subject, despite its long list of benefits for students. Based on recent 2007 test scores from the California Department of Education website there are still approximately 40% of schools that are title one schools mandated under NCLB and must go through program improvement. By 2010, it is predicted that 70% of schools will be title one schools. This means that many schools are unable to provide sufficient arts education. Despite the fact that 48 states in the United States have content standards in the arts, only 20 states clearly mandate arts education (Chapman 2005). Based on this fact it has been noted that state policies do not uniformly support studies in the arts as a core subject for every student. Figure 1 below illustrates the minimal attention that visual and performing arts receive. The chart focuses on financial support, and concludes in finding that schools are not receiving enough financial support for visual and performing art programs.

Figure 1: Elementary Art Specialists ¹

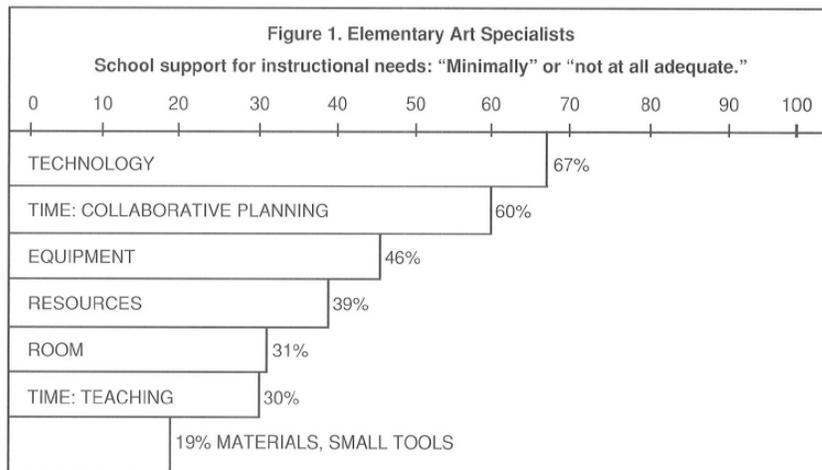


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of public elementary school visual arts specialists indicating “minimally adequate” and “not at all adequate” support for their instruction needs: Academic year 1999-2000. Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2002). Arts education in public elementary and secondary schools, 1999-2000 (NCES-131-2002).

¹ Chapman, 2005, p.9

Due to the fact that arts education is receiving less attention and time in the classroom, students are missing out on a subject that has so much to offer. Sternberg (2006) states that the deterioration of arts is ironic because research findings show that the performing and visual arts challenge students to use reasoning skills—both concrete and abstract—to draw conclusions and formulate ideas. Arts encourage creativity and imagination from concept to process to completion. Moreover, in both large and small districts across the United States, arts have been found to enhance learning for students (p.211).

Given the numerous benefits that have been associated with the arts in education, students clearly should be afforded an education that is rich in arts experiences.

Despite the fact that the arts are noted as an extremely valuable subject, there are still many students receiving a minimal arts education. Based on a recent national study conducted by the National Education Association, it has been found that arts education is still lacking greatly. The study found that fifteen percent of elementary education students in America received no visual arts instruction. Of the students who do receive visual arts instruction, 43 percent received art instruction from a certified visual arts teacher for an average of 77 minutes per week. Specialists teamed with classroom teachers delivered visual arts instruction in 29 percent of the cases for an average of 91 minutes per week. Twenty-eight percent of the students were taught visual arts by their classroom teachers only. These students received an average of 49 minutes of visual arts instruction per week (Gullatt, 2007).

Through extensive studies it has been concluded by many researchers in the field of art education that the arts are not being implemented into classrooms to the degree that they should be. Yet the long list of benefits that the arts provide seems to be ignored. Of the many positive

attributes that have been listed as a result of arts participation, there are four important benefits that reach all students of all abilities and learning styles that have been noted by numerous researchers in the field of art education. Cognitive development, overall development, literacy, and therapy are all benefits of the visual and performing arts that provide life long learning skills that stay with students in and out of the classroom.

When students are able to participate in visual and performing arts programs, cognitive development has been constantly noted throughout numerous studies to be an important and permanent benefit. Along with cognitive development when students participate specifically in music and dance programs there is a number of positive attributes that contribute to students overall development which supports them academically, socially and emotionally. In addition to participation in such programs, another common and important benefit is literacy development. There is an abundance of noted research that supports advanced and well supported literacy development. Another important and lasting benefit is the therapy. When students participate in visual and performing art programs, the therapeutic effect helps students of different abilities and students who have faced disaster. These four essential components of the visual and performing arts illustrate the significance and importance of the visual and performing arts for elementary school children.

Cognitive Development

Cognitive development is one of the most important attributes that the arts have to offer children. When students participate in the arts it has been found by numerous professionals in the field of art education that there are many positive effects on cognitive learning. Cognitive development helps to develop an abundance of the necessary skills that children need to be successful in the classroom. By participating in the arts (drawing, painting, singing, dancing, and acting etc.) children are able to receive a rich experience that helps them to develop deeper cognitive processes. The arts are rich in opportunities for children to develop and make choices which are one of the core aspects of how children develop cognitively (Boyes & Reid, 2005; Fox & Diffily, 2000; Moran & Jarvis, 2001; & Sousa 2006).

Sousa (2006) argues that the arts are an invaluable way to assist in children's cognitive development. He states: "During the brain's early years, neural connections are being made at a rapid rate. Much of what young children do as play--singing, drawing, dancing--are natural forms of art. These activities engage all the senses and wire the brain for successful learning" (p.1). Essentially children's cognitive development is strongly supported by arts programs within their education.

When children make the choice of what to sing and how to sing it, what they want to draw and how to draw it, and what kind of dance moves they want to do and how they will do it, these are the ways that students begin to develop their cognitive processes. Being able to make the individual choice, and thinking about how they are going to make that artistic decision,

allows children to develop the necessary cognitive processes that are so important throughout life (Boyes & Reid, 2005; Fox & Diffily, 2000; Moran & Jarvis, 2001; and Sousa, 2006).

In the journey of making different decisions and thinking about how execute them, children are able to develop important thought processes. When children are able to play, sing, draw, and dance, they are able to develop different cognitive processes which further support their development. If children are able to receive an education that supports their need for cognitive stimulation through the arts, the experience has been noted to have permanent positive effects (Boyes & Reid, 2005; Fox & Diffily, 2000; Moran & Jarvis, 2001; and Sousa, 2006).

Support of arts programs in education is essential to student's development as noted, by Boyes & Reid (2005), Fox & Diffily (2002), Moran & Jarvis (2001), and Sousa (2006). Given that children are artistic by nature, it is proven that schools must facilitate this innate fascination by fostering these skills through art programs. A child's experience at school is extremely influenced by the curriculum offered, and it is important that schools support children's need for arts within their education. It is noted by a number of researchers that when children enter school, the art activities must be continued and enhanced. This is important because brain areas are developed as students learn songs and rhymes and create drawings and finger paintings (Boyes & Reid, 2005; Fox & Diffily, 2000; Moran & Jarvis, 2001; and Sousa, 2006).

There is a deep connection between the arts and cognitive development. Cognitive development is an important aspect of a child's growth because of the essential skills that are obtained, and the arts are an ideal way to do so because of the constant thought processes that children must go through when participating in the arts and all other subject matter (Boyes & Reid, 2005; Fox & Diffily, 2000; Moran & Jarvis, 2001; and Sousa, 2006).

When children do participate in art programs there are many vital benefits. Boyes & Reid (2005), Fox & Diffily (2000), Moran & Jarvis (2001), and Sousa (2006), discuss how one of the most important aspects of the arts is that they are not just expressive and affective, they are extremely cognitive. They develop essential thinking tools such as “pattern recognition and development; mental representations of what is observed or imagined; symbolic, allegorical and metaphorical representations; careful observation of the world; and abstraction from complexity” (Sousa, 2006, p.2). Art programs have a very strong influence on children’s development because of the cognitive skills that are influenced.

The skills that children develop when participating in the arts provide them with skills that help them to develop essential thinking skills to build upon throughout their education. It has been found through numerous studies that the outcome of participation in such art programs fosters many different skills through the development of cognitive skills. Sousa (2006) discusses that through the development of cognitive skills, art programs contribute to a student’s education by

helping them realize the breadth of human experience, see the different ways humans express sentiments and convey meaning, and develop subtle and complex forms of thinking. Although the arts are often thought of as separate subjects, like chemistry or algebra, they really are a collection of skills and thought processes that transcend all areas of human engagement (p.2).

The inclusion of art programs within the education system provide students with an insurmountable amount of benefits surrounding cognitive development. The arts are truly an essential component to the cognitive development of all children.

The cognitive development of children is greatly shaped by participation in arts programs. Moran & Jarvis (2001), both college professors and researchers of child development, confirm the argument supported by Boyes & Reid (2005), Fox & Diffily (2000) and Sousa (2006) that higher order thinking skills (cognitive development) are attained through participation in arts programs. The excerpt below reveals the result of a student with her teacher working to create an art piece. Moran and Jarvis (2001) highlight the thinking skills that are encouraged and developed when children create their own artwork. (*Note: Lydia is the elementary student and Jen is her teacher.)

Figure 2: Lydia & Jen ²

Lydia: Maybe I should draw my story. How do you draw a fish?

Jen: How did you make a fish out of wire? Do you think you could look at your wire fish?

Lydia: I could!

Jen: How did you make the fish's head out of wire?

Lydia: I made a round shape like a circle, then I twisted the ends together.

Jen: How could you make a fish's head using a pencil?

Lydia: I could make a round shape.

Jen: Try it out!

To draw her fish, Lydia coached herself by using verbal cues and recalling her earlier motor sequences in constructing the wire fish. The verbal exchange with Jen and the fish drawing demonstrated Lydia's growing understanding of the connection between drawing and sculpting—using one as a guide in creating the other. Observing parallels between these two art forms enabled Lydia to convey her idea of how a fish looks.

As shown in Figure 2, an art project that may seem simple is actually a complex lesson that fosters careful thought and development of decision making for many students. Lydia and Jen's story illustrate the journey that many students go through when making a personal creation – and the thought processes that occur. Through the exploration of art materials, children build knowledge of the physical properties of objects in their environment (Boyes & Reid, 2005; Fox & Diffily, 2000; Moran & Jarvis, 2001; and Sousa, 2006).

² Moran & Jarvis, 2001, p.32

As children begin to look into the symbolic representation in their artwork, it becomes evident that drawing as an art form has specific benefits for cognitive development. Fox and Diffily (2000) argue that drawing has a plethora of benefits for children concerning cognitive development. Fox and Diffily (2000) state:

drawing helps children form mental representations and fosters more freedom of thought, is an avenue for conducting research, enabling children to consolidate learning for many different activities, encourages flexibility in children's thinking, gives them a concrete way to express what they have learned, and sets the stage for using words to represent objects and actions in formal writing, is interrelated with writing, a relationship essential for emergent writers as they experiment with recording their ideas on paper (p.3).

In conclusion, based on the research of Boyes & Reid (2005), Fox & Diffily (2000), Moran & Jarvis (2001), and Sousa (2006), the arts play a key role, both in life and in the curriculum - and in developing and maintaining the brain's problem solving capacities. "In seeking solutions to challenges children encounter while creating three dimensional objects or portraying different visual perspectives for example, children's problem solving abilities are stimulated through these 'pleasant and metaphoric activities'" (Fox & Diffily, 2000, p.53) When children are able participate and explore art programs there is much to be gained cognitively that carries into all areas of the classroom and out.

Overall Development

Based on the finding of researchers and professionals in the field of art education, Dryden (1992), Foley (2006), Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi (2007), Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou & Derri (2004), and Sousa (2006), conclude that dance and music programs offer a unique contribution to overall development of elementary school children. Although benefits from the arts draw on all aspects of the arts including visual arts and drama, dance and music programs have shown a significant abundance of skills that support a child's overall development. Through participating in music and movement programs, children are given an extremely meaningful experience that allows them to grow in a plethora of ways.

The make-up of a basic movement through dance program includes basic body awareness, counting and rhythm, creative body movement, and language and emotional expression. Dryden (1992), Foley (2006), Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi, (2007), Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou & Derri (2004), and Sousa (2006) state that creative, cognitive, social and emotional development, body/self awareness, language development, sensory experiences, motor planning and sequencing skills and developing an affection for learning, are all skills that can be gained from participation in such programs. Lasa, Ideishi and Ideishi (2007) discuss the importance and benefits of music and movement programs:

Young children sense, move and respond within the context of the moment.

Reaching, jumping, balancing, and hopping are experiences that teach children how to understand and negotiate the world. Movement experiences that are layered with creative, cognitive, social and emotional experiences facilitate children's understanding that movement has meaning; intention and

expression...Through music and movement programs, students are able to connect movement, sensation, and action to self-awareness, emotional response, social interaction, and cognitive focusing and attention (p.25).

When students are able to participate in programs that include dance and music, they are able to accomplish rich skills that stretch far beyond the classroom. The abilities that students gain are multidimensional and help each child to learn, grow, and improve in and out of the classroom.

Based on the basic make-up of a movement through dance program there are many ways that each student can learn, grow, and improve. Integrating these different experiences allows children to learn at different levels and rates depending on their level of ability and interest. Because movement is a sensory experience, visual, auditory and kinesthetic senses are essential sensations in movement through dance. These sensory skills facilitate awareness of response and reactivity to different conditions for each student. It is through this unique form of learning that students are able to experience essential skills that are forever carried in and out of the classroom (Dryden, 1992; Foley, 2006; Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi, 2007; Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou, & Derri, 2004; and Sousa, 2006).

The essential skills that students are able to gain have been noted through numerous studies based on the findings of Dryden (1992), Foley (2006), Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi (2007), Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou & Derri (2004), and Sousa (2006). The skills that have been noted as a result of participation in dance and movement programs are:

physical movement coupled with novel pretend imagery can help with attention, speed, retention, and enjoyment of learning. Movement and music experiences integrated within an elementary curriculum can also reinforce math and logic concepts through rhythm and patterns of beat and tempo. (p.25)

Music and movement programs offer a plethora of skills to be gained because of the unique way that music and movement programs affect each child. Movement and music programs are especially unique in this way because they can help children to build skills that will last a lifetime (Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi, 2007; and Sousa, 2006).

Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou, and Derri (2004) confirm through numerous studies that some of the most significant results of movement programs is that they enhance psychological, social, cognitive, and affective development. They argue that “when children take part in motor activities, their social development progresses, as they become capable of successful interactions with others” (p.632). The essential skills that are gained through dance and music programs cater to how children development and learn.

In addition to the various skills that may be gained, rich personal identity development is often a result of participation in such programs. It is noted by Foley (2006), Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi (2007), and Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou & Derri (2004) that in an ideal movement and music program, students overall development is addressed. Lasa Ideishi & Ideishi, (2007) state:

Arts programs that integrate motor, cognitive, social and emotional skills provide children with layered learning experiences that deepen their repertoire of behavior and responses to the world. A multi-layered arts experience also serves as a framework for creating adaptations for children with different abilities and interests in movement. (p.25)

As discussed music and movement programs offer much more than academic achievement, they offer worldly skills that are multidimensional and multifaceted. It is through dance and music programs that children can positively develop their overall sense of self and the many skills that

follow (Foley, 2006; Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi, 2007; Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou & Derri, 2004; and Sousa, 2006).

Of the many skills that follow, movement through dance clearly facilitates motor skills. Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi (2007), and Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou, & Derri (2004) state that when students are able to use dance as an expression of movement, it offers a tangible and goal directed outcome that students easily recognize. When movement tasks are goal directed, familiar, and enjoyable, they facilitate gross motor skills greater than merely the movement itself. When students can participate in activities that follow these ideal guidelines, there is much to be gained individually and as a whole class (Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi, 2007; and Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou, & Derri, 2004).

Lasa, Ideishi and Ideishi (2007), and Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou, and Derri (2004) discuss how participating in a group format provides opportunities for social modeling and repetitive practice promoting motor planning and sequencing skills. When students are able to work collaboratively, they are given an even greater opportunity to build essential social skills that are integral to their overall development. Although individualized learning in dance and music programs offers the development of many skills, group learning opens up the experience for students so that they can reach even further. Group formatting allows students to develop skills that cannot be afforded otherwise (Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi, 2007; and Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou, & Derri, 2004).

Of the many skills that students often develop Foley (2006), Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi (2007), Sousa (2006), and Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou & Derri (2004), argue that the musical aspect of the movement program allows for dual development of individual and social growth.

When students create instrumental music, it provides many more ‘cerebral advantages.’ Sousa (2006) discusses that cerebral advantages are created because:

learning to play a musical instrument challenges the brain in new ways. In addition to being able to discern different tone patterns and groupings, new motor skills must be learned and coordinated in order to play the instrument correctly. These new learning’s cause profound and seemingly permanent changes in the brain, and certain cerebral structures are larger in musicians than in non-musicians. (p.2)

In combination with the many abilities that students gain through such programs, musical learning offers additional opportunities for students to learn and grow. Foley (2006), Lasa, Ideishi & Ideishi (2007), Sousa (2006), and Zachopoulou, Tsapakidou & Derri (2004) point out the direct link that music has with the brain. When elementary school children participate in dance and music programs there is much to be gained in and out of the classroom.

Literacy

Literacy development is a common attribute that is a result of participation in art programs for elementary school children. Arts programs offer many opportunities for language development because of the rich hands on relationship that students are encouraged to have. Lloyd (1978), Morgan & Saxton (1988), Sousa (2006), Soundy, Guha, & Qiu (2007), Verriour (1983), and Wiggins (2007) argue that “young children acquire information and develop language skills while discussing stories and responding through art, music, movement, and dramatic play” (Soundy, Guha, Qiu, 2007, p.83). It is the many experiences in the arts that have a major role in shaping literacy development for elementary school children.

When children participate in art programs, specifically music, there are clear parallels between music and learning to read. Lloyd (1978) explains how “both depend upon being able to perceive likenesses and differences in sounds and in the shapes of symbols [auditory and visual discrimination]. Music is read from left to right and top to bottom, the same as reading words [eye-motor coordination]” (p.323). Wiggins (2007) states that the foundation that both art and reading are directly connected to, lays in the fact that a music-integrated literacy environment nurtures

auditory and visual discrimination, eye-motor coordination, visual sequential memory, language reception, vocabulary development, phonological and phonemic awareness, and fluency. Simultaneously, musical perception, music score reading, musical memory, song repertoire, and musical performance are enhanced. In the early learning setting, music’s engaging nature encourages children to attend during reading activities, invites them to be active listeners, and promotes comprehension and dialogue. (p.62)

The direct connection between music and literacy shows that students can benefit immensely through participation in such programs. Music fosters the valuable skills that students must gain in order to develop literacy skills.

In Figure 3, Wiggins (2007) illustrates the connection that literacy and music have.

Given an academic goal, or standard, Wiggins shows how participation in such music programs help students to develop language skills.

Figure 3: Correlated Activities that Support Phase 1 Literacy Development ³

Correlated Activities that Support Phase 1 Literacy Development

PHASE 1 GOAL	LITERACY ACTIVITIES	MUSIC ACTIVITIES
Awareness and exploration: Children explore their environment and build the foundations for learning to read and write	<p>1. sing simple songs; learn rhymes and finger plays;</p> <p>2. talk in front of the group sharing personal experience;</p> <p>3. use more advanced sentence structures, such as relative clauses and tag questions ("She's nice, isn't she?") and experiments with new constructions, creating some comprehension difficulties for the listener;</p> <p>4. retelling a four- or five-step directive or the sequence in a story.</p>	<p>1. sing a variety of simple songs in various keys, meters, and genres(e.g., folk songs, ethnic songs, singing games), alone and with a group becoming increasingly accurate in rhythm and pitch;</p> <p>2. use voices expressively in speaking, chanting, and singing;</p> <p>3. use own vocabulary and standard music vocabulary to describe voices, instruments, music notation, and music of various genres, styles, and periods from diverse cultures;</p> <p>4. play simple melodies and accompaniments on instruments.</p>

³ Wiggins, 2007, p. 63

The valuable skills that music offers can be identified through the clear parallels that Hansen, Bernstorf, & Stuber (2004); Sousa (2006); Soundy, Guha, Qiu (2007); and Wiggins (2007) identify. As stated by Hansen, Bernstorf, and Stuber (2004) some of these parallels include the following:

1. Phonological awareness: children develop sensitivity to all units of sound (for instance: generating and recognizing rhyme, syllables, beginning and ending sounds, etc.) when compared to sensitivity to all elements of musical sound (recognizing repeated or imitated sound patterns, sequences, stylistic nuances, etc);
2. Phonemic awareness: children are able to identify and manipulate the smallest sound units in written symbols (e.g. individual letters in “stop”) as compared to emphasizing the smallest units of musical sound through musical notation (e.g. individual pitches within a musical phrase);
3. Fluency: children gain the ability to express their ideas clearly, verbally or in writing as compared to the ability to perform music smoothly, easily, and readily. (p.8-9)

These connections between music and literacy illustrate not only a direct connection, but show that literacy is deeply embedded within music. The essential skills that children may gain through participating in these programs are skills that students take with them forever, in and out of the classroom.

Although there are many benefits resulting from participation in art programs that focus on music, there are also many benefits that are directly connected to literacy and visual art programs. Art and literacy share many common elements which is illustrated through these given facts: language is comprised of lines, shapes, letters, words, sentences, and art programs are comprised specifically of lines, shapes, colors, texture, and volume. Because of this many

researchers and educators argue that art is a language in itself. Through participation in visual arts, one of the most beneficial results is the actual skills that students develop. Some of these skills include the ability to develop or further develop their print awareness and symbol awareness which is one the direct connections to literacy support (Sousa, 2006).

When examining the dramatic aspect of the visual and performing arts, drama has much to offer in regards to literacy development. Dramatic play, where students play alone or together in an unstructured environment, has many direct connections to a child's ability to develop necessary literacy skills. Morgan and Saxton (1988) state that "the existential nature of dramatic play, 'I am making it happen, it is happening to me,' combined with metaxis (the ability to hold two worlds – the real and the imagined, in the mind at the same time) is the fundamental ingredient which makes drama central to language learning" (Morgan and Saxton, 1988, p. 35). When children are able to participate in drama programs, one of the clear benefits is the development of language skills because of the direct connection to the skills that children must use and gain when participating in such programs.

Verriour (1983) confirms the findings of Morgan and Saxton (1988) through a study which showed that not only are drama programs an important tool in helping children to gain and develop language skills, but that there are indeed many benefits. Verriour (1983) discusses how within the classroom, drama can enhance the learning and understanding of language at various levels:

1. The everyday social level of the classroom context.
2. The symbolic level of the context within the drama.
3. The reflective level of the social context beyond the drama which enables students to distinguish the contrasts between the roles they normally assume in the classroom and the symbolic roles they assume within the drama. (p. 734)

Through these various levels, students can begin to develop a deeper understanding of language. If students are given these opportunities to explore and enhance their learning through such programs, the result is skills that children will be able to take with them in and out of the classroom.

Dramatic play invites children to be whatever they want and often times children will take on a change in character which stimulates dialogue that often challenges and enhances their language abilities. Because drama is an open stage, children are in charge of their own script, and therefore, in a sense, their own learning. When children can construct their own learning and have the support of an instructor as a facilitator during dramatic play, there is much to be gained. Literacy is clearly an essential tool that all children must possess throughout their schooling, and it is enhanced and developed greatly when children are able to participate in programs such as drama in the performing arts (Lloyd, 1978; Morgan & Saxton, 1988; Sousa, 2006; Soundy, Guha, & Qiu, 2007; Verriour, 1983; and Wiggins, 2007).

Therapy

Art in education goes far beyond academics for many children because of its noted therapeutic results. Because the arts offer and encourage expression and exploration many children who may be struggling socially or emotionally are able to resolve some of their concerns through participation in the arts. Alvino (2000), Gillis (1993), Nikoltos (2000), Roje (1995), Silver (1999), and Zingher (2004) argue that art in education serves as a form of therapy. Art as therapy includes drawing pictures, creating figures in a medium such as clay or plasticlay, and telling stories relevant to the trauma etc. Through numerous studies, it is shown and

confirmed that art has many therapeutic benefits that include all students no matter the physical or mental capabilities.

Based on extensive studies and research, The American Psychological Association has established “the importance of art experience in mental health and uses it in diagnosis and therapy. Based the findings of Alvino (2000), Gillis (1993), Nikoltsos (2000), Roje (1995), Silver (1999), and Zingher (2004), paintings and drawings permit the expression of feelings which cannot be verbalized. They provide a socially acceptable channel through which to express emotions, often revealing moods and areas of anxiety” (Silver, 1999, p.18).

Each aspect of the arts offers a form of therapy for each student. Drama offers a chance for students to work through their feelings and practice different emotions, music offers children a chance to ‘play’ or sing how they feel. In the special case of drawing, it is noted “that as a process, it enables children to express themselves, experiment, wander and play, unlock a memory, or relive a dream” (Zingher, 2004, p.41) Concerning elementary school children, drawing is one of the most effective forms of therapy (Alvino, 2000; Gillis, 1993; Nikoltsos, 2000; Roje, 1995; Silver, 1999; and Zingher, 2004).

One of the most successful aspects of art and therapy is that it reaches all types of students. Silver (1999) argues that art therapy is an extremely effective way of working with students who are deaf because of the use of visual symbols. Silver states that “if language is defined as a system of communication through the use of visual symbols, art qualifies as a language... its conventional symbols are non-verbal and so universal that they transcend languages and cultures” (p. 15). Due to the fact that art is comprised of visual symbols, children who are deaf are able to use this medium as an alternate and therapeutic way to communicate their thoughts and feelings.

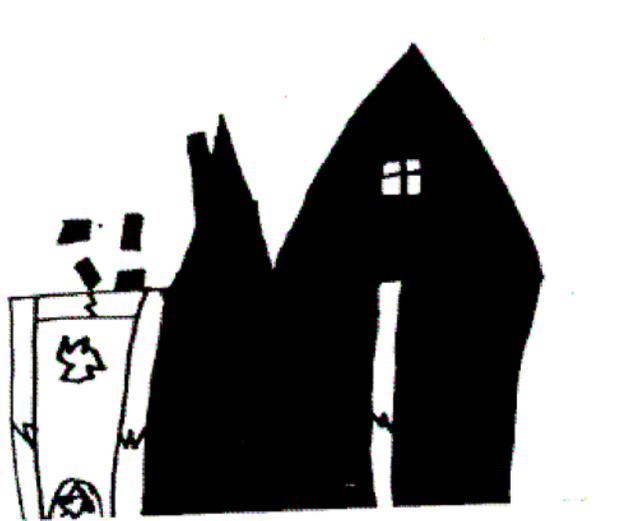
Silver (1999) discusses how deaf children cannot verbalize their imaginary experiences, but that art allows them to do so. She explains how “young deaf child cannot verbalize the imaginary or vicarious experiences, but they can draw them” (Silver, 1999, p.17). Art serves as a bridge of communication and a different way to express emotions for many deaf children because of the endless visual possibilities that can be individually created.

Due to the numerous possibilities that the arts offer students in terms of therapy, the potential also extends toward students who have faced conflict or disaster. Art therapy has also been known to reach many children who have faced disaster. Some of the issues that may arise according to Gillis (1993) in the event of a natural disaster are: “immensity of loss, concerns about future safety, seeing adults paralyzed with fear, rescuers who arrive too late, and above all difficulty in maintaining an inner sense of security under those conditions” (Gillis, 1993, p.165). Due to the issues that many children who face disaster may have to cope with, art has proven to be a very successful form of therapy (Alvino, 2000; Gillis, 1993; Nikoltsos, 2000; Roje, 1995).

Of the numerous studies that have found art to be a very successful form of therapy, a study by Roje (1995) best illustrates these findings. Roje (1995) worked with students at an elementary school that had faced the devastating effects of an earthquake. Clinical observations were made of how the children dealt with their feelings and worries. Through art therapy, the issues were recognized and then released. The therapy consisted of having children metaphorically restore worry through drawing. Through a series of therapeutic drawing experiences students were able regain sense of security, express their feelings that were verbally censored (Gillis, 1993; Roje, 1995).

Many of the children involved in the study were afraid to go to sleep because they were afraid to wake up in the rubble of their destroyed house. An example of this issue is shown with a student, 7-year-old, John, who drew a picture of his house with a large crack in the wall which he said he feared, would collapse in an aftershock (shown in Figure 4). “Drawing the house with deliberate precision provided an opportunity for John to metaphorically restore the loss of control he was experiencing before the immensity of this devastation” (Roje, 1995, p.237). This experience shows how John was able to work through his feelings by restoring the feelings of loss and control and then working through them by drawing.

Figure 4: “My House After the Earthquake” (John, 7) ⁴

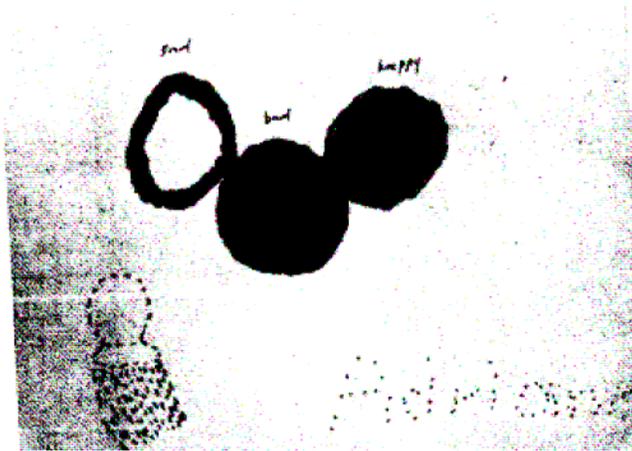


Another example of a child who was able to work through issues of permanent loss or death with art therapy, was 8-year-old Laura. She illustrated how she felt during and after the earthquake (shown below in Figure 4). “After she identified her feelings as fear of destruction, sadness about losses, and happiness her family was still alive, she drew another shape distinctly different from the rest saying ‘when I got out on the street and everything was dark I thought I

⁴ Roje, 1995, p. 237

was dead, this is my feeling of being dead.” (Roje, 1995, p.238) As shown in the picture below, Laura clearly drew how she was feeling and in turn was able to identify her feelings. Through identifying her feelings she was able to begin to work through her issues of loss or death with art.

Figure 5 “When I Thought I Was Dead” (Laura, 8)⁵



The study conducted by Roje (1995) confirms the argument claimed by Alvino (2000), Gillis (1993), Nikoitsos (2000), Roje (1995), Silver (1999), and Zingher (2004) that participation in art programs serves as a very successful form of therapy. In conclusion, art therapy has been shown as a therapy of choice for many children. Based on the given research and findings, art in education reaches beyond academics for many students because of the noted therapeutic results. Due to the fact that the arts offer and encourage expression and exploration, many children who may struggle emotionally or socially are given the opportunity to resolve issues through participation in the arts.

⁵ Roje, 1995, p.238

Conclusion

Time and time again the arts have been proven to be an essential component of education for elementary school children. Although there are many benefits associated with the arts schools are still not receiving enough funding to provide quality visual and performing arts programs. Although 48 states in the United States have content standards in the arts, it has been proven that only 20 states clearly mandate arts education (Chapman, 2005). Based on this fact it has been noted that state policies do not uniformly support studies in the arts as a core subject for every student.

One of the most common and meaningful benefits that the arts provides is cognitive development. Cognitive development has been noted to be strongly associated with the visual and performing arts because they stimulate students to develop and enhance different thinking processes. When children make the choice of what to sing and how to sing it, what they want to draw and how to draw it, and what kind of dance moves they want to do and how they will do it, these are the ways that students begin to develop their cognitive processes. When students are able to make individual choices, and think about how they are going to make certain artistic decisions, it allows them to develop the necessary cognitive processes that are so important throughout life.

Another important benefit of the visual and performing arts is the overwhelming support of overall development for elementary students that participation in music and dance programs. When children participate in dance and listen to/create music there are a number of benefits. The noted benefits that have been found through numerous studies are: creative, cognitive, social and emotional development, body/self awareness, language development, sensory experiences, motor

planning and sequencing skills, and developing an affection for learning. Participation in music and dance programs contributes greatly to overall development and allows students to gain and develop skills necessary to thrive in and out of the classroom.

The arts have also been noted for the strong support of literacy. Arts programs offer many opportunities for language development because of the rich hands on relationship that students are encouraged to have. It is argued and proven through numerous studies that young children acquire information and develop language skills through discussing stories and responding through art, music, movement, and dramatic play. It is through the many experiences in the arts that have a major role in shaping literacy development for elementary school children.

The therapeutic effect of the arts is an extremely important benefit that art education has to offer. One of the most unique aspects of the visual and performing arts is that they cater to all different students. Because the arts offer and encourage expression and exploration many children who may be struggling socially or emotionally are able to resolve some of their concerns through participation in the arts. It has been argued and proven that art in education serves as a form of therapy. Based on the numerous studies, it is shown and confirmed that art has many therapeutic benefits that include all students, typical and atypical.

In closing the numerous benefits that the arts have to offer, art is a key element of elementary school curriculum. Given the array of benefits from participation in art programs, students have been found to not only excel academically and gain necessary skills, but they also become more enthusiastic in the classroom when art is incorporated into curriculum. When the arts are integrated into curriculum, academic outcomes have been found to become deeply enriched, and students have been found to develop greater understandings of lessons when they involve the arts.

Due to the fact that the arts reach many different students there is strong evidence that the art's span multiple intelligences and multiple learning areas for all students. Given the importance of art and the numerous benefits associated with them, the arts are an extremely important component to education. Numerous studies have proven the significance of the arts in education and therefore it is clear that art education needs more support. In addition to more support, the creators of No Child Left Behind need to reevaluate the lack of position that the arts have.

The result of art in elementary education has shown that students not only gain a stronger affection for learning, but they are able to learn in their own unique way, all the while gaining precious life long learning skills that stretch in and out of the classroom. Art's role in elementary schools needs to be reassured and given more support so that students can receive an individualized education, rich with benefits, where 'no student is left behind.'

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