

## EDUCATION

# THE BENEFITS OF ARTS PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS

by Colby Scott | August 29, 2019



According to the National Endowment for the Arts, Americans of all ages consume more arts-focused entertainment than ever before. In spite of this, participation in arts programs has declined over the last quarter of a century. The decline began most sharply in 2008, which coincides with the Great Recession. More parents now push children toward what they view as pragmatic study programs. However, there are many benefits of arts programs in schools.

## The Effect of Arts Programs on Children

Experts believe drawing should be used as a tool in the classroom. A new study found that students who drew-out their notes retained the material nearly twice as much as students who simply wrote-out the information.

Most people categorize art as a “soft skill” and math as a “hard” skill – however, educational expert Andreas Schleicher argues math and science may become “softer” skills due to the rapid increase of technology, and “hard skills” will become intangible skills honed through the arts-curiosity, leadership, persistence, and resistance.

Bette Fetter, CEO and Founder of Young Rembrandts, tells Parentology that when children learn to draw, they use their “whole brain.” The brain relies on three facets to obtain new knowledge and store it for the long haul. These include motor skills, perceptual representations and language. Art programs give children the opportunity to develop all three facets.



“When children learn to draw, they are also learning to evaluate and analyze visually,” she says. “This improves a student’s visual activity in skills like reading and math. It also improves memory and recall by as much as 50% [as stated in an] article by the George Lucas Educational Foundation from 2019.”

Learning to draw is bigger than art alone and is a skill that can be leveraged in different subjects in school, as well as in the workplace. Students who study art as a child develop skills modern employers are looking for, including how to become creative thinkers and problem-solvers. There is also a demonstrated monetary advantage to art education early on in a child’s life.

## **Some Useful Skills for Adult Life**

The island of Jamaica invests heavily in arts programs, bringing the world the likes of Bob Marley and Grace Jones. However, fame has little to do with the country’s commitment to the arts. According to Jamaica’s Early Childhood Commission, an early introduction to this field helps children to develop motor skills, appreciate numeracy and build self-esteem. It also offers a positive escape for children of lesser means.

Universities in America came to a similar conclusion. Researchers at Michigan State University found that of college graduates who majored in the STEM field, those who launched businesses or generated patents had received up to eight times more exposure to the arts as children than the general population.

The belief that arts graduates will struggle to make a living is also not true. With passion, dedication and the right opportunities, graduates become actors, musicians, graphic designers, animators, and professors. Over time, graduates of liberal arts programs also see a surge in their earnings, particularly when they pursue more advanced degrees.



## Here's the Bottom Line

Experts agree that art programs should not solely be an extracurricular activity for creative children. It should be an integrated part of early childhood education as it helps children to see more accurately, increases their memory and helps them to understand the world from a different perspective.

The research shows that art helps children developmentally, socially and emotionally in addition to building their confidence. Children who feel comfortable experimenting and making mistakes also feel free to invent new ways of thinking, which extends beyond art. Indeed, the data shows that children stand to benefit far more if they are interwoven into the core curricula from early childhood.

Parents, teachers, and schools need to be the biggest advocates. Understanding how beneficial art is for all children will help keep art programs alive.

## The Benefits of Arts Programs in Schools — Sources

Edutopia: The Powerful Effects of Drawing on Learning

Andreas Schleicher, Programme for International Student Assessment

National Endowment for the Arts: Arts Education in America: What the Declines Mean for Arts Participation

Bette Fetter, Young Rembrandts Responses

The Early Childhood Commission: Benefits of the Arts in Early Childhood Development

University of Michigan