

Arts Education

Philosophy

The arts have been part of life from the very beginning. They have described, defined, and deepened human experience. All people have an abiding need for meaning--to connect time and space, experience and event, body and spirit, intellect and emotion. We create art to make these connections, to express the otherwise inexpressible. A society without the arts is unimaginable.



Purpose

Arts education benefits both student and society. Involving the "whole child" in the arts gradually teaches many types of literacy while developing intuition, sensitivity, reasoning, imagination, and dexterity. This process requires not merely an active mind but a trained one. Arts education helps students perceive and think in new ways. The arts also help provide and extend meaning. Because so much of a child's education in the early years is devoted to acquiring the skills of language and mathematics, children gradually learn, unconsciously, that the "normal" way to think is linear and sequential, that the pathway to understanding moves from beginning to end, from cause to effect. In this early mode, students trust those symbol systems (words, numbers, and abstract concepts) that separate the person from their experiences.

An education in the arts benefits society because students of the arts disciplines gain powerful tools for:

- understanding human experiences, both past and present;
- teamwork and collaboration;
- making decisions creatively when no prescribed answers exist;
- learning to adapt to and respect others' (diverse) ways of thinking, working, and expressing themselves;
- learning problem recognition and problem solving, involving expressive, analytical, and developmental tools to every human situation (this is why we speak, for example, of the "art" of teaching or the "art" of politics);
- understanding the influence of the arts and their power to create and reflect cultures, the impact of design on our daily life, and in the interdependence of work in the arts with the broader worlds of ideas and action;
- developing the essential senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and kinesthetics as intellectual, emotional, physical, creative, and expressive acts;
- analyzing nonverbal communication and making informed judgments about cultural products and issues; and
- communicating effectively.

In a world inundated with contradictory messages and meanings, arts education in one or more of the arts disciplines helps young people explore, understand, accept, and use ambiguity and subjectivity. In art as in life, there is often no clear or "right" answer to questions that are nonetheless worth pursuing ("should the trees in this painting be a little darker shade of green?"). At the same time, study in any of the four art disciplines in the classroom bring excitement and exhilaration to the learning process. Study and competence reinforce each other; students become increasingly interested in learning, add new dimensions to what they already know, and want to learn even more. The joy of learning becomes real, tangible, powerful!