

Benefits to students and the broader society of music education in schools

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The Arts in education promotes intercultural communication and social inclusion through symbolic and expressive language in an increasingly diverse and contemporary culture. Furthermore, research suggests learning in and through the arts results in both intrinsic and instrumental benefits.

The arts are used to articulate, explore and impart thoughts, feelings and emotions through a variety of culturally determined symbolic representations (Sinclair, Jeanneret & O'Toole, 2012; Tasmanian Department of Education [TDOE], 2008). The Arts are defined according to the culture and context they are created in and are very culture specific. What we perceive and value as art in Australia varies from what other countries define art as being. The Australian Curriculum: The Arts (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2011) comprises of both the creative and performing arts in the following five subject areas: Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts. The arts can reinforce or challenge social ideologies and are essential in developing a sense of self and the broader community. Most importantly, the arts are a powerful medium to bring about change with the potential to resolve issues related to intercultural communication and social exclusion (Sousa, 2011; TDOE, 2008).

Participation in the arts facilitates creativity, satisfaction and pleasure through imaginative self-expression and flexible problem-solving. Students are encouraged to experiment and engage in higher-order thinking and risk-taking when responding to open-ended tasks (TDOE, 2008; Wright, 2000). Similarly, the arts provide a context for students to engage in the various symbolic modes of meaning-making prevalent in contemporary society and in doing so better prepare students for active participation in a diverse world (Sinclair, Jeanneret & O'Toole, 2012; Wright, 2000). The arts combine physical sensory information with emotional intelligence and cognitive thought processes to provide a powerful context to educate the whole person and develop students to their full potential (Gullatt, 2008; Sinclair, Jeanneret & O'Toole 2012; TDOE, 2008).

Current educational trends advocate a balanced and holistic approach to teaching and learning. Creativity and imagination are characteristics evident in young children and are often reflected in their everyday lives through play (Baker, 2012). Furthermore,

research suggests every child is born with musical ability. However, if not nurtured from an early age it may fail to develop (Tait, 2008). Thus, educating the whole child would include nurturing students' artistic ability and allows them the opportunity to apply skills in creative, flexible and innovative ways (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2006). Traditionally, education in the arts has been undervalued and overlooked due to the already overcrowded curriculum and lack of teacher knowledge and expertise (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). This becomes increasingly apparent in high risk, low socio-economic areas where the focus is on developing literacy and vocational skills rather than providing quality arts programs (Bamford, 2006). However, recent research suggests the arts are a powerful means to engage students and respond to the growing demands of the 21st Century (Sinclair, Jeanneret & O'Toole, 2012; UNESCO, 2006). Fundamental to providing a quality learning program is to provide access, equity and inclusion for all students (Bamford & Wimmer, 2012; UNESCO, 2006). Evidence suggests participation in high quality arts education assists intercultural cultural understanding and social harmony by encouraging acceptance, tolerance and respect for differences (Sinclair, Jeanneret & O'Toole, 2012).

The benefits of art education are two-fold. Art is fundamentally a form of expression and communication and is a symbolic way of communicating in a non-linguistic manner. Learning in the arts includes learning specific skills unique to the art form and acquired during the experience (TDOE, 2008). Each art-form has its own distinct features and body of knowledge that students need to understand in order to make and share meaning. More specifically, the knowledge gained includes art form-specific concepts, skills, processes, and principles and comprises of the actual making and responding to art works (Gullatt, 2008; TDOE, 2008). Conversely, learning through the arts focuses on the incidental and transferable learning that occurs as a result of learning in the arts (TDOE, 2008). Through the arts students can gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the world in which they live. Likewise, students learn to appreciate and evaluate aesthetic value and develop cognitive, creative and critical thinking skills. Students learn collaboration, communication and social skills and gain a sense of self. Learning through the arts encompasses the learning students acquire through making and responding to art (Sinclair, Jeanneret & O'Toole, 2012;

TDOE, 2008).

Research suggests participation in quality arts programs positively impacts on students in a variety of different ways. Recent studies in cognitive science suggest sensation and emotion are fundamental to educating the whole child and the mind and the body make up a unified intellectual system (Gullatt, 2008). Furthermore, some researchers claim that logic is not possible without emotion and stimulation of the senses. The personal and emotional nature of the arts is believed to be part of the rationale explaining why the arts are so cognitively powerful (Gullatt, 2008).

The relationship between studying the arts and improved student achievement and success is well documented (Boyes & Reid, 2005; Gullatt, 2008; Ruppert, 2006; Sinclair, Jeanneret & O'Toole, 2012). According to Roy, Baker and Hamilton (2012) the intrinsic benefits of art education includes: arts knowledge and skills, non-verbal expression, pleasure and captivation, emotional stimulation, finding a voice and expressing shared meaning. Boyes and Reid (2005) note that participation and engagement in the arts can lead to a sense of personal fulfilment and development. Likewise, Baker (2012) argues that enjoyment of the arts is integral to explaining why humans do art.

Research suggests the instrumental benefits of an arts-rich environment can improve academic achievement and social outcomes (Ruppert, 2006). Education in the arts has the potential to enhance basic reading and writing skills and language development. Similarly, music instruction can develop spatial-temporal reasoning fundamental to attaining mathematics skills (Ruppert, 2006). Likewise, participation in various arts forms can improve thinking and reasoning skills. Other associated benefits include positive social skills, co-operation, social acceptance and improved ability to handle performance pressure (Roy, Baker & Hamilton, 2012; Tait, 2008). The latter being particularly relevant to high stakes standardised testing.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2006) state that access and education in the arts is a universal human right. Through music education it is possible to exploit this basic human right and innate human ability to improve musical skill while simultaneously improving academic achievement,

promoting social harmony and stimulating emotional wellbeing.

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