

The Importance of Performing Arts in Development

Christopher Devlin

Prof. Stiltner and Prof. Young

HN-300-G Honors Capstone

29 November 2021

### ***Introduction***

Grey jumpsuits. Bland food. The TV is only news channels, and those news channels only report on the weather and the state of the universe. This is the world we would find ourselves in without creativity.

Maybe that is a slight exaggeration, but the point stands: everything that we all love about the world stems in some way from creativity. That is why it is essential that we not just simply maintain the inclusion of the performing arts in education but ultimately increase it as well. An increase in performing arts has been proven to have numerous positive effects on adolescent development. Beyond that, the inclusion of performing arts also allows for more accessible research into the changes that occur throughout the different stages of adolescent development.

The obvious advantages of performing arts are rarely argued. There is no denying the apparent source of entertainment that they produce for all involved and all who view it. What is not discussed enough is the power they offer to the development of young minds in particular. There is an enormous amount of positives for children participating in the performing arts, and some of the biggest ones are what the immediate benefits can lead to in the long term.

### ***The Positives and The Negatives***

One of the least discussed positive influences of performing arts in education and development is the ability of performing arts to provide a bridge over potential educational gaps. Many researchers believe that the inclusion of performing arts helps to aid in closing the gap for children that are educationally behind. The reason that it is so essential to keep performing arts in

## The Importance of Performing Arts in Development

Devlin 3

education is that it can be difficult for certain groups of people to access the benefits of performing arts in lower-income areas. “A 2005 report by the Rand Corporation about the visual arts argues that the intrinsic pleasures and stimulation of the art experience do more than sweeten an individual's life -- according to the report, they "can connect people more deeply to the world and open them to new ways of seeing," creating the foundation to forge social bonds and community cohesion. And strong arts programming in schools helps close a gap that has left many a child behind: From Mozart for babies to tutus for toddlers to family trips to the museum, the children of affluent, aspiring parents generally get exposed to the arts whether or not public schools provide them. Low-income children, often, do not” (Smith). Smith continues to discuss the fact that not only does the inclusion of performing arts have positive long-term effects, but the lack of access to the arts will also have lasting adverse effects. There is overwhelming support of Smith’s opinion as research is done across other sources and areas of development. In particular, when reviewing the topic of praise, there is a unique opportunity for educators to focus on praising the process, over simply the product, when working under the umbrella of performing arts. In Carol Dweck’s 2007 article, “The Perils and Promise of Praise,” there are extensive examples of the importance of educating in this style. By praising process and effort, educators will see their students fall into a growth mindset, which holds a slew of positive long-term effects. “A growth mindset creates motivation and resilience—and leads to higher achievement... It's time to deliver interventions that will truly boost students' motivation, resilience, and learning” (Dweck, 2007). While Dweck never discusses explicitly the effects of this type of praise outside of the classroom, the same principles apply. So often, after-school activities, in particular, can be results-based, but expanding out performing arts opens up more opportunities to acknowledge and appreciate the effort of a child or adolescent.

## The Importance of Performing Arts in Development

Devlin 4

The growth mindset also shows long-term benefits with regard to self-confidence. There are numerous social benefits that stem from participation in the performing arts, from a developing sense of community to a budding sense of self, occurring simultaneously.

In 2008, a study was conducted on the basis of specifically musical theatre and its influence on social and self-confidence. “Ogden interviewed and surveyed adults ranging in age from mid20s to mid-80s about their experiences in musical theatre in their elementary years. Decades after taking part in such performances, the adults reported that taking part in school theatre helped them develop a sense of community both inside and outside the school, and contributed to their growth in self-awareness, self-esteem, and confidence” (Upitis).

Beyond that, researchers have found a direct correlation between performing arts and specific personality traits. These specific traits, often surrounding creativity, are essential to both academic and personal development. “Burton and her colleagues found significant links between rich in-school arts programs and the creative, cognitive, and personal competencies needed for academic success. The results showed that students in —high-arts groups performed better than those in the —low-arts groups on measures of creativity, fluency, originality, and elaboration (Burton et al., 1999). The high-arts students were more co-operative, more willing to display learning publicly, and more likely solely on the fine and performing arts, the other forms of arts education are equally important to cultivating a rich and fulfilling education” (Upitis). The sad actuality is that these high-arts groups are becoming less and less common as time progresses, despite the tangible research displaying the connection between increasing arts education and overall better educational health. Students that attend high-arts school are more inclined to succeed in other areas of their education.

***Creativity and Self-Discovery***

As appears is often the issue on this subject, there is a distinct lack of compelling research on the importance of performing arts education with regards to creativity, yet there are more studies being done of late. Almost all of the research being done has displayed results that dictate performing arts as an essential portion of a child's and an adolescent's development. The research being done revolves a lot around how it can be included in the curriculums in place already. "Much of this research has been conducted by educational researchers, who are interested in determining the best way to integrate arts education into the curriculum. These researchers argue that early education in the arts can contribute unique developmental benefits to children - general skills related to creativity such as higher-level thinking, analytic ability, problem-solving, reflexive thinking, and self-regulation" (Sawyer, 2003). As evidenced in the research Sawyer refers to; there are countless conclusive benefits that stem from the early development of creativity. Fostering an educational culture that encourages the inclusion of the performing arts leads to a growing population of students who are more self-assured and willing to pursue more significant challenges.

***Performing Arts and Jean Piaget***

Jean Piaget, a psychologist, known well for his establishing of stages of child development, characterized the different portions of a child's young life have different levels of cognition. For instance, a child that is between the ages of 2 and 7 falls into the preoperational stage, wherein they are primarily symbolic thinkers, and their imagination has begun to develop

## The Importance of Performing Arts in Development

Devlin 6

well, without the ability to address the more abstract concepts truly. As the child reaches older ages, approaching and beyond the age of 11, they move past what is known as the formal operational stage. Essentially, around the time a child reaches the 5th grade, they are able to handle and conceptualize more abstract thoughts. With this stage in development, the effects of performing arts become increasingly essential in the development of a well-rounded and experienced mind. Coincidentally, this is also the point where a child enters the ‘grey area’ between childhood and adolescence. This is the point in a person’s life that forms the person they are for their lives, and the inclusion of performing arts in their education allows them to develop the numerous positive effects that are discussed above.

In a published research document for the Dominican University of California’s Master of Science in Education program, Lauren Miller noted the importance of specifically theatre arts programs in the development of a student, with a specific focus on Piaget’s theory, stating, “To understand the significance of theatre arts programs on cognitive development in student’s one can look back to Jean Piaget and his developmental theory. Piaget's theory of cognitive development explores how humans develop to their environment over time ... Piaget wanted to see how behavior or adaptation to the environment is controlled through the mind. The theory continues to describe that all experiences that an organism (child) has to get categorized so that in turn the person can use different experiences to represent the world and designate action” (Miller, 2011). This is a precise theoretical analysis of the importance of arts education for the cognitive development of students, beyond just classroom benefits, but also to the discussion of how the arts create a healthy environment for students as well.

### ***The Threats***

#### *Financial Concerns*

One of the biggest threats to performing arts' inclusion in education and curriculums is the financial concerns that it brings about. Unfortunately, the budgets for education are always in question, and many states do not consider any form of art to be an essential portion of education. In fact, only 19 states actually consider art to be a pivotal area to be addressed for students. Part of the reason for this is that the financial concerns stretch all the way up to a national level, with the last comprehensive review of arts education was done by the U.S. Department of Education well over ten years ago. When it comes to the state departments of education, they are not doing evaluations themselves (Tuttle, 2018). It is essential that more research and evaluations are done and presented to the education departments to display the proven benefits of it.

Additionally, there is proof of benefits to those who are brought up specifically in lower-income areas. In a study on the effects of arts and achievement for at-risk youth and those in lower-income neighborhoods, three researchers from the University of California Los Angeles, Louisiana State University, and the University of York in the UK, stated "children and teenagers who participated in arts education programs have shown more positive academic and social outcomes in comparison to students who did not participate in those programs. Such studies have proved essential to the current research literature on the types of instrumental benefits associated with an arts education" (Catterall, Dumais, Hampden-Thompson, 2012). In fact, students who participate in the arts in low socioeconomic areas are five times less likely to drop out of high school than their peers with lower participation rates Catterall, Dumais, Hampden-Thompson, 2012).

## The Importance of Performing Arts in Development

Devlin 8

*Race*

Unfortunately, income is not the only factor in whether or not students are given access to performing arts. Studies have shown that a student's race can be a contributing factor to their education. One study, led by Calvin Wesley Walton at Georgia Southern University, addressed the importance of performing arts for specifically the African-American male. The study displayed the connection between access to and encouragement in the performing arts with the academic identity of an African-American male. Walton emphasized that, even though the study produced tangible evidence on the basis of the correlation, there is a desperate need for more research and consideration in this area of the field. "While the findings of such studies provide important information, more research should be conducted on the connections between school-based performing arts education and academic achievement for African American males. Performing arts education consists of school-based instruction in dance, music, and theater that are guided by national, state, and local standards and are taught through classroom instruction, individualized practice, rehearsals, and performances (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014)" (Walton). Walton also emphasized the importance of educating the entire person and how performing arts is a key to doing just that.

*Conclusion*

In conclusion, there is ample and conclusive proof of the benefits of performing arts. From intellectual and social benefits to even mental health and preparedness for difficulties later in life, there is no denying the benefits. Whether it be the development of certain characteristics



## The Importance of Performing Arts in Development

Devlin 9

that aid in the success of an individual in life. The importance of creativity in life cannot be overstated, and having a base of performing arts in education allows for a person to become even more creative, confident, and self-assured.

As time carries on, the increase in education is essential, and the argument of budgets is one without grounding. Mere financial strain should not be enough of an excuse to deprive generations of the positive effects that follow a student that has been educated in the performing arts. To prove to these education departments the true benefits, what needs to be done is more micro-forms of research. Specific states and districts have to be given the opportunity to analyze their own particular benefits, and then they will see the undeniable benefits that can be achieved through their inclusion of performing arts in their curriculums.

Work Cited

*10 arts education fast facts*. Americans for the Arts. (2020, September 8). Retrieved December 8, 2021, from [https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-topic/arts-education/10-arts-education-fast-facts#\\_ftn10](https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-topic/arts-education/10-arts-education-fast-facts#_ftn10).

Catterall, J. S., Dumais, S. A., & Hampden-Thompson, G. (2012, March). *The arts and achievement in at-risk youth: Findings from ...* National Endowment for the Arts. Retrieved December 8, 2021, from <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Arts-At-Risk-Youth.pdf>.

Dweck, C. S. (2007, October). *Perils and Promises of Praise*. ASCD. Retrieved December 8, 2021, from <http://maryschmidt.pbworks.com/f/Perils+of+Praise-Dweck.pdf>.

Lansing, K. M. (1966). The research of Jean Piaget and its implications for art education in the Elementary School. *Studies in Art Education*, 7(2), 33. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1319621>

Miller, L. (2011, May). *Theatre Arts Programs: Impact of Cognitive Development in Elementary School Students*. Retrieved December 8, 2021, from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED518985.pdf>.

Sawyer, R. K., & John-Steiner, V. (2003). *Creativity and development*. NetLibrary, Incorporated.

Thomas, N. G., & Berk, L. E. (1981). Effects of school environments on the development of young children's creativity. *Child Development*, 52(4), 1153. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1129501>

Tuttle, L. (2018, January 18). *How does arts education fare in the final round of State Essa Plan submissions?* Ed Note. Retrieved December 8, 2021, from <https://ednote.ecs.org/how-does-arts-education-fare-in-the-final-round-of-state-essa-plan-submissions/>.