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Childhood Development: How Fine and Performing Arts Enhance Neurological, Social,
and Academic Traits

By

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Abstract

Childhood development has always been a major topic when studying psychology and biology. This makes sense because the brain develops from the time a child is conceived to the time that child has reached around the age of twenty-seven. Doctors, psychologists, and sociologists look at numerous things when studying childhood development. However, how common is it for researchers to study how the fine and performing arts affect childhood development? Sociologists tend to be extremely open and mindful of all aspects of things such as culture, sexuality, religion, and even age. By taking a sociological standpoint when studying the arts and studying childhood development, society is able to make connections between the two that leads to better understanding of a child's development socially, mentally, and academically.

Childhood Development: How Fine and Performing Arts Enhance Neurological, Social, and Academic Traits

Childhood development is a very common research topic. Professors and doctors study the subject through psychological aspects, physical activity, and how a child's cognitive functions develop over time. All three of these components of studying childhood development lead to highly beneficial data. In addition to these factors, the fine and performing arts have a strong influence on the development of children and young teenagers. When people are surrounded by art, whether it is music, visual art, dance and creative movement, or even theater, their brain stimulation is running at a much higher pace. This allows people to express emotion, grow in their cognitive abilities, and learn to channel in on their focus. By incorporating art into the lives of young children, society is helping to enhance their neurological development, social development, along with academic development and success.

Understanding the Psychology Behind Childhood Development

Before society can truly understand how the arts enhance childhood development, society must understand what it takes for a child's brain to develop normally and at a steady pace. This means understanding the neurological and psychological aspects to development. Susan Calkins and Martha Ann Bell discuss in their article, "Child Development at the Intersection of Emotion and Cognition", written for the American Psychological Association in 2010, that understanding neurological development means learning to understand behavioral development through a cognitive and emotional point of view. The behaviors most commonly studied are emotion, stress, social interactions, focus, following rules and guidelines, and understanding and contributing to social norms. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines social norms as, "...social norms ought to be understood as a kind of grammar of social interactions. Like a

grammar, a system of norms specifies what is acceptable and what is not in a society or group" (Stanford University 1). Understanding social norms allows people to understand sociology at a more advanced level.

By giving this definition, it is also important to understand the development of children growing up with disabilities such as autism or Asperger's. Social norms are part of society's everyday life. People follow social norms because that is what they have grown to know and learn what society feels is right and what is wrong. Social norms play a huge part in the development of children because they teach children how to behave, and behavior is the key aspect to emotional and social development. Children all learn at different paces, but children with developmental conditions like Asperger's take a bit longer to learn the social norms and behaviors than people who do not have these conditions. In October of 2008, the Interactive Autism Network posted an article about Asperger's Syndrome and how having Asperger's affects children's behavior and understanding of things. In regards to the social effects of Asperger's on children, the IAN writes, "They do not always pay attention to the social scene in which they find themselves, and even when they do, they are often not able to make sense of what they see, or to respond appropriately" ("Asperger's" Syndrome).

Although understanding social norms and behavioral development is a major factor when learning about childhood development for most children, it is even more difficult to understand when learning about children suffering from disabilities. According to the Division of Human Development and Disabilities, and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention,

The early years of a child's life are very important for his or her health and development. Healthy development means that children of all abilities, including those with special health care needs, are able to grow up where their social, emotional and educational

needs are met. Having a safe and loving home and spending time with family—playing, singing, reading, and talking—are very important. Proper nutrition, exercise, and sleep also can make a big difference (Center for Disease Control and Prevention).

Several of the activities the CDC list are key components of involvement in the arts. When participating in any kind of creative outlet, these activities such as singing, exercising, and talking are truly pushed to their limit. Taking part in art at a young age also pushes children to their limits, boosting their confidence and helping them find who they want to be. The arts truly allow people of all ages to grow in their basic skills and heighten their cognitive functions.

Using the Arts as Forms of Therapy

Not only do children participating in art grow cognitively, but they grow emotionally and socially. Eugene Cashman, a writer for the Urban Child Institute defines social and emotional development as, "Social and emotional development is the change over time in children's ability to react to and interact with their social environment" (Urban Child Institute). On the emotional standpoint, this relates to the arts because no matter what field of art a child is participating in, they express an emotional connection. According to Carol Korn-Bursztyn, "High quality early childhood programs place a premium on activities that encourage, rather than hinder, the development of imagination in children" (Korn-Bursztyn 6). Through drawing, children can portray how they feel simply by the colors they choose to use. By playing a musical instrument, children express emotion through the rhythm of the music. Children can also express emotion through movement and dance by feeling the beat of the music and continuing to show how they feel by the volume of their body language. Socially speaking, children participating in the arts are usually surrounded by at least one other person. This could be an instructor, director, or a classmate. Drawing, although is normally a solo act, can enhance social development by a child's

contact with their art teacher. This teaches them to be able to speak with people older than them and allows them to become more comfortable by having that one on one contact. Music enhances social development because at some point, there is going to be a dual effort. Children specializing in music must learn to play with other people using other instruments. The same thing goes for dance and creative movement, it is a team effort. Although there may be solos here and there with dance and music, there is always going to be a group piece. Children learn how to work with others and trust others through these two forms of art.

An interesting fact is that the arts can be used as forms of therapy. There are several different forms of art therapy, music therapy, and even a few forms of dance therapy. Pediatric music therapy is especially common in today's society for children with and without special needs. In Wanda Lathom's book, *Pediatric Music Therapy*, she explains the benefits of children with disabilities having a music therapist. Lathom says, "The music therapist's role as a related service person in the schools will involve using music as a tool to help the child acquire the skills, information, and behavior needed to benefit from education and to remain in the least restrictive environment" (Lathom 23). Throughout this section of her book, she really goes into detail about the goals of music therapy and how they affect children's social, emotional, and academic development.

When children listen to, or practice music, they open themselves up to a whole new world of creativity and critical thinking. To play any instrument, one must obtain focus and the neurological capacity to put notes together and play on key and in rhythm. For any child it can be hard to learn music, however, for children with disabilities, this can be especially difficult and frustrating. It takes an enormous amount of practice to perfect the skill of playing an instrument. Any child or teenager who is capable of learning music is capable of so much more in their

lifetime. By putting children in music class or music therapy through their primary school years, society is helping to boost their confidence and self-esteem, which overall makes for a happier and healthier mind.

Another form of therapy used more so than others is art therapy. Art therapy is unique because it can be used in numerous settings. For example, art therapy is another great way to help children with disabilities grow and express themselves. It can also help enhance the social and emotional development of children and teenagers. However, that is not all art therapy is used for. This specific form of therapy can also be used for anger management, it can be used for people in prison, and it can be used for the elderly. There is a group known as the Sunrise Senior Living association that wrote an article on October 5th, 2016 about what it is like for senior citizens to be involved in the arts. Some examples of the benefits they have are improved memory, stress relief, and even helping to alleviate pain some of the senior citizens go through. (Sunrise Senior Living Association) Visual arts are special because they give people a chance to show their emotions without using words. It is a form of communicating without verbally communicating. This is important, especially for developing children, because a lot of people do not know how to express their feelings with words. By providing paint and a blank canvas, they can use their creativity to show what is really on their minds.

Dance therapy, on the other hand, is completely the opposite of music and visual art therapy sessions. Dance and creative movement serve multiple purposes. Some of these include letting out energy, staying healthy, learning what one's own body is capable of, expressing emotion, and learning about trust. Dance therapy is one that really focuses on children's awareness and motor skills. In Carol Korn-Burszytn's book, *Young Children and the Arts: Nurturing Imagination and Creativity*, Herman Jiesamfoek writes,

It is obvious that schooling and education in dance contribute to better use of leisure time, but survival in our technologically advanced society also means developing physically and mentally agile adults, who can creatively and swiftly involve with new technological developments, and can synthesize large amounts of available information at the touch of a button. To link this to dance may seem a long stretch; however, research has shown that engaging in dance can significantly contribute to physical agility, and following the mind-body line of thinking, also an agile mind (Korn-Burnszytn 199).

Dance, too, provides a way to express feeling without using verbal communication. Darci Nelson of the American Dance Therapy Association says that, "In these settings, dance becomes the platform upon which both the physical and psychological wellness of a child can thrive" (Nelson). The American Dance Therapy Association is an association that very firmly believes that the wellbeing and mental health of children is what is most important for substantial development. The American Dance Therapy Association is even mentioned in a scholarly article written in the *American Journal of Dance Therapy*. In this article, the authors write that, "In DMT, movement contributes to increased body image through exploration and process oriented learning, enabling children with ASD to expand their movement repertoire" (Bryden 216). DTM is defined as Dance Movement Therapy and ASD is defined as Autism Spectrum Disorder. Even children who suffer from disabilities such as Autism or Down Syndrome can benefit from a program like dance therapy.

Understanding a Connection Between Art and Anxiety

Children with divorced parents is more common today than ever. Anxiety and depression are serious problems that children all over the world deal with daily. There are several factors that can lead to a child's anxiety, but family problems are the leading cause of childhood

depression. Sally Gifford wrote in an article published through the National Endowment of the Arts that, "Children assigned to an eight-week dance group demonstrated improvements in social skill development and reductions in anxiety and aggression compared to a control group" (Gifford).

In regard to children going through anxiety and depression, researchers also need to consider juvenile delinquency and how the arts can positively impact children's lives. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention published an article in May of 2016 called "Arts-Based Programs and Arts Therapies for At-Risk, Justice-Involved, and Traumatized Youths" about what it is like for at-risk children being put through art classes and the effects it has on their well-being. The Glossary of Education Reform defines at-risk children as, "The term may be applied to students who face circumstances that could jeopardize their ability to complete school, such as homelessness, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, serious health issues, domestic violence, transiency (as in the case of migrant-worker families), or other conditions." Although there are several examples throughout the entirety of the article, the main point is how beneficial art programs are for all children. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention goes into detail about how juvenile delinquents, children suffering from anxiety, or even children who have gone through emotional trauma or stress are impacted by the arts.

More specifically, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention supports art therapy because it pushes a positive behavioral change. Some of the examples they give include the arts helping children and teenagers cope with hard times or family problems, teaching them to learn new valuable skills, and show them how to express themselves in ways other than violence and deviance. Vanessa Camilleri, author of *Healing the Inner City Child: Creative Art Therapies with At-Risk Youth*, wrote that "The creative arts therapies provide developmentally

appropriate interventions that help children to connect with their true emotions, as well as to people around them, in nurturing and healing relationships" (Camilleri 69). There are hundreds of programs for at-risk children and teenagers, or children suffering from poverty for instance, that can help get them involved in visual, music, or even performance arts. These programs are a safe outlet for children across the world who are going through things that they do not know how to understand or cope with.

Having programs and places for at-risk children and teenagers to be a part of is something most people would agree is beneficial. These facilities keep at-risk children out of trouble and in a safe environment before or after school. If children's school systems do not have art classes or music classes, these facilities can also be a place where children can learn to express emotion, as well as find something they are passionate about. For younger children especially, being able to create art in a safe atmosphere helps develop their motor and emotional skills. Unfortunately, even some of these youth development centers do not always offer a creative outlet. Most usually just offer tutoring and physical activities for children to participate in. This is one of the many reasons that all school systems should have at least one form of the fine and performing arts offered for students.

Influences on Children and Their Development

Probably the biggest influence on children is the people that they are surrounded by. This could mean friends, family, teachers, or classmates. The most influential out of that list is most certainly family and teachers when it comes to the arts. Children look up to adults for so many reasons, whether it is emotional or physical support, dreams or goals, and even behavior. By having the influence of art from parents or guardians, children automatically have a higher rate at which their cognitive functions are developing. Art can be somewhat of a safe haven for people,

and when children participate in art, this statement is even more true. Most of society can understand that a lot of children are very vulnerable and shy growing up. Their feelings are difficult to express, they feel embarrassed or ashamed about certain things, and communication does not always come naturally. However, when children have support from people they trust, like parents or teachers, they generally feel a lot more comfortable in whichever subject they are trying to conquer. (*PBSParents*)

Developing minds and bodies need some form of creative outlet to release energy and feeling. Through visual arts, music, and movement, children can do just that. When children have the emotional and physical support they need to participate in something they are passionate about, an enormous amount of cognitive and motor functions are enhanced. Parents, guardians, grandparents, and sometimes even siblings can be a positive influence on children when it comes to being involved in the arts. When children have family members or people they can look up to that are also excited about art or music, it makes the children excited. This is extremely important for young children and teenagers, because growing up and getting through school can be difficult.

School is a place where students, no matter what age, go through developmental changes and make developmental progress as well as work on finding themselves and what they like. If students are in a place where they feel safe to participate in whatever activities they choose, their overall confidence will be much higher. They will have a sense of comfort and personal security within themselves. It is important in every subject to study and succeed. Involving the arts in a student's normal school day gives them something to be passionate about and something to boost their confidence and happiness.

Importance of School Art Programs

School art programs are an absolute necessity in primary schools. This statement goes for both private and public-school systems. Art programs provide children and teenagers with so many amazing opportunities, in addition to offering fulfilling careers to art teachers. The main problem is that there are hundreds of communities who do not have strong art programs, and some communities that cannot afford an art program at all. Having a music program or a visual arts program in schools gives children and teenagers an opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities they may not be able to afford outside of the classroom setting.

It seems that almost every school, whether it be elementary or high school, has a sport program. Football is extremely popular among public school systems, as are soccer and baseball. Is it not interesting that thousands of communities will help to fund their school systems football programs, but not invest in something like a high school band program? Art programs are extremely beneficial and give so many adults solid and stable careers. The three main art programs that should always be in public school systems are visual arts, music, and theater.

Visual arts are what society knows as painting or drawing. Having a visual arts program within public school systems teaches children a numerous amount of skills. The visual arts improve children and teenagers motor functions simply by learning to use hand-eye coordination. They are taught to connect the dots, and this skill can be used in the obvious state of art, but it can also be used in their everyday lives. Visual art teachers can teach these children about the color theory, which can also be used in their everyday lives. According to *PBSParents*, the visual arts can also enhance visual spatial skills and enhance decision making skills (Lynch).

Music is unique because there are so many options for incorporating music in school systems. For example, schools can have band programs, choir programs, or even musical theater programs. Band is the most common school music program across the nations. This is solely

because schools with football programs usually have band perform during the halftime of their games. Children and teenagers involved in band truly have so much potential. Through band, they learn social development skills, they learn how to work in a team and how to work with others, and they learn how problem solve when other members of the band are not present. Choir, although similar in the sense that it improves social development skills, really benefits children and teenagers critical thinking skills. Reading music is not an easy task- it takes patience and practice.

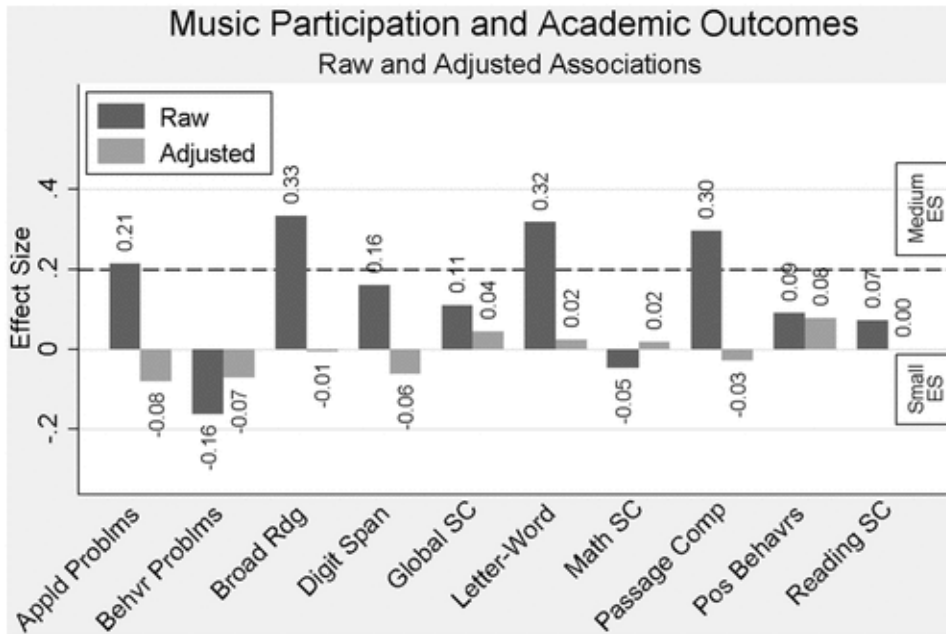
With that being said, children who participate in choir can gain all different types of skills. One very important developmental skill learned through music education and music therapy is language. Laura Lewis Brown wrote in an article, "The Benefits of Music Education," on the website *PBSParents*,

This relationship between music and language development is also socially advantageous to young children. "The development of language over time tends to enhance parts of the brain that help process music," says Dr. Kyle Pruett, clinical professor of child psychiatry at Yale School of Medicine and a practicing musician. "Language competence is at the root of social competence. Musical experience strengthens the capacity to be verbally competent" (Lewis).

By understanding music and the language, children's brains are developing not only through their cognitive functions, but they are developing socially as well. Through choir, it is common for students and groups to sing in other languages. Due to this, children are becoming more cultured as well. Music history can teach children so much and really broaden their thinking spectrum. Grace Lynch wrote in an article on *PBSParents*, "When kids are encouraged to express themselves and take risks in creating art, they develop a sense of innovation that will be

important in their adult lives" (Lynch). Everything about this sentence holds true. By making art, children are expressing themselves, learning to think outside of the box, working to understand boundaries, and can channel in their focus. A good example of this that relates to the music category is something that is known as the "Mozart Effect." This study shows that people of all ages who listen to classical music while studying or working on an assignment end up have much higher academic scores or grades. There is an article written in the New York Times that goes over several different studies testing out the "Mozart Effect." One study was on college kids. As the article states, "They scored higher on spatial-reasoning tests after hearing Mozart, Schubert and Mendelssohn than under any other conditions, including listening to music by Philip Glass, Pearl Jam and other rock groups" (Hershenson).

There have been numerous studies over how music correlates with student's development and progress of different skills. E. Michael Foster wrote a scholarly article for the *American Educational Research Journal* called, "Does Participation in Music and Performing Arts Influence Child Development?" Throughout the entirety of the article, Foster provides immense detail and research over just how positive the arts are when it comes to childhood development. In his article, he portrays the chart inserted below.



"**Figure 2.** Raw and propensity score adjusted effect sizes for childhood music lessons on cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes during adolescence ($n = 1,944$)" (Foster 428).

In this chart, Foster compared music participation to different types of academic outcomes. Data shows that when children and teenagers participated in music, their academic performance was at much higher levels than other students who did not participate in music. The main subjects and techniques improved by music include Applied Problems, Broad Rdg, Letter-Word, and Passage Comprehension. Other skills were improved as well, but those specifically had the highest outcomes (Foster 428).

This leads into the last category of music that should be in every school system, musical theater. Musical theater takes a lot of courage for people of all ages to be involved in. Some people are naturals at it, others, not so much. By incorporating musical theater into the classroom, society is teaching children several skills that will be used in the real world. Some of these skills include public speaking, working with others, taking direction and criticism, and

working on their self-esteem. Musical theater not only involves music, it involves dance most of the time. In order to dance, children and teenagers have to understand coordination and how to trust their own bodies. Dance heavily increases the motor skills and spatial awareness skills which all children need to learn at an early age. When dancing and singing are done simultaneously, however, is where problems can sometimes arise. A lot of times, younger children especially have a hard time doing multiple things at once. Children with ADD or autism, even, have an extremely hard time focusing on more than one task, let alone connecting different tasks to each other. Musical theater is the art form that teaches children with and without special needs what it is like to multi-task, as well as learning how to accept there are multiple things going on at once.

Theater in general does almost the same as musical theater does. The thing about theater is that it gives children, teenagers, and even adults a chance to come out of their hypothetical shell and really embrace something they can be passionate about. In theater, there are multiple roles and jobs to be done. There are the actors, light crew, stage crew, costume design team, music group, and so many more opportunities for people to be a part of. There are options for everyone involved, and there is so much to learn and value from each position. It is very common for towns and cities to have some form of community theater. A specific example of this is the Tullahoma City Community Playhouse in middle Tennessee. Tullahoma, Tennessee, is a small town in central Tennessee, which is home to the South Jackson Civic Center. South Jackson is the local theater, which people of all ages can be a part of for free. Through this same community theater, there is a board of directors that run the Community Playhouse as well as something called PACT, also referred to as the Performing Arts for Children and Teenagers (South Jackson). PACT is a free program for students that does a summer theater camp, a

Broadway style spring show, and several small theatrical shows over the seasons. This is a great way for children and teenagers to be involved in the arts, especially if their school systems do not have an art program.

Art Enhancing Academic Development

Academic development is the third major topic when studying child and teenager development. Studying is important in almost every single subject, unless the student is simply a genius- which is very rare. Students who are involved in the arts, however, are already having better studying techniques and overall do better in the academic setting. Neil Swapp of *Edutopia* did research on how having a creative outlet improves the academic development of students. More specifically, he writes how learning to understand, read, and play music improves the quality of cognitive development. Some examples he gives are verbal memory, reading, and better pronunciation of foreign words. (Swapp). Neil Swapp states in his article, "Creativity and Academics: The Power of an Arts Education,"

For example, in order for a student to play in tune, he must have a scientific understanding of sound waves and other musical acoustics principles. Likewise, for a student to give an inspired performance of Shakespeare, she must understand social, cultural, and historical events of the time. The arts are valuable not only as stand-alone subject matter, but also as the perfect link between *all* subject matters -- and a great delivery system for these concepts, as well (Swapp).

Although his examples only involve music and reading theater playwrights, how students enhance their academic performance holds true with so many other forms of art as well.

School Funding

Funding is one of the biggest issues for smaller school systems. There are some schools that cannot even fund an honors program. If a school cannot afford at least a few honors classes, they very obviously cannot afford an arts program of any kind. Therefore, implementing a program like PACT in the local communities is beneficial. Not all community theaters allow people under the age of sixteen to be a part of their productions. However, if these smaller towns and communities can come up with a small group to start a program for children and younger teenagers to be a part of, then the school systems will not have to worry about finding funding for a theater program. Through theater, people are exposed to movement, acting, and music.

A problem with this is that not all communities even have a local theater for people to participate in. If school systems are at all able to have an arts program, ultimately that is the best solution to children having influence of the arts. When funding programs, especially programs like art and music, most money comes from fundraisers. Carol Jeffers wrote in *Art Education*,

...teachers in the wealthier district were much more likely to benefit from fund-raising events than were their counterparts in the three poorer districts (including the poorer Getty district). However, the teachers themselves were not necessarily involved in raising funds for their art programs. Rather, it was the wealthier parents who regularly sponsored such events on their school's art programs behalf (Jeffers 38).

What Jeffers shows in her study on funding art programs is that parent involvement is very important, especially when it comes to supporting the art programs financially. In areas of poverty and lower income communities, parents and guardians struggle enough as it is to provide for their families and children. How are these same people struggling to provide for their families going to be able to donate to their children's schools art programs? It is simple, they will not be able to. This is the reason that a lot of schools in low income communities do not have stable art

programs, or simply do not have an art program at all. Parent groups keep the arts going, so when there is not support coming from parents, there usually is not any support at all.

Supporting Children, Teenagers, and Teachers Through the Arts

When it comes to the social and academic development of children and teenagers, confidence is something that is very important. Parents, teachers, and even fellow classmates can help boost a child's confidence. How does society define confidence, though? The Cambridge English Dictionary defines confidence as, "a feeling of having little doubt about yourself and your abilities, or a feeling of trust in someone or something." Art is one of those things that people must have confidence in. One does not have to be good at art to partake in art, but they do have to have the confidence and determination to try and to really work to express themselves. Cheryl Lock wrote in an article on *PBSParents*, "When your child puts his heart and soul into an art project—and spends hours working on it, cultivating it, and making it beautiful—he'll feel an enormous sense of accomplishment when it's complete" (Lock). Unfortunately, not all children and teenagers get to feel this sense of accomplishment and confidence in the arts due to lack of parental and family support.

There are thousands of schools in the United States that offer art classes for students to be a part of, especially in the middle and upper-class communities. However, just because the classes are offered and at full availability for these students, it does not mean that they are going to participate in the classes. The children and teenagers who do not have support from parents or their families are often the ones who do not take part in the art classes offered through their schools. Although they do not have support for the arts at home, though, does not mean they should not get support for the arts while at school.

Teachers play a huge role in so many student's lives. However, not all teachers get the chance to teach art and bring different forms of creativity into their student's lives. According to Ian Bowell, "Primary school teachers' confidence in teaching visual art is threatened in traditional sources of support" (Bowell 11). Although the most important factor is students receiving support, teachers also need and deserve support when involving children and teenagers in the arts. Art gives thousands of extremely talented and qualified people job opportunities simply by school systems offering art classes. Why have an art class but not have a qualified teacher to teach that art class? It does not make sense. A school would not hire a football coach who knows nothing about football- so the same should always go for the fine and performing arts. School systems need to use their resources wisely and support their teachers and art programs the same as they would any other program. The fine and performing arts have so many benefits in child and teenager development and need to be in every school system.

Developing a Personal Sense of Emotion Through Art

The development of children is enhanced beyond measure during their primary school years. Being a student teaches people of all ages numerous skills that can be used in the everyday and professional world. People learn social skills- for example, how to work in a team, public speaking skills, confrontational skills, and overall better communication skills. Obviously, academic skills are learned while being a student. This can be the basic grammar and mathematics skills, or other subjects like science and technology. Academics lead students to work on their critical thinking and analyzing skills, which is a superb skill to have outside of the classroom setting. These also correlate with cognitive skills.

Dr. Barbara McCombs from the University of Denver wrote an article called "Developing Responsible and Autonomous Learners: A Key to Motivating Students." In this article, Dr.

McCombs writes all about different learning techniques for students and how teachers and parents should go about helping students learn. One of the sections of her article, "Student-centered methods," gives detail on ways students like to learn and ways that further improve the quality of their learning abilities. Several of her examples have to do with parental and family support, critical thinking techniques, and then using what the student is interested in to help focus and decision make. Dr. McCombs makes the point that by listening to music or reading poetry can intensify student's emotions and give them topics to use in writing classes (*American Psychological Association*).

This can be true for subjects other than writing, though. Emotion is something that everyone has and is something that everyone needs to release. An article in *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, written by a group of three professional art therapists, states,

For children, art is a medium for natural and spontaneous expression, which helps develop interpersonal and intrapersonal communication (Moriya, 2000). Artistic expression is a way to assess the feelings and perceptions of the child's inner world and to enable communication between this inner world and the outer world (French & Klein, 2012). Studies have found that art therapy in the school framework helps pupils resolve emotional problems (Gersch & Goncalves, 2006) and can assist children at risk and children with learning disabilities to adapt to the school system... (47).

In this paragraph alone, this group of therapists express just how important feelings and emotion are for children. Children, no matter what mental or physical state they are in, need a way to show what they are thinking in a way that they feel safe doing so. Art does this. Art provides numerous outlets for at-risk youth, children with disabilities, and every other child in the world. Developing social skills is a hard task to learn, but when these children and teenagers write down

on paper, in song, or through movement, they can feel more comfortable opening up about their emotions.

Conclusion

There are many important components to the development of children and teenagers. Each person develops different functions at their own pace. The main skills to take into consideration when researching childhood development are social development skills, cognitive and motor skills, and academic learning skills. Not only do researchers study these traits, but they focus on the psychology and the biological aspects of these traits. What happens when people look at these developmental qualities when art is added to the mix? The word art is an extremely broad term. Art can be visual, like painting, drawing, or even digital media. It can also be performance based, like music, singing, dancing, and theater. No matter what form of art a child is involved in, every form of artistry has benefits when it comes to that child's development.

When children use their hands to draw, write, or create a picture, their emotional development is enhanced. Emotional development, while also a major part of cognitive development, is important because at a young age it is hard to be confident in expressing feelings- visual art gives children and teenagers who struggle with emotion a way to show how they are feeling. Children and teenagers involved in music, whether it be privately or in a band or choir, experience social and academic development, as well as increase their critical thinking abilities. Socially, they learn how to work with others and be involved in a team. They also learn how to work with adults and professionals, such as their directors or mentors. Music involves an immense amount of language. When involved in choir or voice, children learn language skills such as pronunciation and foreign words which add to their vocabulary. Children who participate

in the school band, or even a small band that they arranged themselves, enhance critical thinking skills by learning how to read music while playing at the same time. Dance and theater spark all kinds of developmental traits in children and teenagers. Dance, or any kind of body movement, increases children's motor functions, their coordination, and their spatial awareness. Dance is also an exceptional way to express emotion. Something that dance and theater both do is teach children to be confident and self-aware. Being in front of an audience can cause much anxiety to people of all ages, but when involved in the performing arts they learn to be in front of people and that is a great social skill to obtain.

By having these art related programs in every school system across the nation, children and teenagers will have the opportunities and the resources available to learn and enhance all these developmental traits. Developmental milestones, especially for young children, are vital. If children are not getting the support they need, their development will be suspended. Society needs to understand the importance of art and just how beneficial it is to future generations development. In a world full of hate and violence, why would society not want children and teenagers to have an outlet where they feel safe and can truly express themselves? The fine and performing arts are beautiful, important, and extremely beneficial for the development and well-being of children and teenagers.

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