



TOPIC: FUNDAMENTALS

Community Arts Education Issues, Benefits, and Research

Research shows that high-quality instruction in the arts benefits individuals and communities. Arts education programs that are responsive to community needs foster cognitive development, increase creativity, improve self-esteem, and promote better health. They can also advance economic growth, promote a sense of shared culture and community belonging, and be a valuable and enriching part of K–12 education.

Arts Participation Benefits

Community arts education programs benefit the community as a whole and the people who participate. *Instrumental benefits*—such as economic growth, improved academic performance, and better social integration—enrich society. *Intrinsic benefits*—such as the personal pleasure that comes from individual expression and the emotional stimulation of arts participation—are what attract most people to the arts in the first place. Today, arts professionals and arts advocates are emphasizing both in making the case for the impact of arts participation and arts education.

In *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts*, a RAND Corporation report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, researchers proposed these benefits of arts involvement:

1. Personal benefits, such as pleasure or relief from anxiety
2. Benefits to individuals that also affect society, such as the development of learning skills that have a “spillover effect”
3. Benefits to the public as a whole, such as increasing economic growth and social capital

Community Arts Education Benefits

Community arts education providers offer learning opportunities that lead to some or all of these outcomes, depending on the type of organization or the goal of the instruction or program:

- Teach specific artistic skills through sequential instruction in performance and creation. *At a community school of the arts, a student learns to play a musical instrument or create wheel-thrown pottery.*
- Stimulate aesthetic awareness, literacy, and appreciation. *In an art museum education program, a student learns visual literacy skills helpful for looking at, thinking about, and experiencing works of art.*
- Build other skills and strengths through the arts, including self-expression, crosscultural understanding, self-esteem, and social interaction. *In an afterschool youth theater program, a student learns team building, self-expression, and other critical life skills.*

Source: Adapted from *Cultivating Demand for the Arts*

These outcomes complement overall benefits of arts education in the classroom and in community settings:

- Stimulate and develop imagination, problem solving, and critical thinking
- Refine cognitive and creative skills.
- Affect developmental growth in children across socioeconomic boundaries
- Teach life skills, such as developing an informed perception; articulating a vision; learning to solve problems and make decisions; building self-confidence and self-discipline; developing the ability to imagine what might be; and accepting responsibility to complete tasks from start to finish.
- Nurture important values, including team building; respecting alternative viewpoints; and appreciating and being aware of different cultures and traditions.

Some arts education research has implications for the field of community arts education. Key research areas include

- The impact of arts learning on student achievement and human development
- Instrumental and intrinsic benefits of arts education and arts participation
- The relationship between arts education and arts participation
- The role of community coordination and partnership in expanding access to arts education

The California Arts Council maintains a comprehensive, annotated list of arts education research studies and reports: *Research and Reports on the Arts*