Why We Should Teach Arts in School

Bo Rui Wang, age 16 (*Young Voices Magazine* *2016* <http://torontopubliclibrary.typepad.com/teens/YVbackissues/young-voices-2016.pdf> )

Today, educators and policy-makers are continuously calling for more funding for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) programs at school. In fact, in the United States alone, over $2.9 billion has been given to fund STEM in 2015. Although this is a great venture – STEM creates innovative, world-changing scientists, engineers and doctors, and evidence has shown that STEM programs significantly boost high school math and science marks – there is an increasing neglect for art programs in high school. For example, arts funding for high schools in the United States alone was just $250 million in 2015, compared with the $2.9 billion given to STEM and $5 billion given to other science programs.

The arts are a fundamentally important element to education. The arts foster character, creativity, perseverance, communication and other skills that simply cannot be fostered through STEM. The arts have been proven to reduce stress, improve well-being, and increase happiness, which are essential to a successful high school experience. The arts allow students to explore the world, gain a deeper understanding of the world, problem-solve, analyze and critically think. Students who take arts are four times more likely to win an academic award than students who take STEM.

Arts help at-risk youth. Studies have shown that students who take the arts have the lowest dropout rate in high school. They are also the least likely group to use drugs or commit crimes. Arts lessons have been shown to make youth less aggressive. Most at-risk youth tend to underachieve in school, and music lessons have been proven to improve their performance by as much as 25 percent. Music is also a key tool in reducing crime. This is demonstrated by an example in Toronto. In 2014, the TTC decided to play classical music as a pilot project at eight of its most crime-ridden stations. Within a few months, crime dropped dramatically at those stations.

The arts, and especially music, are proven to raise academic performance. In fact, high school music students were surveyed and found to have a substantially higher GPA than non-musicians in the same school. A survey of 7,500 university students found that music students had the highest reading scores. Based on neurological research, students who were exposed to music-based math lessons scored higher on tests than those who were taught in the conventional (STEM) method. Furthermore, students who took music were, on average, 40 percent better at English and humanities than their peers.

Skills gained from the arts are also transferable to other subjects, which is something that does not happen in STEM. The analytical skills taken from music, for example, can be transferred to math and science, while the performance skills taken from drama can be transferred to English and French. The arts help to build and foster character through the promotion of respect, discipline, creativity and perseverance. The arts also help develop essential skills such as time-management, organization, critical thinking, and analytical and communication skills.

The arts also improve school rankings. A study done by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement showed that all the top-performing schools devoted at least a quarter of the day to the arts, especially music. The arts improve the education of students. Studies have shown that participation in the arts increases students’ desire to learn, willingness to learn, and achievement in learning. The world’s best education systems, as ranked by PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), all require mandatory arts participation for students. In Japan, consistently one of the world’s top performers, students are required to take music from the start of middle school to the end of high school.

The bond that musicians, actors, artists and dancers have with one another is special and unbreakable. It is arguable that no other group in high school can develop such a long-lasting, tight bond. In one survey, 90 percent of the people agreed that music brings family and friends closer together. This is because the arts promote teamwork, perseverance, practise and patience. The arts promote social skills and allow students to work with each other rather than compete with each other.

Sadly, although the benefits of the arts are numerous and prominent, due to the requirement of funding for STEM, many schools have cancelled arts programs. Music is proven to greatly improve academic and social performance, yet many schools have scrapped their music programs, instead adding more math and science courses in their place. Although this is an efficient short-term solution to boosting standardized test results, in the long run it not only lowers students’ performance but is also detrimental to their social and mental well-being. Please, think twice before cutting arts programs, and create a better future for schools, students, and society.

**Graphic Organizer for Essay Paragraph 1**: Introduction

**Thesis Statement** (everything in this box)

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