

PERSONAL  
and social  
development of  
children and youth

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# PERSONAL and social development of children and youth

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**T**he ability to engage and motivate children and youth from all socioeconomic levels in education and community is a respected strength of arts and culture.

- 1 The arts are an effective outreach tool to engage youth
- 2 Learning in and through the arts enhances learning in other domains and general scholastic achievement
- 3 The arts build resilience and self-esteem in young people
- 4 The arts contribute to creating healthy and supportive communities for youth
- 5 The arts help in the successful transition to adulthood and the development of in-demand job skills
- 6 The arts offer opportunities for youth leadership development and for youth to affect positive change in their communities

## Key arguments

Making the case for arts and culture for personal and social development of youth

### **1. The arts are an effective outreach tool to engage youth.**

The arts reach many young people who are not otherwise being reached. The arts are often the primary, and sometimes, the only motivation for young people to engage in school or community (Brice Heath, 1999; Broadbent, 2003; Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Seidel, 1999; Upitis & Smithrim, 2003).

The arts reach young people in ways that they are not otherwise being reached, appealing to diverse strengths, interests, and ways of social engagement (McKay, Reid, Tremblay & Pelletier, 1996; Burton, Horowitz, Abeles, 1999; Delgado, 2000).

Levels of attendance in arts programs are relatively high and sustained among at-risk youth (Wright, John, Offord, & Row, 2004).

Arts groups are usually non-labelling and provide a low-key, less-intimidating approach to integration (Department of Justice Canada, 1999).

### **2. Learning in and through the arts enhances learning in other domains and general scholastic achievement**

(Deasy, 2002; Fiske, 1999).

The arts provide new and unlimited challenges for young people already considered successful, combating boredom and complacency (Catterall, Champleau, & Iwanaga, 1999).

Participation in the arts contribute to greater motivation for, and increased engagement in, learning (Upitis & Smithrim, 2003).

Learning in the arts has significant effects on learning in other domains (Deasy, 2002; Fiske, 1999; Murfee, 1995).

*“Drawing helps writing. Song and poetry make facts memorable. Drama makes history more vivid and real. Creative movement makes processes understandable.” (Murfee, 1995)*

Arts-involved students typically perform 16-18 percentage points above non-involved students in academic achievement (Catterall, Champleau, & Iwanaga, 1999).

Students with high arts participation from lower socioeconomic communities especially perform higher academically (Catterall, Champleau, & Iwanaga, 1999).

When compared to “arts-poor” schools in the same neighbourhoods, schools partnered with arts organizations improved significantly and more quickly in terms of scholastic achievement (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999).

Sustained involvement in theatre corresponds with greater success in reading and sustained involvement in music corresponds with greater success in mathematics (Catterall, Champleau, & Iwanaga, 1999; Upitis & Smithrim, 2003).

Youth in extracurricular arts programs – more so than those involved in other extracurricular programs (sport, academic, and community involvement) – do better in school due to the mixture of “roles, risks, and rules” offered by arts programming (Brice Heath, 1999).

“Arts learning, involving as it does the construction, interweaving, and interpretation of personal and socio-cultural meaning, calls upon a constellation of capacities and dispositions which are layered and unified in the construction of forms we call paintings, poems, musical compositions, and dances. Many of these same competencies and dispositions extend to other subject domains where they coalesce in equally distinctive forms – mathematical, scientific, linguistic – as pupils organize different kinds of meaning, insight, and understanding.” (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999)

The arts access multiple intelligences (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999; Deasy, 2002; President’s Committee on Arts and the Humanities, 2005).

Learning through the arts deepens exploration of complex issues (Cueva & Kuhnley, 2003; Murfee, 1995; Seidel, 1999).

“Creative activity is also a source of joy and wonder, while it bids its students to touch and taste and hear and see the world. Children are powerfully affected by storytelling, music, dance, and the visual arts. They often construct their understanding of the world around musical games, imaginative dramas and drawing.” (Murfee, 1995)

Creative abilities (expression, risk taking and imagination) are improved through arts involvement (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999; Murfee, 1995; President’s Committee on Arts and the Humanities, 2005).

“Seventy-five percent of Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild students go on to college. An after-school program for at-risk high school students at a community arts center in Pittsburgh, the Guild’s extraordinary success shows how valuable community arts groups can be to school districts.” (Murfee, 1995)

### **3. The arts build resilience and self-esteem in young people**

(Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001; Department of Justice Canada, 1999; Eccles and Barber, 1999).

The arts permit the making of mistakes as part of the creative process and cultivates responsible and productive management of risk by young people (Brice Heath, 1999; Seidel; Smyth & Stevenson, 2005).

The arts encourage self-directed learning (Seidel, 1999) and self-efficacy (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zarkeras, & Brooks, 2004).

The arts connect students to themselves and each other. The arts assist with positive identity formation (Catterall, Champleau, & Iwanaga, 1999; Palmer Wolf, 1999; Seidel, 1999).

“Creative art activity allows the adolescent to gain mastery over internal and external landscapes by discovering mechanisms for structure and containment that arise from within, rather than being imposed from outside. The artistic experience entails repetition of actions, thoughts or emotions, over which the adolescent gains increased tolerance

or mastery. While providing a means to express pain and unfulfilled longings during a distinct maturational phase, the arts simultaneously engage the competent, hopeful and healthy aspects of the adolescent's being." (Milkman, Wanberg, Park Robinson, 1995)

Youth in extracurricular arts programs do better in their personal lives (Brice Heath, 1999).

Youth involved in theatre gain in self-concept and motivation (Catterall, Champleau, & Iwanaga, 1999; Oreck, Baum, & McCartney, 1999)

According to a review of 57 studies, self-concept among young people is positively enhanced through arts participation (Murfee, 1995).

"When children's efforts culminate in a performance or exhibition, they have a chance to experience meaningful public affirmation, which provides them with some degree of celebrity. For those few minutes, children are in their own eyes every bit as important as anybody – any TV, sports, music, movie or video idol. This can be an experience of particular potency for youngsters whose lives are primarily characterized by anonymity and failure." (President's Committee on Arts and the Humanities, 2005)

SDQ-I (Self-Concept) scores compared to the number of years in in-school arts

SDQ-I Scores	High-arts group	Low-arts group
Physical Ability (S-C)	29.65%	20.08%
Physical Appearance (S-C)	27.40%	24.31%
Peer Relations (S-C)	29.45%	23.26%
Parent Relations (S-C)	35.17%	24.31%
General Self-Concept	36.81%	27.48%
Reading (S-C)	40.49%	20.08%
Mathematics (S-C)	29.86%	15.43%
General School (S-C)	35.79%	18.60%
Total Non-Academic (S-C)	33.33%	24.31%
Total Academic (S-C)	41.10%	17.76%
Total (S-C)	34.15%	17.97%

Source: Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles (1999)

There is significant correlation between youth participation in sustained, structured community-based arts programs, and the development of pro-social behaviours and decreased conduct and emotional problems (Ross and Roberts, 1999; Wright, John, Offord, & Row, 2004).

Youth participants in sustained, structured community-based arts programs demonstrate increased confidence, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution skills, and problem solving skills (Wright, John, Offord, & Row, 2004).

Youth involved in the arts use their free time in positive and constructive ways (Department of Justice Canada, 1999).

Arts involvement creates opportunities for young people to have contact with positive role models and full social contact with peers in pro-social environments (Department of Justice Canada, 1999).

Young people who participate in band, orchestra, chorus, or a school play, for example, are significantly less likely than non-participants to drop out of school, be arrested, use drugs, or engage in binge drinking (President's Committee on Arts and the Humanities, 2005).

"Changes in body image may be expressed through movement and dance. Drama offers the opportunity to explore identity by integrating childhood roles and experimenting with future possibilities. Music expresses emotional dissonance and volatility. The visual arts provide a vehicle for translating inner experiences to outward visual images. Writing and oral history projects bring a greater understanding of one's family and neighborhood." (President's Committee on Arts and the Humanities, 2005)

#### **4. The arts contribute to creating healthy and supportive communities for youth**

(Smyth & Stevenson, 2005).

When the arts become central in an organization or community, the learning environment improves, and the organizational culture transforms to become more positive, creative, and supportive (Brice Heath, 1999; Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Fiske, 1999; Murfee, 1995; President's Committee on Arts and the Humanities, 2005; Seidel, 1999; Smyth & Stevenson, 2005).

Participating in sports, joining clubs or groups, and taking music, dance, or art lessons are examples of ways in which young people can participate in their community, learn new skills, and socialize beyond their family boundaries (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001).

The arts encourage intercultural exchange and respect of differences (Murfee, 1995; Smyth & Stevenson, 2005).

Youth involved in theatre develop higher levels of empathy and tolerance for others (Catterall, Champleau, & Iwanaga, 1999).

Students reported significantly improved attitudes relating to self-expression, trust, self-acceptance, and acceptance of others in the "Arts Alternatives" program in New Jersey (Murfee, 1995).

"Because dance, music, photography and other visual arts transcend language, they can bridge barriers among cultural, racial and ethnic groups. The arts also can promote a deeper understanding of similarities and differences among religions, races and cultural traditions. For some children, the exploration of their unique cultural histories can be critical to their sense of themselves and to others' images of them. This knowledge can help bind them more fully to the larger society of which they are a part." (President's Committee on Arts and the Humanities, 2005)

The arts engage community leaders and resources in young people's lives (Brice Heath, 1999; Catterall & Waldorf, 1999).

The arts provide learning opportunities for the adults in the lives of young people (Brice Heath, 1999).

Parents with youth involved in sustained, structured community-based arts programs show a positive increase in the perception of their neighbourhoods (Wright, John, Offord, & Row, 2004).

#### **5. The arts help in the successful transition to adulthood and the development of in-demand job skills.**

The arts connect learning experiences to the world of real work and assist in developing job skills (Fiske, 1999; Murfee, 1995; Smyth & Stevenson, 2005; Wright, John, Offord, & Row, 2004).

Youth participants in sustained, structured community-based arts programs exhibit increased abilities to complete tasks (Oreck, Baum, & McCartney, 1999; Wright, John, Offord, & Row, 2004).

The arts and other recreation fill the gap in youth services and aid youth,

especially those considered to be at additional risk, in their transition to responsible, contributing adult members of the community (Delgado, 2000; McKay, 1995).

Many arts activities are dependent upon collaborative efforts, teaching valuable teamwork skills (Department of Justice Canada, 1999; President's Committee on Arts and the Humanities, 2005).

Creativity and creative problem-solving skills are developed significantly through arts involvement (Murfee, 1995).

*“The one constant is the transformational experience that occurs for a young person that can change their life forever.” (Hill Strategies, 2004)*

## **6. The arts offer opportunities for youth leadership development and for youth to affect positive change in their communities.**

The arts provide a positive means for young people to make themselves visible and heard (Smyth & Stevenson, 2005).

The arts contribute to the development of civic values, leadership, and active citizenship among youth (Brice Heath, 1999; Department of Justice Canada, 1999).

Involvement in the arts opens pathways for young people to make contributions and connections (teaching, coaching, employment, etc.) to their communities (Department of Justice Canada, 1999).

## **Quotations about Personal and social development of children and youth**

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### **The arts build resilience and self-esteem in young people**

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### **The arts contribute to creating healthy and supportive communities for youth**

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### **The arts help in the successful transition to adulthood and the development of in-demand job skills**

"The one constant is the transformational experience that occurs for a young person that can change their life forever." (Hill Strategies, 2004)



## PROFILES

### **Greater Victoria, BC**

*Youth reclaiming & transforming their environment: The story of Greater Victoria's Traskside Art Gallery.*

[creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/Greater-Victoria-Traskside.html](http://creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/Greater-Victoria-Traskside.html)

### **Ottawa, ON**

*Creating leaders through the arts: The story of Ottawa's Arts Leadership Training Program.*

[creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/Ottawa-Arts-Leaders.html](http://creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/Ottawa-Arts-Leaders.html)

### **Regina, SK**

*Self-determined mentorship for at-risk young people: The story of Regina's Street Culture Kidz Project.*

[creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/Regina-StreetCultureKidz.html](http://creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/Regina-StreetCultureKidz.html)

### **St. John's, NL**

*Legitimizing creative youth expression: The story of St. John's Legal Graffiti Wall.*

[creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/St-Johns-Legal-Wall.html](http://creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/St-Johns-Legal-Wall.html)

### **Toronto, ON**

*Creative youth development and diplomacy: The story of Toronto's Creative Youth Envoy.*

[creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/Toronto-CYE.html](http://creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/Toronto-CYE.html)

### **Toronto, ON**

*Empowering street-involved youth through art: The story of Sketch in Toronto.*

[creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/Toronto-Sketch.html](http://creativecommons.ca/project-profiles/Toronto-Sketch.html)

### **Winnipeg, MB**

*Intervention through circus & magic: The story of Winnipeg's Circus & Magic Partnership.*

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## REFERENCES

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