



## The teaching of art in education, the first opportunity for talent

### *The teaching of art in education, the first opportunity for talent*

Janilson Ribeiro Batista<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Paulo Roberto Argente Ottoni

Submitted on: 07/10/2022

Approved on: 07/10/2022

Published on: 07/12/2022 DOI:

10.51473/rcmos.v2i2.324

#### SUMMARY

In this article, we argue that, for the study of Education in the Arts discipline to continue advancing, we must outline the effects of particular forms of arts education, offered in certain contexts, in specific domains of children's socio-emotional development. We explain why formulating precise hypotheses about the effects of arts education on children's socio-emotional development requires a differentiated definition of each school year syllabus or arts education activity in question, as well as a consideration of the immediate and broader contexts in which the grade level (a) student or activity occurs. Next, there are many examples of programs and activities related to Arts Education reaching children, thus providing, within this article, considerations that allow the refinement of hypotheses about the impact of arts education on children's socio-emotional development.

**Key words:** Artistic Education – Children – Development

#### ABSTRACT

In this article, we argue that, for the study of Education in the Arts discipline to continue advancing, we must outline the effects of forms of arts education, offered in certain contexts, on specific domains of children's socio-emotional development. We explain why formulating precise hypotheses about the effects of arts education on children's socio-emotional development requires a differentiated definition of each menu of the academic year or arts education activity in question, as well as a consideration of the immediate and broader contexts in which the grade of the (a) student or activity takes place. Then, there are many examples of programs and activities related to Arts Education reaching children, thus giving, within this article, the considerations that allow the refinement of hypotheses about the impact of arts education on children's socio-emotional development.

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although research into the benefits of Teaching Arts in Education is expanding rapidly, problems remain in the ways in which this Article (or any others) is presented, disseminated and used to inform matters relating to the discipline and educational policies. Chief among them is the tendency for discussions to focus on the benefits of Arts Education, as if all arts education were a monolithic activity with a singular path to uniform benefits.

Here, we argue that our field must move beyond such broad statements about the impact of Arts Education to delineate the effects of particular forms of this excellent discipline, offered in certain contexts, in specific domains of children's social-emotional development, a broad construct that encompasses identity formation, self-regulation and interpersonal skills and which this academic work increasingly suggests is fostered by many Education experiences in the Arts discipline (Farrington et al., 2019).

<sup>1</sup> Interamerican University: Doctorate course in education. Asunción- Paraguay Janilsonri4@gmail.com  
<sup>two</sup> Advisor. Interamerican University: Doctorate course in education



This specificity is essential for three reasons. First, the field has already progressed to the point where it is improbable that simply demonstrating an association between some broad characterization of arts education (e.g., “fine arts”) and some domain(s) of children’s socioemotional development (e.g., empathy) constitutes a significant advance in our understanding the relationship between Arts Teaching and child development.

To continue to build a scientific understanding of the potential role of arts education in children's social-emotional development, we must formulate and test more precise hypotheses that link a particular form of arts education offered in a given context to a specific domain of that development. Only when all three of these terms – educational experience and context.

Second, if arts educators want to contribute to growing efforts to promote children's social-emotional development, they must design and implement programs that can achieve this goal. This is much more likely when programs are intentionally designed around a plausible theory of change that links program activities to specific domains of children's social-emotional development and that provides guidelines for implementing a program with fidelity across different participants, locations. and contexts. The alternative – offering an ill-defined program and hoping that some unspecified socio-emotional benefit accrues – is unlikely to produce results.

Third, just as a program is more likely to achieve its objectives when built around a plausible theory of change, so are initiatives or efforts made up of many organizations working together. Given that arts education initiatives are often supported with public funds, educators and policymakers must be convinced of the initiatives' potential before implementation and continued effectiveness thereafter to provide support. Outlining the specific benefits of arts education initiatives for children's social-emotional development aligns the expectations of these initiatives with the activities they offer and ensures that the claims of these initiatives do not exceed the evidence of their likely effects.

These reasons could just as easily be cited to support an argument for a more considered approach to understanding the developmental benefits of the arts. *cognitive* of children, rather than their socio-emotional development. In fact, the boundary between cognitive and socioemotional development is often quite permeable: there is a cognitive component to most socioemotional skills and a socioemotional component to most cognitive skills. Furthermore, the effects of an arts education experience on a particular aspect of children's development may be mediated by changes in children's cognitive processes (e.g., theory of mind).

However, this article focuses on Arts education and children's socio-emotional development for two reasons. First, it is an area of growing research interest, with an increasing number of studies producing findings that now require conceptual organization. Secondly, it is also an emerging area of interest among education professionals and policymakers, and as such the socio-emotional benefits of the arts have been increasingly cited in arguments that arts education is an integral part of development. of all children (see, for example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 28 and 29). That said, many, if not all, aspects of our argument would apply equally well to research that seeks to understand the effects of arts education experiences on children's cognitive development.

## 2. DEVELOPMENT

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The first step to formulating precise hypotheses about the teaching of Arts and its educational benefits for the School is to develop a differentiated definition of educational activities and programs. Although it may seem obvious that participation in a ballet class is different from participation in an ensemble of music and instruments it is often treated as a monolith.

However, there are not only distinctions between art forms, but also within individual art forms. (e.g. genre or tradition). It's an open question *if* these differences cause variation in results and *which* elements of an art class lead to causal changes.

Any researcher/teacher/school coordinator must decide from the beginning, for example, whether they are interested in ed on the holistic effects of a theater class, with its curriculum decided by theater experts and its activities shaped over many years (Goldstein et al., 2017), or whether they prefer to specify and isolate the effects of an acting class *throughout* well-matched control groups and strictly specified activities.

Regardless, when discussing and reporting any research, details are important because they define the specific opportunities for social-emotional development that different arts education experiences and programs offer children (Gibson, 1979). This includes, for example, whether artistic activities were experienced as an audience, and whether artistic practice was informed by classical forms, modern techniques or postmodern experimental methods.

Two reasons why this differentiation is not regularly made in research reports is the large number of ways in which artistic activities can be categorized and the lack of knowledge of which of these categorizations are important for children's development. To begin with, there is mastery of an arts education experience (Bridgett et al., 2015) visual arts, including painting, drawing, sculpture and collage; (Brofenbrenner; Morris, 2006) dance, including ballet, jazz, tap, hip-hop, modern, and choreography; (Brown, 2018) theater, including improvisation, classical, modern, experimental, and musical theater; and (Burchinal et al., 2000) music, including orchestral, pop, jazz, band, and improvisation, performed instrumentally or vocally, as well as media. This, of course, is a short, introductory list of possibilities and subgenres.

Some school curricula also include digital media or culinary skills in the arts, or separate creative writing such as poetry, drama, or fiction in the arts, while others include creative writing genres in drama or English classes.

It is important, when thinking about the contextual effects of different arts domains on outcomes, to keep in mind that art forms are often combined in practice, professional presentation, and occasionally in the classroom. Poems are set to music. Staging a play, a cantata requires music, dancing, acting and makeup, costumes and designed sets. Thus, while arts education experiences may be categorized in ways that reflect the disciplinary boundaries of the arts themselves, the boundaries between these experiences may be more or less permeable than those found within the arts themselves. Furthermore, elements of the arts can be integrated into educational experiences that primarily aim to impart knowledge about subjects outside the arts (Hardiman et al., 2014).

Although complex, studying how teachers separate and combine artistic domains will allow researchers to get closer to both the complexities of real-world practice and the rigor needed to form conclusions about how the arts affect social-emotional development.

Each arts domain has non-mutually exclusive characteristics that can specify effects. Music, Theater and dance are generally interpretive and collaborative. Musicians, dancers, and actors may perform alone or work in ensembles of various sizes, learning and performing the work of a composer, choreographer, or playwright. Visual artists, on the contrary, tend to work more alone, generating material. However, visual artists can work in collectives, and music, dance and theater have the possibility to generate and/or improvise work as part of the study. In fact, most acting classes begin with an improvisational warm-up and use text and behavior generation throughout the rehearsal processes.

Music and dance depend on rhythm; theater and visual arts contain figurative and representational elements. Within each domain and genre, an additional element to consider is the period or form in which the lesson is focused. Any class in these arts domains may focus on classical Western or Eastern works, the modern artistic revolutions of the 19th and 20th centuries, or current experimental work.

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Like any area of study that continues to be informed by its own history, the focuses of arts in time affect the type of work the student will do, their freedom of form and interpretation and the rules they “must” follow. Whether these differences lead to different results has not yet been studied.

Likewise, there can be fundamental differences when a student actively participates in creating art, theater, dance, or music, compared to simply being in the audience or observing. Although there are some

evidence that suggests that both watching (GREENE et al., 2018) and participating (GOLDSTEIN; WINNER, 2012) in theater in second childhood positively affects empathy, more studies are needed to replicate both effects, and this type of convergence may not apply to other forms of art.

Painting or walking through a museum, playing the violin or sitting in a concert hall, hours of physical practice or watching a ballet are such significantly different behavioral and psychological activities that it would be very surprising if they caused the same effects.

A starting point for conceptualizing the real implications for social and emotional learning across all domains of art is to investigate the habits of mind promoted and supported by each. Habits of mind are cognitive patterns – mastery of general ways of thinking about problems, framing the world and guiding behaviors (PERKINS et al., 1993).

Intensive studies on habits of mind are well established in the visual arts (HETLAND et al., 2015), with similar studies recently carried out in music (HOGAN; WINNER, 2019) and theater (GOLDSTEIN and YOUNG, 2019). The similarities between art forms, such as their aesthetic and expressive components, have led some theorists to work toward a unification of the psychological components of art forms (BROWN, 2018), but practitioners may or may not agree. To this point, both visual arts and music have been found to employ the mental habits of persistence (i.e., continuing to practice and solve a problem); imagination (of what changes in a musical performance or visual stimuli might be like); and expression of ideas and meanings (HETLAND et al., 2015; HOGAN; WINNER, 2019). But music can focus on building and creating ensembles, while visual arts involve the use of careful observation and perception.

Finally, the “same” artistic activity can occur in several ways (GREENO, 2006). To give an example from theater education, a child may study their character, memorize lines, rehearse scenes, perform informally for peers, or perform in a full production in front of an audience. Each of these activities has different experiential elements and immediate contexts and, as such, can inculcate different states of arousal and incur different consequences.

Thus, if researchers seek to build the evidence base for incorporating theater education into school curriculums and youth programming, it is vital to understand which activities in which contexts have a measurable impact on which domains of socio-emotional development among children (HOLOCHWOST et al., 2018).

## 2.1 THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT FOR ARTS TEACHING

Define an artistic education activity or program, differentiating it in terms of its domain and characteristics. Ethics is an essential first step in formulating hypotheses about the socio-emotional benefits of that activity or program.

The next step is to consider the immediate context in which this activity or program occurs. The goal is to provide a deeper understanding of where, to whom, by whom, and how a specific arts education experience was provided. For example, a performing arts residency program may look very different at a performing arts elementary school than at an elementary school that lost its arts programs a decade ago. Similarly, the impact of a performing arts program may be markedly different if classroom teachers are viewed primarily as behavior managers and facilitators or if they are active participants in training sessions.

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professional development designed to transfer performing arts strategies into your daily instruction. Together, information about the immediate context helps define the environment/ecology in which a program takes place, who is an active participant, and how the program was implemented.

An essential parameter of the immediate context of an arts education program or activity is the environment specific institutional in which this activity takes place. Much of arts education takes place in schools, but arts education also takes place in many other settings, from community arts organizations to cultural providers and children's homes. Each of these settings has a specific arts learning profile, a

configuration of characteristics that define that scenario as an immediate context for learning the arts.

For programs that take place in schools, elements of this profile include the adequacy of the physical space made available for the program, the level of support offered to the programs by teachers and classroom managers, the history and prominence of arts education in the school, and whether Arts education is part of the curriculum for all students or is available only to students who meet certain academic or behavioral standards.

Simply knowing that a student participated in a music education program at your school is insufficient; the arts learning profile of a school without dedicated practice or performance space and a single moment does not generate fruits that enable continuity and school culture inferred from the Arts.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Using a nuanced definition of an arts education program and considering its immediate and broader contexts to specify the benefits of that program on children's development allows us to formulate more precise hypotheses about not only *which* benefits these programs can confer, but *how* these benefits can be conferred.

This understanding is a prerequisite for the intentional design of artistic experiences designed to produce a specific benefit and for understanding how defining and contextual factors make the realization of that benefit more or less likely.

Equally important, this understanding is a mark of a maturing science, capable of going beyond the observation of a phenomenon – such as the association between arts education and child development – to offer an explanation of that phenomenon.

Promoting socio-emotional development through education artistic can be an equifinal phenomenon, where many paths lead to the same end. However, this does not diminish the value of understanding each of these pathways, as each may be the most efficient path to a given social-emotional end for a given population of children.

We understand that, by formulating precise hypotheses about the effects of artistic education on the development of the first talent opportunity in children, young people and adults, the chances of responding to them in a timely manner are increased.

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