

Arts Education: An investment in quality learning

This paper reviews key research on the impact and outcomes of Arts Education to demonstrate how closely aligned its concepts and approaches are with the idea of quality education outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4. It is designed to contribute to UNESCO's Education and Culture section Vision Paper which explores how the two can work better together to help build safer, more inclusive and sustainable societies grounded in human rights.

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Executive summary

This paper reviews key research on the impact and outcomes of Arts Education (AE), with the objective of demonstrating how AE and its conceptualizations, methodological approaches, theoretical foundations and applications are closely aligned with the objectives and expectations of quality education as notably envisioned by Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on education.

For UNESCO (2006), AE is understood to include two different approaches:

- the teaching of art as an individual study subject and AE as developing learners' artistic skills, abilities and sensibilities;
- the mobilization of the arts, its tools, methods and stakeholders as a pedagogical approach, also referred to as 'arts in education' or 'learning through the arts.'

The evidence gathered in this paper points to six main conclusions.

- **Arts education contributes to the humanistic outcomes associated with quality education as captured in Target 4.7 of SDG 4 on education**, namely the promotion of values grounded in global peace, sustainability, justice and respect for cultural diversity and the development of social and emotional skills such as empathic concern and perspective-taking, all of which support personal and collective well-being and indices associated with increased societal happiness¹ such as healthy life expectancy, freedom and generosity. The possibilities for arts education to foster well-being and connection are particularly crucial during and following periods of social isolation such as those associated with the pandemic. In a time of climate crisis, arts education may support the necessary reimagining of ways to live with the earth.² Furthermore, AE fosters a positive public perception of the arts and cultural heritage, which play a key role in preserving and sustaining social cohesion.

- The evidence demonstrates that **the “learning of the arts” positively impacts learning in ways that are relevant to broader academic and non-academic outcomes** (see Tables 1 and 2). It has been associated with improvements in mathematics performance, writing skills, reading achievements, creativity, student engagement and attendance, as well as perseverance in pursuit of educational goals and classroom behaviours (e.g. measured for example in terms of reduced disciplinary incidents). The durability and generalizability of these transferable skills from the arts to other disciplines requires more research and policy attention. However, this should not be an obstacle for undertaking important steps towards investing in the development of AE programmes that are culturally-adapted, sensitive to diverse learners, and celebrate the transformative potential of engaging with the arts both within and outside of the curricular context.

- Arts education **fosters teacher innovation and collaboration**, positively impacting school culture and can help students gain a sense of mastery and accomplishment and engage with their communities. Indeed, AE introduces pedagogical approaches, tools and materials that can help create holistic and transformational learning experiences, in and out of the classroom context, that resonate with young people and nurture their motivation to learn. Teachers, administrators and

¹ World Happiness Report 2020 - <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2020/>

² UNESCO Education and Foresight Working Paper - <https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/news/just-published-learning-become-world-education-future-survival>

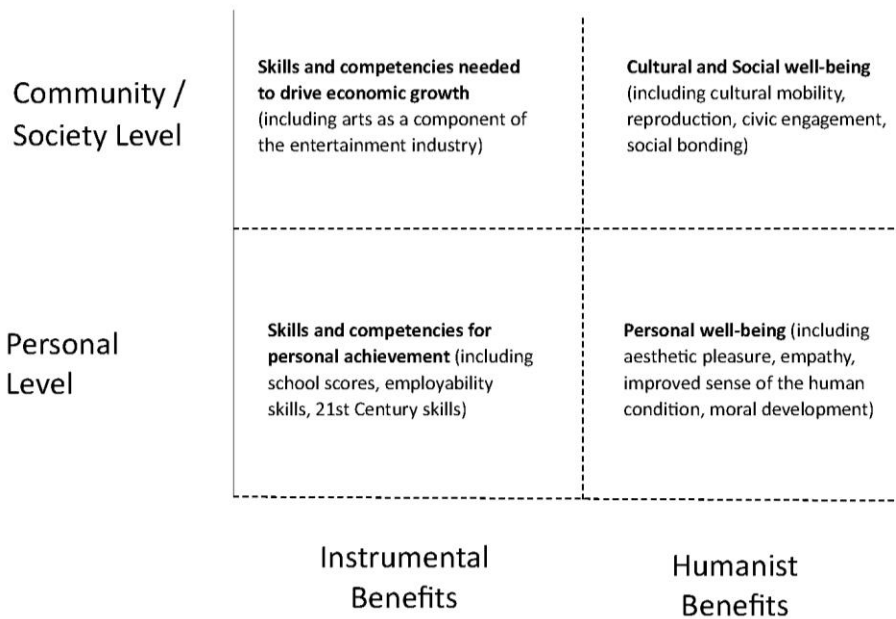
policy-makers must therefore be kept apprised of the evidence of the impact of AE on quality education outcomes and encouraged to innovate their approaches as they make decisions about which pedagogical resources and partnerships are worth their investment to improve learning outcomes.

- By linking formal and non-formal learning settings, including both in-person and digital cultural spaces such as museums, festivals, performance venues and cultural centres, AE **supports the capacity-building of artists and cultural bearers, while expanding the pedagogical role of cultural institutions and spaces**. Harmonies among formal education and cultural spaces provide rich opportunities to enliven pedagogies and enlarge the work of cultural practitioners and knowledge bearers.

- Considering the nature of local and Indigenous knowledge in spanning language, cultural practices, land use practices, social interactions, ritual and spirituality, AE holds potential to **support knowledge revitalization for Indigenous peoples**, which have been historically compromised or delegitimized within traditional education settings.³ Through holistic, community- and land-based arts education practices, situated in both formal and non-formal settings, Indigenous ways of knowing and being may be validated and enlivened.

- Last but not least, by building on the economic potential of the arts and creative industries, AE **creates opportunities for employment and economic growth**, which cannot be underestimated. According to 2017 UNESCO data (before the outbreak of the COVID pandemic), in countries with high levels of GDP per capita, the rate of cultural employment ranges from 3% to 8% of total employment, which is not negligible. In some countries with lower GDP per capita, we observe the percentage of the population working in the culture sector reaching almost 10%, as is the case in Mexico⁴.

Figure 1. Summarizing the benefits of arts education



³ UNESCO LiNKS - <https://en.unesco.org/links/transmission>

⁴ UNESCO UIS - <http://uis.unesco.org/en/news/uis-data-show-importance-culture-sector-workforce>

- On a methodological note, the review of existing research highlights the **limitations of quantitative methods and the absence of evaluation mechanisms to assess the contribution and impact of AE to learning**. As shown throughout this review, to date, empirical work provides scant quantitative evidence on the impact of AE due to contextual factors that limit the use of experimental designs. However, the relative absence of such quantitative evidence does not imply that there is no causal link between AE and wider learning outcomes. Rather, policy-makers are best served by considering results from the gamut of experimental, mixed-method and qualitative studies being consistently produced in the field and which show promising results in terms of the potential of AE to respond to the challenges of seeking more holistic outcomes of quality education systems. It is therefore necessary to invest in qualitative and mixed methodology research that offers richly detailed case studies, ethnographies and accounts of creative practices by artist-teachers and learners, which can further inspire and guide educational policies.

1. Introduction

Rationale and purpose of the paper – UNESCO’s interest in this area of education stems from its unique mandate, which intersects the domains of education, culture, heritage, creativity and arts. From this institutional perspective, linking education and culture is not new for the Organization. Since the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1998) and even earlier, as initiated in the 1947 inquiry on music and the visual arts in general education⁵, developed through the instigation of the International Society for Education Through Art (InSEA) in 1954, and later conveyed by the 1972 Faure Report⁶, education and culture are inter-woven in numerous ways that vary both within and between generations and across cultures and societies.

It is, however, less widely acknowledged and understood how 'culture' – defined as a sector of social and economic activity and understood to include 'the total and distinctive way of life of a people or society'⁷ – can be a vector for improving the quality of education as framed by SDG 4 on education, and Target 4.7 SDG 4 in particular, which calls on countries to

by 2030, ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.

While educational processes and outcomes are clearly embedded in, and shaped by, culture, it remains to be determined how the Education Sector can intentionally leverage the “culture sector” - namely its assets, actors, institutions, processes, methods, resources and products – as well as arts specifically – namely the cultural practices and expressions of individuals and collectives – to improve the quality and relevance of learning. Some UNESCO initiatives, such as the strategy for Education for Health and Wellbeing, as well as special projects in Heritage Education, are already harmonizing culture and education work towards Target 4.7. However, there is still further to go in bringing AE to UNESCO’s aims for global citizenship education and education for sustainable development, which emphasize the importance of working together across sectors, towards a just and sustainable planet for all human and more-than-human life (Target 4.7)⁸.

⁵ Draft enquiry to Member States of UNESCO, National Commissions and other co-operating bodies: music and the visual arts in general education, UNESCO 1947. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000141302?posInSet=1&queryId=674e8c2e-58f1-4344-99d3-c09dff1b1546>

⁶ *Learning to Be: the world of education today and tomorrow* was developed in 1971-1972 and prepared by a commission chaired by Edgar Faure, a former Prime Minister and Minister of Education of France. The *Learning to Be* report warned of the risks of inequalities, privation and suffering and emphasized the universal features education. The Faure report called for the continued expansion of education and for lifelong education. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000223222?posInSet=2&queryId=a5cc3978-fb9f-44d1-918d-ceed2e7a0318>

⁷ *Our Creative Diversity*; UNESCO 1994, page 21. Also see *Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity*, 2001. In its anthropological sense, “Culture” refers to the people’s way of life – the different values, norms, knowledge, skills, individual and collective beliefs – that guide individual and collective action. In this sense of values and norms, culture is understood as a stock of intangible renewable resources upon which people draw inspiration and through which they express the meaning they give to their existence and its development. Culture also refers to a sector of social and economic activity dealing with the diverse manifestations – past and present – of human intellectual and artistic creativity and comprising individuals, organizations and institutions responsible for their transmission and renewal. The arts and cultural expressions, together with these individuals and institutions constitute what is commonly regarded as the “cultural sector”, a policy domain, concerned mainly with heritage and creativity.

⁸ *Harnessing culture in times of crises*, UNESCO 2020. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373383>

As a first step in this direction, this paper aims to present the evidence that establishes how AE, in all its aspects – its conceptualizations, methodological approaches, theoretical foundations and applications – has the potential to help ensure the achievement of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by positively impacting on learning outcomes within pedagogical contexts and builds learners’ capacities, throughout life, to fulfil broader socio-cultural and humanist goals such as those outlined in Target 4.7 and which require developing culturally, politically and socially-sensitive citizenship ideals.

UNESCO’s commitment to Arts Education- UNESCO’s longstanding commitment to supporting AE has been evident since its inception. Following a long commitment to AE since 1946, in 1999, UNESCO stepped up its engagement in the field when the 156th Session of UNESCO’s Executive Board launched the International Appeal for the Promotion of Arts Education and Creativity in Schools. The Appeal then paved the way for the organization of two world conferences on AE (Lisbon in 2006 and Republic of Korea in 2010) and the adoption of the *Road Map for Arts Education* in 2006 that helped to promote a common understanding among its Member States and all stakeholders of the importance of AE and its essential role in improving the quality of education.

Building on this seminal work, UNESCO’s Member States specifically requested in November 2019 that the Organization increase its commitment to AE⁹.

Structure of the paper – In Section 2, quality education and AE are defined to provide readers with a clear understanding of the parameters of this study. Section 3 underlines the challenges in assessing the impact of AE before presenting, in Section 4, the results of recent studies on the learning outcomes of AE¹⁰. Finally, in Section 5, the paper addresses some of the arguments that are typically invoked to limit investment in AE and provides some recommendations for policy-makers, teachers and practitioners who wish to address these challenges in view of prioritizing AE. The paper ends with succinct concluding remarks in Section 6.

⁸ *Harnessing culture in times of crises*, UNESCO 2020. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373383>

⁹ 40 C/Resolutions 51 – Promoting awareness of arts education and international Arts Education Week; and 40 C/Resolution 48 – World Art Day adopted on 26 November 2019

¹⁰ NB - The majority of the literature reviewed suffers from being published mainly in English and could be seen as enforcing a cultural hegemony that is biased towards the occident. However, the Paper includes results of systematic reviews – which by definition are broad-ranging in scope when selecting studies for inclusion - and to also describe recent case studies that approach the evaluation of AE curricula and interventions in minority racial or cultural contexts, as well as in geographical areas that cover the global South.

2. Conceptual clarifications

What do we mean by “quality education”? UNESCO’s understanding of quality education is captured in SDG 4 on education and its ten targets¹¹, which call on countries to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.

As stated therein and enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26), for UNESCO (2004, 2007), quality education is much more than literacy and numeracy. It involves ensuring that learners of all ages develop throughout life a wide range of skills, attitudes, values and behaviours that support their personal development, health, well-being and active participation in the social, cultural, political and economic development of their societies. Built into this vision is the idea that quality education is a humanistic endeavour that fosters values of cultural diversity and acknowledges the contribution of culture to sustainable development (SDG 4 - Target 4.7).

Reading in between the lines of SDG 4, we distinguish a broader understanding of the notion of quality education, governed by five dimensions, that is, relevance to the current context, pertinence to individual lived experience, equity, effectiveness and efficiency (Tawil et al., 2012). Such an inclusive conception of quality education allows policy-makers to thread together three distinct and well-researched pedagogical approaches that are at the heart of AE:

- **Learner-centred** pedagogies support sense-making through the arts, by connecting to learner’s lived experiences, relationships and connections to the human and non-human world.
- **Competency-based** education supports learner acquisition of core competencies that span disciplines and learning spaces, providing an integrative approach to AE towards lifelong learning. In learning by doing, students deepen their competencies in relation to evolving and increasingly complex contexts rather than to static curriculum.
- **Socio-communal** AE links learning within the broader social, cultural, economic and political dimensions of the local context. While it supports development of learner competencies, therefore, AE can also connect with surrounding communities, lands and relations to support broader social aims.

What is Arts Education? UNESCO has taken care to approach AE from two distinct angles: ¹² the first focuses on art as an individual study subject and AE as a field of education that develops learners’ artistic skills, abilities and sensibilities; the second is to treat the arts as a pedagogical tool or method, which can also be referred to as “arts in education” or “learning through the arts”. Similarly, AE can also be understood as connecting to a separate form of knowledge in and of itself, where signs and symbols tap into ways of knowing beyond language¹³.

UNESCO’s *Roadmap for Arts Education* (UNESCO, 2006) argues that AE is core to quality education as it aims to achieve the following four objectives:

¹¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

¹² This understanding evolved on the basis of deliberations held during the World Conference on Arts Education, which took place from 6 to 9 March 2006 in Lisbon, Portugal and led to the development of a “Roadmap for Arts Education”. This document explores the role of Arts Education in meeting the need for creativity and cultural awareness in the 21st Century. It also contains numerous examples of Arts education practices and organizations.

¹³ Roper, B., & Davis, D. (2000). Howard Gardner: Knowledge, learning and development in drama and arts education.

- Uphold the human right to education and cultural participation¹⁴
- Develop individual capabilities and opportunities
- Improve the quality of education
- Promote the expression of cultural diversity.

In academic literature, conceptions of AE straddle the disciplinary realms of learning both within and through the arts, privileging an understanding of AE as a well-rounded pedagogical experience that develops holistic, creative, collaborative persons with a deep appreciation for the arts in an increasingly complex, multicultural and diverse society.

In the realm of AE, educational content refers to the artistic skills as well as the subjective aesthetic or artistic quality associated with the visual, musical, performative, multimedia or other art forms. Furthermore, AE is expected to help people develop a critical appreciation of the role of arts in developing civic engagement, critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Eisner, 2006; Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013).

¹⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 on the right to education and Article 27 on the right to cultural participation stating that everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

3. Methodological limitations

Though research is showing that AE has a positive impact on learning, it is often stated in the literature that the generalization of such findings remains a challenge for the reasons outlined in this Section.

Lack of longitudinal studies – There is a dearth of longitudinally designed empirical studies, which can attest, throughout time, to the cognitive, behavioural and socio-economic impact of developing, implementing and evaluating AE programmes both within and outside of the school context. This means that the results of the studies that are detailed in this paper are very specific to their original context and consequently cannot be generalized. For this reason, we invite readers to refer to the original publications referenced in this paper in order to understand the conditions of implementation of AE and, should they wish, to adapt the curricular programmes to their specific context.

Lack of comparative studies – Relatedly, few studies are comparative in scope, making it difficult to speak to consistency and variability of AE pedagogies, theories, and impacts across cultural and educational contexts. In keeping with the above, the results from studies detailed below may not therefore be universalized but may instead indicate possibilities for translation and adaptation. This limit also indicates a need for comparative research across diverse education systems, regions and communities, as well as research originating in underrepresented areas.

Research method limitations – Experimental designs¹⁵ – although valued for their ability to describe causal relations – are unable to account for the myriad other conditions that impact the depth and effectiveness of classroom instruction relating to AE. This lack of ecological validity of experimental designs means that conclusions from such studies cannot capture the full range of variables in play within an actual classroom or learning environment, which determine, and result from, the learning experience.

¹⁵ We understand “experimental design” as a research design that aims to eliminate all factors that influence outcomes except for the cause being studied (independent variable). All other factors are controlled by randomization, investigator-controlled manipulation of the independent variable, and control of the study situation by the investigator, including the use of control groups. For more information please consult Creswell, John W. and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018

4. Evidence of the impact of Arts Education

Given the above-described limitations, the question arises as to how research might best describe the multiple humanist dimensions of quality education as understood by UNESCO. To address this concern, our review presents evidence from a range of methodological perspectives including systematic reviews, longitudinal multi-method studies and case studies. The most significant findings of these studies are summarized in Table 1 and detailed below, highlighting AE's contribution to the achievement of SDG 4 and Target 4.7 in particular.

Table 1: Summary of impacts of various types of AE on learning outcomes as presented in Section 4.

Type of AE	Learning outcomes*
General arts Instruction	Social skills
	Academic self-regulation
	Empathy
	Perspective-taking
	Relationship-building
	Academic achievement
	Cognition
	Writing skills
	Attendance
	Health-promoting behaviours
	Reduced stress
	Reduced disciplinary incidents
	Motivation for higher education
	Improved test scores for poorly-performing students
Music instruction	Spatial-temporal abilities
	IQ scores
	Reading skills
	Language skills
	Mathematics learning
	Self-concept
	Self-efficacy
	Introspection
	Personal growth

	Confidence Expression Motivation and persistence Social belonging and group cohesion Academic achievement
Dance instruction	Reading achievement Creative thinking Stress reduction
Theatre education	Verbal skills
Visual AE	History learning Mathematics learning Creative thinking Academic achievement Verbal skills
Multi-arts activities	Mathematics learning Verbal skills

In addition to learner outcomes, research indicates that AE also contributes to broader social aims by supporting:

- Bridges across knowledge systems
- Local and Indigenous knowledge
- Ecological awareness and care for the environment
- Reduction of social inequalities
- Enhancement of healthy civil society by fostering respectful outlooks and behaviours towards those perceived as 'different'

4.1. The learning of the arts, notably music, dance and the integration of multi-arts activities in classrooms has a positive impact on academic and non-academic learning outcomes¹⁸

- In a systematic review conducted by See and Kokotsaki (2016) to investigate empirical evidence as to whether arts participation resulted in improved learning outcomes in children aged three to 16 years, evidence was found indicating that instruction in music, dance and the integration of multi-arts activities in classrooms impacted learning outcomes. In the case of music, medium-strength impacts¹⁶ were seen in spatial-temporal abilities, IQ scores, reading and language skills,

¹⁶ Small, medium and large impacts refer to effect sizes calculated as part of systematic reviews conducted in specific disciplines and relative to specific designs employed in the studies themselves. For more information, please consult [Cohen, Jacob \(1988\). *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*. Routledge. ISBN 978-1-134-74270-7](#)

improved self-concept, self-efficacy as well as academic motivation. Dance classes showed impact on reading achievement, creative thinking and reduction of stress. Multi-arts activities showed impacts on both mathematics and verbal skills. Finally, in the context of visual arts, positive impacts were seen in learners' outcomes related to history classes, mathematics as well as creative thinking. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

It should however also be noted that the authors of the reviews mitigated their findings because deficiencies were found in some of the research designs employed, such as the lack of replicability and the preponderance of correlational studies as opposed to those, which were experimental or quasi-experimental in nature.

- The OECD published a meta-analytical study led by Winner et al. in 2013, which investigated the impact of AE on academic skills in non-art subjects by looking at more than 500 studies published in the domains of education and psychology in 11 languages across the world. Building on the *Reviewing Education and Arts* project from 2000, the OECD considered a wide variety of methodological approaches in selecting studies for its report thereby compensating for the lack of availability of longitudinal and experimental research.

The meta-analytical study found that multi-AE can lead to improved academic outcomes. They uncovered that music education positively impacted IQ and academic achievements. Theatre education was found to be linked to improved verbal skills while visual arts showed the weakest and most tenuous links to overall academic or verbal skills. In addition, the study reported that some studies demonstrated the relationship between enrolment in AE programmes and the improved motivation of learners to persist with their scholastic endeavours. Tentative evidence of AE impacting social skills, academic self-regulation, as well as empathy, perspective-taking and other humanist outcomes of learning was also identified. Key results of the meta-analysis are summarized in Table 1.

Rashid National Museum (Egypt) providing new learning opportunities and making vital connections between people, their heritage, culture and history. The Rashid National Museum was established in 1959 in the historical city of Rashid, Egypt where the Rosetta Stone was discovered. The museum holds over three hundreds artifacts. The Education Department of the museum regularly organizes workshops using the arts, crafts and archeology for the community. In December 2019, a Workshop on Ceramic Calligraphy was held to coincide with the International Day of Arabic Language (18 December). Workshop participants learned the skills in, and the science behind, producing ceramic plates with Arabic calligraphy, linking their works to the global celebration of the International Day of Arabic Language. Moreover, with the facilitation of the Egyptian National Committee for the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the workshop included a group of students enrolled in a Heritage Science Programme at an Egyptian university.

To know more: <https://www.facebook.com/rashidnationalmuseum/>

4.2 Arts education – including both the learning of the arts and learning through the arts – improves the quality of educational systems and positively impacts student engagement, motivation, attendance and perseverance.

Longitudinal studies in AE have examined the impact of sustained implementation of arts-based curricula on school-based stakeholders including administrators and teachers. Some of the studies analyzed also report on key indicators of student engagement – including attendance and perseverance – which speaks to the broader motivational and sustainable impact of AE on learners (see Table 1 above).

- A report published by Duma (2014) details the results of three independent longitudinal studies that measured the student, teacher and school-level impacts of the first decade of implementation of the *Changing Education Through Arts* programme in the USA, which saw the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts enter into a long-term and intensive collaboration with several schools. In evaluating the instructional design of this arts-based pedagogical programme, studies found that the approach which favoured professional learning was most responsible for the success of the programme in schools. Learner outcomes, which were impacted most from the programme were increased student engagement from both a social and academic standpoint, improved cognition, and gains in standardized test scores for poorly performing students. As a result of the programme, teachers were more supportive of integrating arts for a diverse set of learners and were more likely to use collaborative pedagogical strategies to enable learners of differing abilities to succeed. At a school level, the studies demonstrated that a culture of change had been established which promoted administrative support, teacher collaboration and learner-centred pedagogies.
- A longitudinal study from 2012 to 2016 measured the impact of the ‘Window on a Wider World’ (WOWW) fine arts enriched programme on 54 rural elementary level public schools in Texas, USA, (Sharp & Teigs, 2018). WOWW provided specific administrative, pedagogical and learner-centred support for the integration of dance, music, theatre and visual arts in curricular approaches being adopted in Texas public schools. Results showed significant relationships between participation in the arts-based pedagogical WOWW programme and increases in student achievement as well as improved attendance rates in school.
- The Houston Education Research Consortium in Texas, USA, commissioned a true experimental study with randomized class assignments of over 10,000 3rd to 8th grade learners from 42 Houston-area schools involved in enriched AE experiences via school-community collaborations, which partnered teachers and their learners with local arts organizations, cultural institutions and teacher-artists (Bowen & Kisida, 2019). The study found improved learner behaviours in terms of reduced disciplinary incidents, increased writing achievement on standardized tests, compassion for others, engagement, empathy as well as greater motivation to continue to higher education.
- Egana delSol, Contreras and Valenzuela (2019) report the results of a longitudinal study which took place between 1996 and 2003 in rural Chile. This study explored the cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes of an extra-curricular youth orchestra programme involving 27 youth and at-risk participants in a low socio-economic context. The analyses controls for selection bias and demonstrates the positive effects of the immersive music education programme on standardized language and mathematics tests, and even goes on to show how traits such as persistence are developed during the specific AE programme.

“A todas luces, diálogo de saberes entre ciencia y arte a dialogue” (In all lights: a dialogue of knowledge between science and art)

Students and teachers, from elementary/primary schools which form part of the UNESCO Associated Schools Network in six Mexican States, mobilized around the theme of “light” through a national project entitled: *“A todas luces, diálogo de saberes entre ciencia y arte a dialogue” (In all lights: a dialogue of knowledge between science and art)*. In collaboration with experts and scholars in science and art, the participating students discovered the phenomena of luminescence, fluorescence, the addition and subtraction of colors, reflection and refraction of light, optical illusions, and basic and general aspects of light and energy. In a primary school located in Monterrey, Nuevo León in Mexico, teachers, students and parents created a mural called “The Lights of Monterrey”. Through their creation they worked with physicists and well-known artists to experiment with Newton discs, which they had produced themselves, light bulbs and fluorescent and phosphorescent materials and paint. Today, the “Lights of Monterrey Mural” illuminates the school library and celebrates the commitment of the broader school community to children’s education.

4.3 Arts education – including both the learning of the arts and learning through the arts – fosters humanistic education outcomes and greater well-being, as well as providing learners with the opportunity to introspect and develop different ways of understanding the world.

Several recent case studies have demonstrated the impact of AE programmes and activities in serving the broader goals of quality education including the promotion of pluralism, perspective-taking, empathy, civic engagement and other broad humanistic outcomes. Art-making, as a form of creative expression, allows for the exploration of one’s own identity and the sharing of perspectives between learners. Working with local artists-teachers and engaging in traditional art-making processes constitute ways to recognize the value of traditional knowledge systems and “ways of knowing” that are embedded in communities and, in so doing, enrich the curriculum, and enliven the learning experiences of students (see Table 1 above).

- An empirical study undertaken by Kaitlyn J. Rathwell and Derek Armitage (Rathwell and Armitage, 2016) in the context of two Inuit communities in Nunavut, Canada, demonstrated that art and artistic processes can create bridges between knowledge systems by notably offering an opportunity to share skills and experiences. As pointed out by the authors of the research, these skills that are shared during the process of art-making can concern the artistic practice itself or the stories related to the significance of the artwork and its value to the community.
- Working with a theoretical framework grounded in developing resilience and in the context of formerly incarcerated African-American youth in an alternative schooling programming in Southern California, Lea et al. (2016) found that arts-based educational programming provided opportunities to build prosocial and supportive relationships with fellow learners and educational personnel. Specifically, music and poetry lessons impacted these marginalized youths’ motivation and sense of academic self-efficacy. They also reduced various psychological measures of distress.
- Elsewhere, Bertling (2015) describes how to build empathetic concern in middle-school students – specifically in the context of learning about ecological and climate crises – through a critical place-based art education programme being operated in North America. This curriculum focuses on

ecological awareness and the development of arts-based methods to learn about the environment, how to care for nature, and take responsibility for sustainably ensuring the continued protection of the natural environment.

- A qualitatively-oriented case study by Cain et al. (2020) describes how participatory music-making practices positively impact the well-being of Baltic, Latin American, Caribbean and newly-arrived immigrant and refugee populations in Brisbane, Australia. The improved social, mental and emotional outcomes of these marginalized groups include introspection, personal growth, self-esteem, confidence, expression, social belonging, group cohesion and reduced feelings of isolation.
- A recent study commissioned by WHO found that arts-making directly improves well-being by affecting the social determinants of health, for example, by reducing social inequalities, supporting child development, encouraging health-promoting behaviours and supporting caregiving (WHO, 2019)¹⁷. A study¹⁸ conducted on the basis of data from the USA General Social Survey examined the impact of participation in the performing arts (audience-based participation in the arts) and art-making on three specific dimensions of civil society: civic engagement, social tolerance and other-regarding behaviour. The multivariate analysis found strong evidence that the arts enhance civil society. Both audience-based participation in the arts and personal participation in creating art are linked to higher levels of civic engagement, higher levels of social tolerance on some dimensions of the measure, and higher levels of respectful behaviours towards those considered as 'different'. The findings of the study demonstrate a strong association between the arts and individual-level social outcomes that contribute to the health of civil society.

Civic-Care project, Ghana, for young people aged 15-35 years. Civic-Care is an AE project that provides young people with the opportunity to connect, become civically conscious and participate actively in the development of communities. The initiative enables participating youth to voice their concerns, step-up and take action on pertinent issues using the visual arts, drama (stage-plays), creative writings. Topics covered include using culture to promote the 17 SDGs; the UN Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (and 2020 General Elections in Ghana); sanitation, pollution and climate change; inequalities related to persons with disabilities; breaking silence and secrecy to prevent/end and report on violence and abuse against women, girls and boys; and promoting women's rights in communities and to migrants and refugees. Through AE activities, the project reports an increase in civic awareness and skills among youth and allowed for the designation of youth-friendly spaces in communities.

To know more - <https://unescoghana.org/call-for-submissions-young-peoples-e...>

¹⁷ WHO, 2019. https://www.euro.who.int/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/412535/WHO_2pp_Arts_Factsheet_v6a.pdf

¹⁸ *Impact of the Arts on Individual Contributions to US Civil Society*; Kelly Leroux & Anna Bernadska; Pages 144-164 |; Published online: 15 May 2014; <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2014.912479> cited in <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2019/02/12/new-evidence-of-the-benefits-of-arts-education/>

5. Busting the myths about Arts Education

Despite the availability of evidence showing the value of AE programmes at many levels – personal and communal (see Section 4) – it is often not considered a priority in education sector planning. Some of the arguments put forward against AE are addressed hereunder alongside some recommendations for policy-makers, teachers and practitioners invested in promoting AE with a view to contributing to social development and well-being.

- **How do we know if AE is beneficial and worth the investment?** Evidence of the positive impact of AE on quality education is provided in this paper and should inform decisions about which pedagogical tools are worth the investment, notably in resource poor contexts. However, given the paucity of research on AE (see Section 3) and difficulties encountered when trying to incorporate AE into utilitarian frameworks guided by high-stakes assessments (e.g. Biesta, 2018; Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013), the collection of context-specific evidence should be envisaged. In view of reinforcing the business case for AE, the creation and implementation of programmes that aim to monitor, document and showcase the benefits of AE for learning can go a long way in responding to criticisms of AE being an unaffordable luxury in an already financially burdened education system.

- **Does AE improve employability?** Existing research makes it possible to dispel the notion that AE is not important to the development of knowledge, skills and competencies that are relevant for employment, even though this is not the primary value of AE. Though it cannot be empirically demonstrated that AE promotes creativity – a sought after skill – AE has been shown to promote “the acquisition of artistic habits of mind included to mean not only the mastery of craft and technique, but also skills such as close observation, envisioning, exploration, persistence, expression, collaboration, and reflection – the skills in thinking and creativity and the social and behavioural skills that are developed in the arts”¹⁹ – and which are conducive to innovation in the world of work.

AE can also leverage the fact that it nurtures an appreciation for the arts and culture, which are steadily contributing to employment, economic growth and increased indices associated with societal happiness (Upitis, 2011). According to UNESCO data (UNESCO, 2017), in countries with high levels of GDP per capita, the rate of cultural employment ranges from 3% to 8% of total employment. The range is wider in contexts with lower GDP per capita. For example, in Mexico almost 10% of the population works in the culture sector compared to just 1% in El Salvador²⁰. Furthermore, the export of creative goods contributes significantly to international trade in some OECD countries, such as the US (above 40 billion US\$ of exports in 2015), Italy, Germany, France and the UK²¹. Policies grounded in the growing evidence of the financial, social and humanist potential of AE can only benefit its wider implementation in global curricular practices.

¹⁹ *Art for Art's Sake: The Impact of Arts Education*, OECD 2013.

<http://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/Art%20for%20Art's%20Sake%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

²⁰ UNESCO UIS - <http://uis.unesco.org/en/news/uis-data-show-importance-culture-sector-workforce>

²¹ Page 12. <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/venice-2018-conference-culture/documents/Culture-and-Local-Development-Venice.pdf>

Shaghafi (My Passion) – A platform created by the Ministry of Culture of Jordan for developing and cultivating the capabilities of young talents. The aim of this initiative is to broaden young peoples' employment opportunities and commitment to social development through the cultural and creative industries. It also seeks to develop learners' skills in these areas by providing easy, simplified and free training tools. After creating an account on the platform, learners can explore a wide range of online training courses, for example visual and plastic arts, musical arts, cultural industries and design arts. The platform offers short and intensive training courses lasting between two to eight hours and distributed in the form of practical 20-minute lessons.

To know more: <https://www.shaghafi.gov.jo/>

- **Why invest in programmes that cater to the interests of a small number of learners interested in the arts?** AE is not exclusively about developing artistic abilities and technical skills. AE is also an effective means to reach out to all learners, stimulate their curiosity and desire to learn, and achieve a wide range of learning outcomes. For example, AE nurtures an appreciation of the arts and artistic communities. The process of art-making also constitutes a way of connecting learners to their natural environment and cultural heritage through storytelling, the discovery of legends, songs, poetry, dance, traditions, etc. Through these and other practices, learners develop a commitment to the preservation of their cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) and respect for that of others, for one's own enjoyment and the generations to follow (Elkins et al. 2016). In short, AE has been shown to impact humanistic outcomes associated with quality education such as the development of personal well-being, social justice and related markers of a peaceful, just and sustainable society.

From this perspective, AE should be seen as an instrument to support the achievement of inclusive²² and equitable quality education (SDG 4, and Target 4.7 in particular) and can be promoted in this context.

If, to the contrary, AE is perceived narrowly as a discipline, rather than as a pedagogical approach that can be integrated throughout the curriculum, it is far too often shifted to an out-of-school activity and de-prioritized. We therefore miss out on an opportunity to use the arts as a pedagogical tool for holistic learning experiences. We also deprive educators of a valuable resource to reconnect students to school and the learning process.

- **Does AE accentuate gaps between students from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds?** Recent research demonstrates the contrary. AE can in fact help close the achievement gap between higher and lower-income students. According to a report produced in 2012 entitled "The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth,"²³ (Cattarral et al. 2012) that reviewed four longitudinal studies, students with low socioeconomic backgrounds and high levels of arts engagement had higher school averages, graduated from secondary school at higher rates and expressed a stronger motivation to pursue their education than those with lower rates of arts engagement. Another study conducted in 2015 by the President's Committee on the Arts & Humanities (USA) assessed changes in mathematics and reading proficiency at eight "Turnaround Arts Initiative schools", which are part of the U.S. Department of Education's State Incentive Grants programme that targets the bottom-performing 5 per cent of schools

²² "Inclusive" is here understood to mean overcoming barriers to quality educational access, participation, learning processes and outcomes, and ensuring that all learners are valued and engaged equally. See: *A Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education*. UNESCO, 2017. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254>

²³ A summary of findings on the subject can be found in: *How the Arts Advance Student Learning*, October 2017. The Oregon Community Foundation. https://oregoncf.org/Templates/media/files/research/Benefits_of_Arts_Education_9_2017_Final.pdf

in each state. The evaluation revealed that students from the Turnaround Arts schools, which adopted “learning through the arts” programmes as part of their school improvement strategy, performed better in both these subjects, compared to similar State Incentive Grant schools and in comparison to district-wide averages.

- **Arts Education can only be provided in well-endowed school environments. How can it be provided in a resource poor context?** Viewing AE as a luxury raises the question of cost in terms of time, skill and basic funding. These concerns are not insurmountable if AE is regarded as a pedagogical tool, rather than as a discipline or technical skill, that enhances learning strategies and helps address the multiple intelligences of learners. Finding creative ways to incorporate AE is possible by drawing inspiration from the numerous examples²⁴ from around the world that show how AE is being delivered in affordable ways, by building collaborations with the community, engaging local artists and tradition-bearers as teachers, and using sustainable and/or refurbished materials. Notably in resource poor contexts, AE can create opportunities for the recognition and consideration of local art, fostering the integration of local knowledge systems in the classroom and, above all, recognizing and valuing the artistic knowledge and creativity of members of local communities. As seen in the case of Haitian Raras, the creative process involves seeing what is available in the community, exploring how materials are used for artistic expression and discovering how the involvement and solidarity of communities can be mobilized.

Teacher’s Guide for Culture and Arts, bringing culture into the classrooms of Somalia. Over 700 school children in Somalia have already benefited from the new Teacher’s Guide for Culture and Arts activities in schools manual, which presents different art methods such as storytelling, theatre and visual art, to facilitate self-exploration and sharing of personal experiences among children. As part of the EU/UNESCO project “Promoting a culture of inclusion in Somalia” carried out in 2018 and 2019 in Somalia and implemented by the NGO International Committee for the Development of Peoples (CISP), a 5-day training workshop was carried out for 48 teachers and mentors at 24 schools in Mogadishu and Galkayo on how to utilize the new Teacher’s Guide for Culture and Arts to effectively facilitate culture and art-based activities for children. Inspired by the UNESCO World Heritage in Young Hands Education Programme, CISP collaborated with teachers, experts in the education sector and in arts methodologies to develop the manual as a tool for teachers and mentors for the facilitation of extracurricular sessions using culture and arts to promote cultural heritage, peace and social inclusion in primary and secondary schools in Somalia. The manual is available online in both English and Somali and can be used by teachers in other countries interested in strengthening AE in their classrooms.

English version of teachers guide: https://www.cisp-som.org/assets/usermedia/resources/EG_TeachersGuide_Book_Online.pdf (link is external)

CISP: www.cisp-som.org (link is external)

²⁴ Examples to be found here : <https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/artseducationweek>

6. Concluding remarks

Given the diverse research evidence summarized in this paper, it is possible to confidently assert that AE is an effective learning tool to achieve humanistic inclusive and equitable quality education.

Before concluding, it is imperative to recognize the challenge that exists in demonstrating the positive impact of AE due to conflicting theoretical approaches within the field of AE. Depending on the theoretical approach adopted, researchers investigate the question of the effectiveness of AE through multiple lenses, without necessarily acknowledging the biases that impinge on the validity of their study. These tensions, explained hereunder, help to contextualize the evidence collected in the paper and open up a future research agenda.

One of the tensions in the field pertains to the predominance in classroom uptake and research of some sub-disciplines. As discussed by such AE scholars as Bamford (2006) and Bordeaux (2016), while the arts disciplines covered by curricula vary from one cultural, socio-economic and developmental context to the next, only the visual arts and music have been adopted extensively in arts classrooms worldwide. This situation limits the investigation of the effectiveness of performative AE including but not limited to theatre, dance, sculpture as well as arts tied to living heritage, such as storytelling and craftwork, which are specific to a cultural or social context. Due to these limits, paired implementation and research is necessary to expand knowledge about the efficacy of wide-ranging AE disciplines across contexts.

Another tension in the field relates to the treatment of epistemological biases. Critics argue that specific theoretical, philosophical and knowledge-making principles are given preferential treatment in the development of AE curricula and in research programmes. This situation establishes an inherent bias to the field that impacts the training of generations of educators, academics and policy-makers who, in turn, influence how AE is seen to contribute to human development. For example, canonical methods which draw from historically-focused and critically-acclaimed works of art exert the most influence on the development of pedagogical practices in most European AE curricula; this in turn influences the development of AE curricula in both developed as well as developing countries (Bamford, 2006). Such a focus on canonical or “world-acclaimed” works sustains a deep bias against diversity and has been critiqued as promoting a cultural hegemony and favouring a tunnel vision with respect to the kinds of arts that are valued. As a consequence, it leads to a lack of exposure to the multiple perspectives needed to build more pluralist notions of culture and of the role of arts in society. Such a bias furthermore nurtures a disconnect between AE and the transmission and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage – also referred to as “living heritage”. Even more deeply, this bias negates arts and AE as a form of knowledge, particularly when it is situated outside of the hegemonic centre. Future practice and further research are needed to upset this bias towards epistemological and creative justice, where AE can take multiple expressions and forms.

Finally, in a piercing critique of current theoretical practices in AE, Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013), echoed by Biesta (2018), propose re-orienting methodologies to focus on the event of “art-making” as the primary object of study in arts classrooms. In conceiving of “art-making” as an event, all stakeholders — including students, teachers, artists, tradition-bearers and related institutions — interact reflexively to make contextualized sense of the aesthetic and pedagogical practices that produce the art.

According to these tensions and limits, more qualitative and mixed-methods research that offers richly detailed case studies, ethnographies and accounts of creative practices by artist-teachers and learners are needed to further inspire and guide educational policies. At the same time, the existing research yields multiple lines of evidence that provide a foundation for how a diverse range of arts-based pedagogical materials impact learning across scholastic, cultural and socio-political contexts.

Indeed, we hope that both the evidence and existing gaps will motivate practitioners to take important steps towards investing in the development of AE programmes, particularly those that are culturally adapted, sensitive to diverse learners and celebrate the transformative potential of engaging with the arts both within and outside of the curricular context.

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