



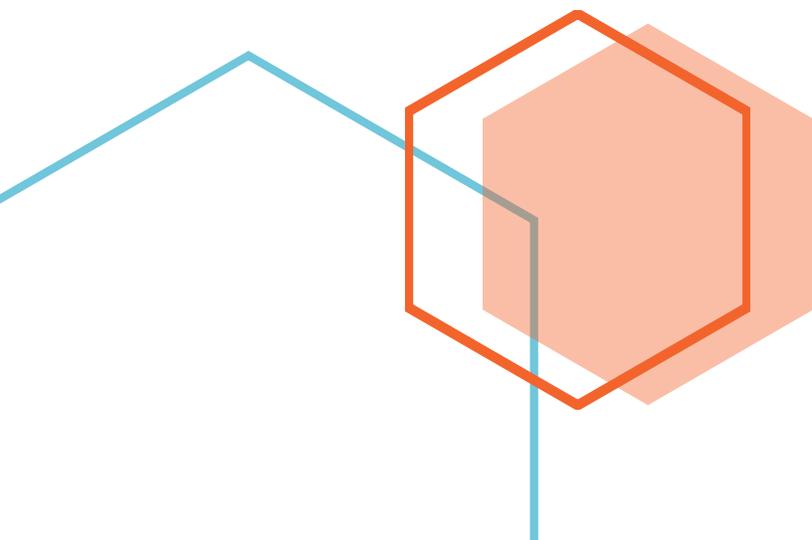
Arts Integration for Young Children



A POSITION STATEMENT OF THE SOUTHERN EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSOCIATION

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The arts provide critical links to success in school and life.

Imagine a world without architecture, music, theater, dance, and the visual arts. Most of human culture would not exist if academic ability were the whole of our intelligence. Many ideas, feelings, and sensations can only be understood or expressed through the arts. "Poetry, music, painting, dance, and other arts are not frills to be indulged if time is left over from the real business of education; they are the business of education." (Silberman, 1971)

The benefits of arts programs to society and our communities are obvious.

In areas where schools are struggling to close achievement gaps, and for children who need remedial instruction, arts education plays a critical role in boosting learning, achievement, and over-all development. "At a time when creativity and communication skills are at a premium, the arts should be used for their rich potential to captivate and engage students in learning" (Former Secretary of Education Riley).

As children sing, dance, paint, and sculpt, critical links to achievement are forged.

Through arts activities, foundational patterns and dispositions needed for success in school and life are set up and reinforced. New experiences are integrated and anchored within the brain, enabling children to unlock mysteries of our symbol system (literacy), make sense of their world (science & mathematics), and learn to live and work peaceably with others (social studies)



SECA believes that arts learning enriches, inspires, and enables profound human expression important to children's emerging capacity for joy and sense of well-being.

SECA recommends that we support and fully fund arts programs because of the foundational importance of these programs in promoting and enhancing all aspects of growth and development of young children. All children should be provided arts experiences every day.



In schools struggling to close achievement gaps, arts programs can be a key to success.

Young children who participate in the arts for at least three hours, three days a week for a year are (Catterall, 2002; Catterall, 2012):

- four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement,
- three times more likely to be elected to class office within their schools,
- four times more likely to participate in a math and science fair,
- three times more likely to win an award for school attendance,
- four times more likely to win an award for writing an essay or poem,
- two times more likely to read for pleasure, and
- four times more likely to perform community service.

Gains in dispositions for learning are critical outcomes of participation in arts programs.

SECA believes that arts learning is an integral part of a balanced, quality core curriculum and recommends that arts and movement experiences be integrated throughout the curriculum.

The arts develop the basic components of creativity such as originality, elaboration, fluency, and flexible thinking. These are essential skills for success in school and in life; they enable us to solve problems, predict outcomes, and develop ideas. Evidence of transfers of learning from the arts to academic and social development is substantial.

For example:

- **Reading and Language Skills:** As children sing, dance, paint, enact, listen to and compose music and poetry, they internalize the rhythms and patterns of our language. Fluency, vocabulary, and phonological abilities enable children to perceive and discriminate subtleties in sounds and patterns. Children's efforts to break the phonetic code and associate letters, words and phrases with sounds and meanings are supported. The arts also nurture comprehension, event-sequencing skills, sense-of narrative, understanding of character motivations, and most importantly, dispositions to read.
- **Writing:** Spatial reasoning skills, developed through music and movement activities, improve children's ability to plan and organize writing. Forms in music compositions coincide with literary elements such as: introductions, main ideas or themes, theme development, transition devices, and concluding statements or summaries. Symphonies, operas, even simple songs, contain many of the same elements that written verbal compositions contain: the ideas are just expressed through a different set of symbols. Practice with one symbol system reinforces skills in the other.
- **Mathematics:** Music reinforces brain patterns and connections in much the same way as mathematical thinking. As children clap, sing or dance rhythmic patterns and sequences, they



develop the spatial reasoning, spatial-temporal reasoning, and patterning skills that are fundamental to solving math problems and creatively engaging in scientific processes.

- **Sensory-Motor:** Sensory-motor learning is fundamental to every aspect of development for all children, but for the kinesthetic learner, arts provide the keys to learning.
- **Creativity:** Multi-arts experiences strengthen abilities that affect every aspect of intellectual accomplishment. Without these capacities, poetry, invention, constructions, music and literature would be impossible.
- **Social and Emotional Competence:** The desire to pursue and sustain learning is essential to achievement. For children to be successful in school and life, they must want to learn. Skills such as engagement, disciplined and sustained attention, persistence, and risk-taking are practiced and reinforced in arts and movement programs. In addition, children who regularly participate are absent from school less often, have fewer referrals for discipline, and report higher educational aspirations. They also show higher levels of confidence, impulse control, self-identity, problem-solving, conflict resolution skills, empathy, and social tolerance.

SECA recommends that teachers provide information to parents and policymakers concerning the foundational role that arts learning plays in children's development and that we assess our arts community resources to determine how to further promote and provide arts opportunities for children.

When parents and business leaders are polled regarding their expectations for children's education, they list (Catterall, 2002; Catterall, 2012):

- the cultivation of integrity
- cooperation
- leadership abilities
- social compliance
- conflict resolution skills
- collaboration skills
- emotional health
- tolerance
- moral development
- citizenship.

All of these abilities are developed or enhanced through regular participation in arts programs. In times of shrinking revenues or when policy makers feel pressured to focus on academic achievement, arts programs are in danger of being eliminated. Early childhood teachers understand that to eliminate these programs would be counterproductive and even damaging to children, robbing them of opportunities for developing potential. All who serve and act on behalf of children must inform the public about the value of arts and movement in the lives of children.



The working professionals in our arts communities can provide wonderful mentoring opportunities for young children. As children have first-hand experiences with artists and their work, an understanding of the representational nature of the arts, a sense of wonder, and the capacity for aesthetic responsiveness are fostered.

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Silverstein & Layne, 2010, pg. 1) defines art integration in the following way:

Arts Integration is an APPROACH to TEACHING in which students construct and demonstrate UNDERSTANDING through an ART FORM. Students engage in a CREATIVE PROCESS which CONNECTS an art form and another subject area and meets EVOLVING OBJECTIVES in both.

By this definition, the arts should not solely be a regular activity but a primary way that teachers teach and learners learn. This is best accomplished in a student-centered classroom environment that allows children to construct knowledge as they draw on prior experiences, engage in active hands-on learning that facilitates divergent thinking and problem solving, and creates spaces for children to learn from one another as they engage in curricular content through the arts.

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Additional Resources:

Arts Edge by The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts:

<https://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/>

Arts Education Partnership:

<http://www.aep-arts.org/>

The National Art Education Association:

<https://www.arteducators.org/>

The National Association for Music Education:

<https://nafme.org/>

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