

Fourth Graders' Rationale for Keeping Art Education in Schools:

Do Art Teachers Agree?

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Introduction

Art, music, and PE are considered “extras” in our schools. For most children in the US, the question of whether these classes should be part of the school day is salient. While children typically receive PE and arts classes (94% of elementary schools offer music and 83% offer art; Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012), they are also presented with messaging that these classes are on the brink of extinction (Richerme, 2011).

Because the existence of these classes is often threatened, a variety of justifications have been given for their retention. Some rationales are “intrinsic” (e.g., the joy associated with participation in the arts), while others are “extrinsic” (e.g., extra-curricular activities can help improve academic test scores; Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lacrin, 2013).

This is the first study to investigate the thoughts of those who have the most to lose when art education is threatened -- the children. Here, we report the arguments given by United States 4th graders for keeping art class in school, along with those of their art teachers, and contrast differences in responses.

Method

The studies described here come from a larger research project about habits of mind in Grade 4 art classes.

Participants

2158 Grade 4 students and 42 art teachers were recruited from private and public schools around the U.S. participated.

Measure

Children were randomly assigned to one of three groups and asked to write about art, music, or physical education class. Teachers were all assigned to the art condition. Children were given 10 minutes to answer the following prompt:

Pretend that the people in charge at your school have decided that art [music/PE] class is not important, and that students will not have art [music/PE] class anymore. Is getting rid of art [music/PE] class a good idea or a bad idea? Say why, and give as many reasons as you can. Pretend you're trying to convince a friend who doesn't agree with you-- what will you say to make them change their mind? It's okay to write your answer in a paragraph, in a letter, or in a bulleted list.

Coding

A team of 5 researchers and the PI developed a coding manual using inductive and deductive approaches, based on predications related to Studio Thinking (Hetland, Winner, Veenema & Sheridan, 2007/2013) and Teaching for Artistic Behavior (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009), approaches to visual art instruction.

A set of 100 responses per discipline was randomly selected for manual creation. The PI open-coded responses (Anfara & Mangione, 2012) and presented a list of these codes to the research team. All researchers then used this list as basis for creation of a final thematic coding manual consensually using the practice set of responses.

For final data coding, one coder was assigned to code each discipline. These coders underwent three training rounds of 40 responses each to measure inter-rater reliability. On the final round, a pooled Cohen's kappa was calculated using the coding platform Dedoose to measure agreement between the coder and the PI. These ranged from .81 to .87.

Each response was considered its own unit of analysis, and codes were tallied by discipline.

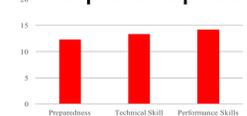
Previous Findings

A subset of 600 participants (200 each condition: music, art, PE) was analyzed to how responses differed between art disciplines.

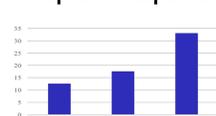
Are there rationales unique to art and unique to music?

To find out, for each code we subtracted the percentage given for music from the percentage given for art. Codes that differed the most (by over 10 percentage points) are shown below.

Music Specific Responses



Art Specific Responses



Music specific rationales refer to musical **content** – technical and performing skills, and being prepared to undertake future musical study.

Visual art specific rationales reference permission to exert **personal control** via feeling agentic, showing creativity, or personal voice (expression).

Thus, children feel that personal control is specific to art but not to music class. Might this due to messaging from their art teachers? To find out what kinds of signals art teachers give about the value of art class, we examined what teachers say in response to our question, and how these compare to what students say.

Current Findings

All responses from students in the art condition (n=675) and all art teachers (n=34) were analyzed using the following codes. (Codes that were not used by at least 15% of either teachers or students were omitted.)

Acceptance	"Everyone can make art."
Agentic Expression	"Art can show you really are."
Creativity	"Art gives me a chance to use my imagination."
Collaboration	"You get to work with your friends."
Confidence	"My art is something I can be proud of."
Develop Craft	"We learn how to sculpt."
Different Way of Learning	"We learn to think differently than we do in math."
Emotional Investment	"Art is my passion."
Emotional Wellbeing	"Art frees my mind."
Engage and Persist	"You can practice to get better."
Envision	"I use my imagination in art."
Express	"I show my feelings through my art."
Freedom	"We get to make choices in art."
Observe	"We practice looking at things really closely."
Opportunity	"Some kids may not have art supplies to use at home."
Other Skills	"Practicing art might make your handwriting get better."
Preparation/Academic Necessity	"We might need to know the basics of art when we go to college."
Problem Solving/General Learning	"Art helps your brain."
Reflect	"We're always evaluating what is good in our artwork."
Relevance	"I make art about things that I like."
Stretch and Explore	"In art, we try new things."
Ubiquity	"Art is everywhere."
Understand Art Worlds	"We learn about famous artists."

What are Children's and Teachers' Most Frequently Used Arguments?

The top responses (all responses that were included in at least 50% of responses) are listed below.

Student Responses		Percentage of Responses that Included Code
1	Emotional Investment	58%
2	Develop Craft	54%
Teacher Responses		Percentage of Responses that Included Code
1	Express	74%
2	Develop Craft	68%
3	Problem Solving/General Learning	68%
4	Stretch and Explore	56%
5	Creativity	53%
6	Acceptance	50%

Conclusions

Why do children feel personal control is unique to art class? Might this messaging from their art teachers?

Not only were personal control (agency, creativity, expression) responses that were unique to student responses for art (in comparison to music or physical education class), but these kinds of rationales were among the top 10 reasons given by students.

Teacher responses show evidence of their beliefs in personal control (expression, acceptance).

What are the most common answers for art students and teachers, and how do the two groups differ?

Both groups cite the development of craft as a top reason for learning art. Previous research (Hogan & Winner, 2017) shows that this is also a top answer for music and P.E., and therefore is not art-specific.

Overall teachers have a more diverse view of the benefits of art education than do students. For children, an intrinsic justification of “art for art’s sake” is most common. Essentially, because they “like it” is a top reason for Grade 4 children. Teachers, however, include more instrumental justifications, like that art “makes you smarter” or “helps your brain.” We conclude from this that at least up until age 9/10 years, children are not as influenced by instrumental rationale for arts education as adult art teachers.

Future Directions

Further analyses will examine the following questions:

Do teachers impart their particular beliefs about the value of art education onto their students?

Future analyses will look for alignment of responses between teachers and their individual students, which would provide stronger evidence that teachers directly or indirectly influence their students’ beliefs about why art education is to be valued.

Does the pedagogical approach of the art classroom influence children's responses?

Subsections of teachers/students in the sample employ the Studio Thinking framework (Hetland, Winner, Veenema & Sheridan, 2007/2013), which emphasizes thinking in the art room, or the Teaching for Artistic Behavior philosophy (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009), in which the students design and direct their own artworks. Future analyses will examine whether responses of students in these classrooms align with these pedagogical approaches.

Which of these rationales are most effective with decision makers?

Data collection will begin shortly to survey elementary school principals, often those who decide whether art education will or will not be present in the school day, to see which are most effective for advocacy.

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