



How High-Quality Arts Education Can Prepare Students for the Future

The learning capacities and abilities that visual arts education develops are essential knowledge and skills for all learners. However, in an era in which student learning is measured first and foremost by standardized test scores in reading and mathematics, the arts—along with many other subjects—are being impacted by this policy at state and local levels.

However, students learn a great deal in high-quality visual arts classes that is not captured on standardized tests. For example, as Hetland and Winner found, by teaching students to look through a cardboard frame called a viewfinder, teachers at Boston Arts Academy help students learn to *observe*—something naturalists, climatologists, writers, and doctors need to know how to do. In addition, visual arts teachers encourage students to form mental images and use them to *solve problems*—an ability that chemists and architects use to create models and that inventors use to think up new ideas. Learning to *innovate* is an important ability that standardized tests typically do not measure.

Outside of education, there is a growing consensus that these abilities are just as important as scientific and technical know-how for the 21st-century world young people are entering. “Corporate leaders in America believe that the success of America is going to depend on a

flow of innovative ideas,” according to Susan Sclafani, a former high-ranking official in the Bush Administration’s Department of Education and panel member of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce. “And, they believe the innovative ideas will come because students have the opportunity to engage in the arts.”

Moreover, visual arts instruction also helps students learn to value diverse perspectives and cultures, something that is increasingly important in a global society.

But skillful teaching is required. “Does visual arts learning offer a particularly good platform for developing creativity? I say yes,” says David Perkins. But, he cautions, “The transfer of learning from art to other domains is no free lunch. It won’t just happen. We have to help people to generalize from what they have done.”

Perkins argues strongly that more research is needed to determine what makes the knowledge and skills developed through visual arts education transferable to other domains. Such research would help teachers identify the necessary “bridging moves” that enable students to generalize their knowledge and skills into other areas of learning.