

The Arts Education Partnership

Making a Case for the Arts

How and Why the Arts are Critical to Student Achievement and Better Schools



For more information, including how to order copies of *Third Space: When Learning Matters* and *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement*, visit the AEP web site at www.aep-arts.org

The Arts Education Partnership is a coalition of more than 100 national education, arts, government, and philanthropic organizations that demonstrate and promote the essential role of the arts in enabling every student to succeed in school, life and work. The Arts Education Partnership is administered by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies through a cooperative agreement with the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education.



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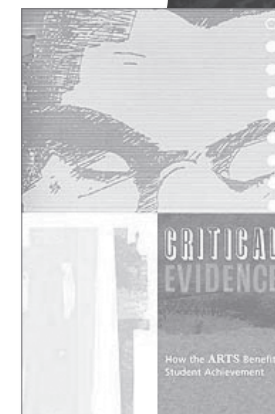
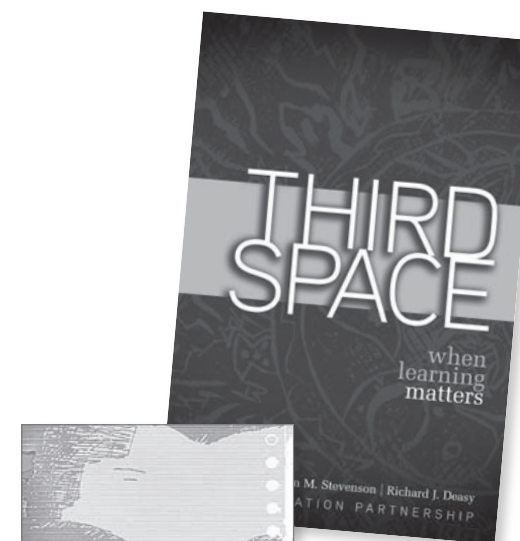


The Questions...

All students benefit from the opportunity to learn about and experience the arts. Study of the arts in its many forms – whether as a stand-alone subject or integrated into the school curriculum – is an essential part of achieving success in school, life and work. Yet, **how do we know** that study of the arts contributes to student achievement? **What does the research say** about how integration of the arts can lead to better schools?

The Answers

The answers to these and other questions are found in a new book published by the Arts Education Partnership (AEP). *Third Space: When Learning Matters* (2005) is based on a three-year research study that examined the impact of an arts-centered curriculum on school improvement. It describes the process of transformation in 10 elementary, middle and high schools serving economically disadvantaged students in rural and urban regions of the country.



Also Inside...

The benefits of arts education as described in *Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement* (2005), a booklet published by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in collaboration with the Arts Education Partnership. ►►



When Learning Matters

“*third space*”: a metaphor that describes the positive and supportive relationships that develop among students, teachers and the school community when they are involved in creating, performing or responding to works of art.

Third Space: When Learning Matters tells the story that the arts play an important role in changing education and encouraging new thinking about teaching and learning. “Third space” is a metaphor that describes the positive and supportive relationships that develop among students, teachers and the school community when they are involved in creating, performing or responding to works of art. It is the place where connections get made.

What is so striking about the schools described in *Third Space* is that they are not only high poverty schools beating the odds. Their accomplishment, in the powerful kinds of opportunities that they provide for teaching and learning, is one that would be formidable for any school anywhere. They provoke us to think anew about public education generally and what schools should be like as places—as communities of learning.

In each of the 10 schools in the study, the arts changed the school environment and in so doing opened new possibilities for teaching and learning and for building a sense of community within and around the school. The study documents multiple benefits for students, teachers and school communities resulting from these changes. Following is a sample of the findings.

Student Outcomes

Students are at the center of school transformation. Arts learning directly contributes to the development of their intellectual and personal capacities.

- For many students, where school had often been a place of failure and frustration, the experience of success in the arts was a revelation that learning matters – that they matter. As a result, they were more willing to do the hard work of learning.
- Learning in the arts helped students develop the sense that they can be agents of their own learning and that they can make a positive change in their own lives and in their surroundings. It contributed to their sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem.
- Improved student behavior and attendance rates were attributed to the schools’ arts programs. Students themselves reported that the arts kept them engaged in school. As one high school student noted, “If it wasn’t for this program, I wouldn’t be in school at this point.”
- Teachers and district officials credited their school’s arts programs for the improved scores of students on standardized tests, including improvement in reading and mathematics.



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Benefits for Teachers

Teachers are key in determining how meaningful the arts will be to students. As the arts become a part of the fabric of education at schools, the change has an impact not only on students, but also on teachers as well.

- Teachers reported increased satisfaction and renewal. They enjoyed teaching more, primarily because of the responsiveness of their students and the new level of collaboration with other teachers in the school.
- This satisfaction was evident not only in the way teachers talked about their work, but also in a reduction in teacher turnover reported at eight of the 10 schools.
- Teachers became more effective as they learned about their students through their artwork. As one teacher put it, the experience helps with “how to move them forward.”

Building Community

The “*third space*” experiences are not confined by the walls of the schoolhouse – the arts also lead to strong relationships between schools and their surrounding communities.

- All of the schools involved artists and arts organizations from the community who became an integral part of school life, partnering with teachers and students in programs during and beyond the school day.
- Schools used arts programs as a way for students to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of their local communities.
- Participation in the arts helped students to develop both individual and social skills, including tolerance and the ability to grapple with moral dilemmas. It helped students to avoid or change negative perceptions of other groups or individuals.
- Parents, teachers and administrators reported that arts programs were one of the most successful means for offering parents experiences they found helpful, relevant and rewarding for themselves and their children.

Benefits of Arts Education

Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement (2005) responds to the needs of policymakers, educators, parents and advocates for fact-based, non-technical language documenting the most current and compelling research on the value of arts learning experiences. The booklet was published by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in collaboration with the Arts Education Partnership.

One convenient way to sum up how study of the arts benefits student achievement is the recognition that learning in the arts is academic, basic and comprehensive. It is as simple as A-B-C.

A Learning in the Arts is ACADEMIC. Learning experiences in the arts contribute to the development of academic skills, including the areas of reading and language development and mathematics.

B Learning in the Arts is BASIC. Arts learning experiences contribute to the development of certain thinking, social and motivational skills that are considered basic for success in school, life and work. These fundamental skills encompass a wide range of more subtle, general capacities of the mind, self-perceptions and social relationships.

C Learning in the Arts is COMPREHENSIVE. The arts help create the kind of learning environment conducive to teacher and student success by fostering teacher innovation, a positive professional culture, community engagement, increased student attendance, effective instructional practice and school identity.