



HOW ARTS CAN BENEFIT

The Arts as Tools for Health Education¹

The arts have the potential to make a powerful contribution to health education in the community. The arts can promote an attitude of optimism and hope: “The arts foster an awareness that problems can have multiple solutions and questions multiple answers—that good things can be done in different ways” (Eisner, 1998). This reality can make a significant difference when seemingly insurmountable barriers arise.

The arts are increasingly used as a vehicle for learning. Why the arts in health education? To be effective, health education needs to begin with a people’s reality (McDonald, Antunez, & Gottemoeller, 2003). The culture that embodies the people’s history and aspirations is central to that reality. The arts provide a leveling effect, giving *all* people a voice, and through this voice their dreams can be articulated.

The arts also affect self-efficacy—a person’s belief in his or her ability to change. A positive identity of self and community expressed and reinforced through culture can give communities and individuals strength. Consider, for example, “Black is Beautiful,” the slogan from the 1960s that reflected and reinforced pride and emerging power in the African-American community. Further, the process of creating art is very individual and personal, which can be empowering and exhilarating, opening up new vistas of self-confidence (McDonald et al., 2003).

Not all art is created in isolation. Art that is shared develops and expands social support. Creating common reference points through culture breaks down community isolation and allows members to share their common experience and build collective vision (McDonald et al., 2003).

The arts can work in the service of community health projects in the following ways, often simultaneously (McDonald et al., 2003, pp. 165–167):

1. *To get people involved*—Using art forms or activities involves people who might otherwise be disinterested or intimidated by more explicitly health-oriented activities. The arts can make health education fun.
2. *To find out about a community*— The arts and literature can be a valuable strategy for conducting community needs assessments and mapping community assets.
3. *To change awareness and relay health education messages*—The arts and literature are powerful messengers. Because they reach into people’s feelings, they have the potential to shape consciousness. Positive messages can be developed and promoted. When the message is relayed by one who *becomes* the singer, the actor, or the artist and is transformed through that process,

¹ Eisner, E. (1998). Does experience in the arts boost academic achievement. *Art Education*, 5(1), 7–15.; McDonald, M., Antunez, G., & Gottemoeller, M. (2003). Using the arts and literature in health education. In M. Torres, & G. Cernada (Eds.), *Sexual and reproductive health promotion in Latino populations* (pp. 161–174). Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc.



change can take place both in the messenger and the audience. The transformative nature of participation in the creative process can be invaluable for community health education (see “Street Theater”).

4. *To attract attention to a health issue*—A cultural manifestation of an issue, for example the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt displayed on the national mall in 1996 in Washington, DC, will often capture people’s attention and change their perceptions.
5. *To promote community-building*—Cultural forms of expression rooted in the community help establish the collective life, whether it is through celebration, ritual, or grief.
6. *To promote healing*—The creative process is both restorative and transformative, healing the one who undertakes it. At the same time, the resulting creative product offers insights to others with similar experiences, and helps to promote *their* healing.

Each of us has a preferred learning style, a different approach or way of learning. There are three basic styles:

- visual learners, who learn best by seeing;
- auditory learners, who learn best by hearing; and
- tactile/kinesthetic learners, who learn best by moving, doing, and touching.

The arts can make a huge contribution in the success of health projects. Incorporating the arts in learning provides numerous opportunities to address all three learning styles and thus help assure that health education and messages will have a greater impact on the community.

Archiving Community History through Book Making

Stimulation behaviors used by others, such as frequent talking, singing, and playing are considered critical for the development of children’s language and cognitive skills (Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2004). Findings from studies of early childhood support programs for disadvantaged children suggest that investments in early childhood affect outcomes that endure for a lifetime (Fenichel & Mann, 2001).

A recent study reports that in families without book-sharing, children were almost twice as likely to have developmental delays as children in families with book-sharing (Glasco & Leew, 2010). Other caregiver behaviors such as helping children learn by talking and showing them new things resulted in more children having language skills in the average range by 6 months of age than those whose caregivers did not.²

According to results of the UgandaARTS Project Questionnaire, there are approximately 224 children under the age of 5 years old in the camps. The arts offer an excellent opportunity to provide critical

² Fenichel, E., & Mann, T. (2001). Early Head Start for low-income families with infants and toddlers. *Future Child*, 11(1), 134–141.; Glacoe, F., & Leew, S. (2010). Parenting behaviors, perceptions, and psychosocial risk: Impacts on young children’s development. *Pediatrics*, 125(2), 313–319.; Tamis-LeMonda, C., Shannon, J., Cabrera, N. & Lamb, M. (2004). Fathers and mothers at play with their 2- and 3-year-olds: Contributions to language and cognitive development. *Child Development*, 75(6), 1806–1820.



experiences for these younger children, while at the same time teaching older children important and useful art skills. Additionally, an important factor in building resilience in children is having them experience doing something good for others. The bookmaking process has this element as well.

The bookmaking process has several components, which take advantage of the multidisciplinary group of trainers. While training the trainer, the storyteller will demonstrate working with the older children and young people to tell and record their stories. The visual artist will teach bookmaking, having the children create one-of-a-kind art books incorporating the text and illustrating with drawings and collage. Photography also can be used if available. Children would learn simple bookbinding techniques.

Upon completion, the older children would read their books to the younger children. To further the project, the older children could determine the interests of the younger children and create additional books based on their themes as well.

Building with Clay not only to express feelings but also create an income-generating opportunity:

Traditional clay offers an experience for children unlike that found when they use store-bought dough and sculpting materials other than clay. Exposure to real objects and real materials helps children learn best. Experiences with simple clay alone provide the best discovery of techniques. Even young children learn traditional pinching and coiling techniques easily when given the opportunity.

Coil

Coiling often happens spontaneously when children start exploring with a lump of clay. After first attempting to smash it down or roll it into a ball, children often begin to roll it while pushing down, and almost by accident discover that they are creating a long tube of clay. Continuing, a long snake of clay appears magically beneath their hands as they roll the clay back and forth. After making this discovery, we ask if they can think of a way to create from the coil a useful object that would hold something. We show them how to begin coiling the long piece of clay upon itself to create a coiled bowl or cup. We then use a damp sponge to smooth and tighten the sides of the coiled bowl or cup.

Pinch

Once children start to make pinched objects with clay, they seem to find it a successful and fun technique for starting many projects. They begin with the rolled, smooth ball of clay. We have them turn the clay around in their hands several times, smoothing it before they take a thumb and stick it about half way down into the clay. For very young children with a large ball of clay, we may need to offer some assistance. After making the thumb hole, they begin to pinch the hole between their thumbs and index fingers of the same hand while the thumb remains in the hole. We demonstrate how to hold the forming pinch pot in one hand between thumb and index finger while it sits on the palm of our other hand or on the table. As they pinches, they should turn the pot around and around on the table or in their hands gently. During this technique, the hole in the pot widens and a bowl or cup shape forms.

Piece and Pull

Children can also create clay sculpture through piecing or pulling. Often a child begins with a lump of clay and pulls off chunks to create appendages while saving a large lump for the main body of the object. Joint work remains immature and weak in children when creating piecework. We show children how to texture the joining sides so that their sides join better, and how to smooth the joint to create a



stronger hold. Pulling involves leaving the lump of clay whole and pulling gently to create appendages. One sculpture children enjoy involves making a portrait sculpture. We have children flatten a lump of clay slightly on the table, leaving it thick enough to both push into and pull slightly from to create features. Beginning with the eyes, have them push their thumbs gently into the region of the lump where eyes might appear naturally. As they do this, an area between the eyes begins to create the bridge of the nose. They push their fingers slightly down and inward toward each other under the eyes at the approximate location where the sides of the nose occur. A nose begins to rise from the clay that can then be manipulated to give the nose shape. They create the mouth similarly, by placing their fingers in the area where the mouth should be and gently pushing toward each other and down until an area rises from the clay that then becomes the lips through further manipulation.

Clay Tiles

Look at the work of professional artists who work with clay. We'll show pictures, photos, samples of clay work (preferably an example of a clay tile). Discuss the work we share—type, clay used, glazing, burnishing, painting, decorations etc. Get children used to the art vocabulary associated with clay.

By exploring clay, the children will learn what clay can/not do. This begins with the children touching, rolling, forming the clay. Doing this will help them develop ideas and skills for when they begin their tiles. If the children have no experience working with clay, time must be allowed for them to experiment and to see what properties it has. If we give the children each a small lump of clay, ask them to find out about it. Suggest poking, pulling, rolling, making marks on it and in it, pinching, attaching more clay and texturing it. We will sit in a circle and let the children to follow some simple instructions- make it into a round ball/ make a finger hole in it/ make a pattern over it with fingernails/ pull a piece off/ roll it into a ball and attach it again, etc. We will get the children to make something more specific- a dog/cat/snail and encourage them to see the clay as a 3D form that needs to be looked at all over.

We will probably need to pre-cut a clay tile for each child. We will demonstrate rolling the clay, using a rolling pin, bottle or thick plastic tube. We'll make each tile about 1- 1 1/2 cm thick (about 1/2 inch). We'll talk about the theme they will be using and look for examples or pictures to use as a reference. We'll discuss how they can add clay to their tile to create their object and explain the scratch and slip technique, to keep pieces of clay from falling off. Although we'll encourage the use of different tools, we'll remind children that their fingers are often the best tool.

While in-between working on their tiles, the children will need to keep them covered in an air tight plastic bag- the clay will stay moist for a long time as long as no air gets in. The finished tiles will need to air dry for about 1 week before firing in a kiln (firing in a kiln gets the best results). When fired, children can paint and varnish them.

The tiles can be used separately, or pieced together on a wall, table, or other flat surface.

Music Program: Foundations of the Music Education curriculum

The musical portion of the program would revolve around several respected international educational standards, all of which are highly adaptable to local material and activities. Due to the very wide range of training and experience held by the facilitator (Aaron Sivertson), we have the benefit of being able to provide a highly integrated, dynamic, accessible, and adaptable curriculum.



This curriculum will be directed both to the local teachers and the students with whom they work. The particular balance of the methods will be determined later pending further research and observation of the skills currently in place for both the instructors and the students, and adapted according to facilities, equipment, level of experience of the trainers, and other factors. The methods will be drawn principally from the following two highly respected standards:

A) Orff Method - The Orff method is one of the most exciting and effective music education tools available to young children. It is a mix of singing and repetition, combined with movement games to the music, including simple dance steps, and easily involves props such as ribbons, balls, etc. Local songs are used as much as possible, as well as a limitless repertoire of music from other cultures as is appropriate. A major component of the Orff method is also musical improvisation. Patterns are improvised on percussion and basic keyboard instruments, and entire pieces are constructed complete with notated music, improvised music, singing, speech, and movement.

B) Instrumental music education, i.e. brass band, mixed brass and percussion ensembles, etc. - These music education methods will be carefully delivered to the local instructors and students directly by the facilitator based upon well-researched and published methodology, well-grounded in many bases of educational psychology. The facilitator will coach the instructors and students in playing techniques, instrument care, musical performance, notation, and, specifically for the instructors, methods of music curriculum delivery.

Depending on the results of the assessment of current programming, the above methods can be combined and adapted and delivered to the local instructors in the way that will best suit the existing program and allow for progress towards an exciting, dynamic and integral musical arts program based in the local traditions and culture. Other approaches, such as elements of the Suzuki method where parents/caregivers are involved in the learning process with young learners, will be included as is deemed beneficial by the facilitator. The facilitator will also work with the local instructors on ways to combine the entire musical community, from the young and beginners through to the experienced players, creating exciting integrated musical learning experiences and performances.