



Ten Lessons the Arts Teach

By Elliot Eisner



- 1. The arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships.**
The arts are most conspicuous in their insistence that relationships are central and that good relationships are achieved when the mind works in the service of feeling.
- 2. The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than answer.**
The arts embrace diversity of outcome; standardization of solution and uniformity of response is no virtue in the arts.
- 3. The arts celebrate multiple perspectives.**
One of their large lessons is that there are many ways to see and interpret the world.
- 4. The arts teach children that in complex forms of problem solving purposes are seldom fixed, but change with circumstance and opportunity.**
Learning in the arts requires the ability and a willingness to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities the work as it unfolds. Art is a conversation with materials, a conversation punctuated with all sorts of surprises and uncertainty that really stimulating conversation makes possible. In the arts, the aim is more than impressing into a material what you already know, but discovering what you don't.
- 5. The arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what we can know.**
The limits of our language do not define the limits of our cognition. What we come to know through literature, poetry, and the arts is not reducible to the literal.
- 6. The arts teach students that small differences can have large effects.**
The arts focus on paying attention to subtleties. Seeing subtle qualities and their relationships is essential to the arts.
- 7. The arts teach students to think through and within a material.**
All art forms employ some means through which images become real. Materials offer distinctive opportunities. To realize such opportunities, the child must be able to convert a material into a medium. For this to occur, the child must learn to think within the affordance and constraints of a material and to employ techniques to make the conversion of a material into a medium possible. A material is not the same as a medium - and vice versa. Material is the stuff you work with. A medium is something that mediates; it mediates the choices, decisions, ideas, and images that the individual has. The problem for the child is to take some material - drawings, paintings, sculptures, etc. - and think within the constraints and affordances of that material the shape that image needs to take.
- 8. The arts help children learn to say what cannot be said.**
Talking about the arts makes some special demands on those who speak about them. The task is not to replicate in language the qualities artworks possess but to imply through language qualities that are themselves ineffable; hence the trick is to say what cannot be said.
- 9. The arts enable us to have experience we can have from no other source.**
Through such experience we can discover the range and variety of what we are capable of feeling. Some works of art have the capacity to put us into another world. Why not afford children opportunities to access such works of art and help them acquire forms of literacy that will give children the joy, delight, and insight such artworks make possible?
- 10. The arts' position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults believe is important.**
The curriculum of the school shapes children's thinking. It is a mind altering device; it symbolizes what adults believe is important for the young to know, what knowledge and qualities are important to possess.

