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Benefits of Art Education: A Review of the Literature

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RUNNING HEAD: Benefits of Art Education: A Review of the Literature

Abstract

Though extensive studies exist regarding the use of the arts in general education settings, a comparable amount of research is still needed to support the need for the use of the arts in special education settings. This review of the literature examined the role of the arts in general education and special education. The studies revealed that the arts provided benefits to students in both the general education and special education settings in academic, social and behavioral areas.

Keywords: arts education, special education, academic, social and behavioral performance

Background and Need

Within the United States educational system, there is evidence that shows that the arts are not a priority. McMurrer (2008) conducted a survey of 349 public school districts and found that since the inception of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), 58 percent of districts have increased instructional time for reading and language arts, and that 45 percent have increased instructional time for math, while arts education instructional time has decreased by 16 percent (p. 2). According to Gardner (1999) “most cultures, and certainly those that consider themselves to be highly civilized, do not need special arguments for including the arts in their schools. In the United States however, such automatic allegiance to the arts does not exist” (para. 4).

Berliner (2011) explained that the loss of art in the current high-stakes testing environment is problematic (p. 291). Berliner (2011) argued that the arts provide an alternative means to view reality, expand the way students perceive the world, and often has immediately unobservable benefits for the workers in a market economy (p. 291).

In respect to incorporating the arts into special education, there is currently a need for more research to be done on this topic. Gerber, Keifer-Boyd, and Crockett (2013) write that “students with disabilities can excel in and through the arts” and that “over the past decade, a small but growing body of research is beginning to document and demonstrate the importance of the arts in the lives of students with disabilities” (p. 11). Gerber et al., (2013) state that there is currently no home or central professional location for arts/special education research and that information on intersections of art and special education is dispersed among many journals and is difficult to access (p. 11).

Theoretical Rationale

The value of incorporating the arts into education was first observed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and has since sparked the conversation of incorporating the arts into various subject areas (Berlinger, 2011). Leaders of the child-study movement, influenced by Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, as well as the introduction of empirical psychology, called for a widespread and scientific study of children (Humphreys, 1985). The child-study movement investigated children’s ways of learning, including incorporating sensory capabilities, physical characteristics, humor, play, religious ideas, memory, attention span, etc., into learning.

Educator and philosopher, Dewey, was an advocate for integrating the arts into education. Dewey stated that the arts should be a “foundational part of the curriculum because it developed creativity, self-expression, and an appreciation of the expression of others” (as cited by Heilig, Cole & Aguilar, 2010, p. 136). Dewey argued that “children need an education that is authentic and allows them to grow mentally, physically, and socially by providing opportunities to be creative, critical thinkers” (as cited by Heilig, et al., 2010, p. 137). Dewey believed that the arts could offer children a way to enhance their view of the world, helping them to create new

understandings of the world around them (Goldblatt, 2006).

Gardner (1999) proposed that human beings possess various intellectual possibilities in his theory of multiple intelligences and argued that this theory “provides a basis for education in the arts” (para. 2). Gardner (1999) wrote that schools tend to focus on the two skills of literacy and math, which he identified as the linguistic and logical intelligences, respectfully. Gardner advocated for the recognition and incorporation of “at least six other intelligences: spatial, musical, naturalistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and bodily-kinesthetic” (Gardner, 1999, para. 2). Gardner (1999) argued that participation in the arts provides a way to develop a wide range of intelligences in children and that the arts allow children to express what is important to them through multiple forms of expression.

Lowenfeld, also known as “the father of Art Education” advocated using art in education and devoted his early teaching career to a school for blind children where he developed a passion for therapeutically using creativity in art (Efland, 1990, p. 234). Lowenfeld’s work established early in the field of arts education that the arts can not only remediate, rehabilitate, and socialize children with disabilities, but that children with disabilities are capable and important (Efland, 1990). In his book, *Creative and Mental Growth, 5th Edition* (1970), Lowenfeld described how the process of art promotes self-expression, independence, flexible thinking, social interactions and general well-being. Regarding students with disabilities, art therapy pioneer, Kramer (1971) conveyed that art is therapeutic and that art builds skills and aesthetic awareness.

Review of Literature

The Benefits of Including Art in General Education

Research has identified the benefits of the arts in the general education curriculum.

Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning (Fiske, 1999) provides a collection of

seven studies that show the correlation of high levels of arts participation with higher grades and test scores in reading and math. One study included in the collection is entitled, “Involvement in the Arts and Human Development: General Involvement and Intensive Involvement in Music and Theater Arts.” Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga (1999) conducted this quantitative study using data (standardized test scores, academic grades, and dropout rates) from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) to see how student involvement in the arts affected academic performance. The NELS data used consisted of 25,000 students from the United States in grades 8th through 12th (Catterall, et al, 1999, p. 2). The study examined students who were involved in the arts across all disciplines, as well as students that had continued involvement with music in a single discipline, such as playing a musical instrument or being in a theater production (Catterall, et al, 1999, p. 2). Catterall, et al. (1999) found that the students involved in arts had positive academic developments in all grades (8th-12th), and that students who were involved in the arts showed “comparative gains” over time, specifically pointing out that the same was even found among a subgroup of students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds (p. 2). Also, students (including the SES subgroup) who are involved in instrumental music during the middle and high school years show significantly higher levels of math proficiency, compared to students who were not involved in instrumental music (Catterall, et al., 1999, p. 2). Lastly, it was observed that SES students who were involved in the theater arts such as plays, musicals, drama clubs, and acting lessons, had “...gains in reading proficiency, gains in self concept and motivation, and higher levels of empathy and tolerance for others” (Catterall, et al., 1999, p. 2).

Overall, Catterall, et al., (1999) found that even though their research displays a positive association between student involvement in the arts with academic and social outcomes, there is

still a need for future research by educators, school leaders, parents, students and artists to continue to learn what art can do in relation to human development (p. 17).

Another study included in the *Champions of Change* collection is entitled, “Learning in and Through the Arts: Curriculum Implications.” In this study, a group of researchers from Teachers College Columbia University, conducted a study of over 2000 students in grades 4th through 8th, attending public schools and “...found significant relationships between rich in-school arts programs and creative, cognitive, and personal, competencies needed for academic success” (Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 1999, p. 36). Burton, et al., (1999),

...found that young people in “high-arts” groups performed better than those in “low-arts” groups on measures of creativity, fluency, originality, elaboration and resistance to closure—capacities central to arts learning. Pupils in arts-intensive settings were also strong in their abilities to express thoughts and ideas, exercise their imaginations and take risks in learning. In addition, they were described by their teachers as more cooperative and willing to display their learning publicly (p. 36).

According to Burton, et al., (1999), non-art teachers involved in this study shared with the researchers that the effects of their students participating among strong arts programming could be seen in their science, math, and language classes (p. 36). Teachers noticed that these students were “...curious, able to express ideas and feelings in individual ways, and not afraid to display their learning before their teachers, peers, and parents” (Burton, et al., 1999, p. 36). Burton, et al., (1999) found when students that have less access to the arts, this “...exerts a negative effect on the development of critical cognitive competencies and personal dispositions” (p. 44).

The combined efforts of the researchers included in *Champions of Change*, agreed upon

the following findings in their studies:

- The arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached.
- The arts reach students in ways that they are not otherwise being reached.
- The arts connect students to themselves and each other.
- The arts transform the environment for learning.
- The arts provide learning opportunities for the adults in the lives of young people.
- The arts provide new challenges for those students already considered successful.
- The arts connect learning experiences to the world of real work. (Fiske, 1999, p. ix – x)

According to Fiske (1999) when students are exposed to the arts they are provided “with authentic learning experiences that engage their minds, hearts, and bodies” (p. ix). Art allows students to engage in multiple skills and abilities which create meaningful learning experiences that develop a student’s cognitive, social, and personal competencies (Fiske, 1999, p. ix). The *Champions of Change* researchers found that students who are engaged in the arts can attain higher levels of achievement and that the arts can make a more significant difference for students from disadvantaged circumstances (Fiske, 1999, p. viii).

The *Champions of Change* researchers’ combined efforts found that to be effective, the arts learning experience needs to:

- Enable young people to have direct involvement with the arts and artists.
- Require significant staff development.
- Support extended engagement in the artistic process.
- Encourage self-directed learning.
- Promote complexity in the learning experience.
- Allow management of risk by the learners.

- Engage community leaders and resources. (Fiske, 1999, p. x-xi)

Overall, the *Champions of Change* studies display how incorporating the arts into a student's education "provides unparalleled opportunities for learning, enabling young people to reach for and attain higher levels of achievement" (Fiske, 1999, p. XII).

Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development (Deasy, 2002) is a body of work consisting of 62 peer-reviewed studies and essays on arts education research that examine how the arts are beneficial to students both academically and socially. The studies and essays in *Critical Links* are organized in five different sections including: dance, drama, visual arts, music and multi-arts. The studies and essays included in *Critical Links* does as the title of the document says and "links" arts education with a variety of academic and social skills including: reading and language, mathematics, thinking skills, motivation, social behavior, and school environment (Deasy, 2003). Deasy (2003) writes,

Of great importance to schools struggling to close achievement gaps are indications that for certain students—most notably young children, those from economically disadvantaged circumstances, and those needing remedial instruction—learning in the arts may be particularly helpful. For instance, studies show that some students who are encouraged to dramatize reading material significantly improve their comprehension of the text and their ability to read new and unfamiliar material (p. 16-17).

One study included in *Critical Links* (Deasy, 2002) provided an evaluation of a successful art program model: Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE).

The Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE) partnered local artists with teachers

to design curriculums where a visual art form was integrated into reading or social studies lessons (Catterall & Waldorf, 2002). This study compared student performance of the students participating in CAPE, against a control group of students not participating in CAPE, based on standardized tests scores (p. 72). Their results concluded that the CAPE students performed better, in both their reading and math standardized test scores, than the control group of students who did not have arts education integrated in their reading or social studies lessons (Catterall & Waldorf, 2002, p. 72). Catterall and Waldorf (2002) found that “the low-SES [socioeconomic status] children in arts-integrated schools perform better than those in comparison schools in terms of test scores. The difference was statistically significant at the elementary level, but not at the high school level” (p. 72). Their findings in this study lead Catterall and Waldorf (2002) to believe that low-income schools perform better when partnering with local artists and arts agencies (p. 72). In the *Champions of Change* (1999) report, Fiske writes about the CAPE program in his executive summary stating, “If well-constructed partnerships between school and arts organizations can increase student achievement, then such partnerships must be nurtured and replicated” (p. xi).

The Benefits of Including Art in Special Education

Malley and Silverstein (2014) examined the existing relationship between arts education and special education by presenting current research on the topic and then sharing the results from a national forum of stakeholders from both fields. Malley and Silverstein (2014) argue that, “Regardless of barriers, physical or environmental, all students need the opportunity to learn in and through the arts” (p. 39). The arts allow students to use creativity and problem solving, as well as provide opportunity for self-expression (Malley & Silverstein, 2014, p. 39). Students with disabilities may have a difficult time expressing themselves with speech and written

language but art allows them to do this. Malley and Silverstein (2014) found that there is current research supporting the benefits of using art with students with disabilities, but there is not work being done to unite the professionals who could design these programs for students (p. 39). For example, the fields of arts education and special education are separate.

Realizing the need for an integration of arts education and special education, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and its affiliate VSA (formerly Very Special Arts) hosted a national forum on this topic in the summer of 2012. At this forum, leaders in the fields of arts education and special education came together to share their knowledge on each field, eventually making recommendations for a national agenda stating that the arts are a necessary component in the education of students with disabilities (Malley & Silverstein, 2014, p. 40). Malley and Silverstein (2014) report that this forum produced two recommendations, the first was that an informational hub/technical assistance center needs to be created to serve as a resource for educators in the arts and special education in the form of a website (p. 41). The second, was to create a consortium of professionals from the arts and special education communities that could move forward with a common goal (Malley and Silverstein, 2014, p. 41). A main priority of this consortium would be to provide professional development for educators including teacher preparations programs, as well as providing in-service trainings for general educators, paraprofessionals, and art teachers, teaching the importance of integrating the arts into special education and practical methods on how to do this (Malley & Silverstein, 2014, p. 41).

Rabkin and Redmond (2006), write about arts integration and its ability to raise student achievement. They write, “Two decades of efforts to raise standards, focus schools on academic fundamentals, and close the achievement gap have steadily eroded the place of arts in public

education” (p. 60). The arts must compete against other subjects for time and resources and the arts are usually used as a reward or a curriculum enrichment.

Rabkin and Redmond (2006) share that there is now evidence that shows that arts education can have powerful effects on student achievement, especially for struggling students (p. 60). Rabkin and Redmond (2006) write that there are examples of schools that have prioritized the arts, helping to raise low-income and other struggling students’ performance (p. 60). These schools have “began to practice arts integration, an instructional strategy that brings the arts into the core of the school day and connects the arts across the curriculum” (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 60). The low performing students in these schools experienced success in the arts, with many being previously withdrawn or disruptive, now becoming active and productive members in class (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 61). The arts integration approach has artists and teachers working together to design lessons and units, integrating the arts into the core subject matter (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 61).

Rabkin and Redmond (2006) share a variety of examples of arts integration, ranging from having students develop their letter awareness by dancing letter shapes, to writing music and lyrics in social studies, to writing about personal histories after viewing folk paintings (p. 63). They write, “The paired subjects engage the same cognitive processes...Setting these parallel processes in motion appears to generate a cognitive resonance between the two subjects, deepening learning in both” (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 63). By connecting art to the core curriculum, the students find the work more interesting and meaningful, creating higher levels of engagement, and student motivation (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 63).

According to Rabkin and Redmond (2006), arts integration is not simple, easy work, and these programs need support at the federal, state and local levels (p. 64). They write that schools

should make arts integration a priority by providing professional development and access to local artists, and that teacher preparation programs should make arts integration a requirement (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 64).

Mason, Steedly and Thormann (2008) conducted a study on the relationship between “substantive arts involvement and social, cognitive, and artistic development...” (p. 36). Mason, et al., (2008) found that by including students with disabilities in arts education, the students are given opportunities to make decisions as they create, causing their learning to be more hands-on (p. 37). By giving students with disabilities the opportunity to be hands-on with their artwork, their “learning becomes more participatory, enhancing understanding” (Mason, et al., 2008, p. 38). In their study, Mason, et al. (2008) wanted to examine “teachers’ perception of the arts’ impact on students with disabilities in terms of social, cognitive, academic, and artistic skill development” (p. 39). To do this, Mason, et al. (2008) conducted 34 focus groups over a two-year period in sixteen states with teachers and artists who had experience working with students with a variety of sensory, physical, emotional/behavioral, cognitive and learning disabilities (p. 39-40). As a result, Mason, et al. (2008) found that teachers feel there is great value in including students with disabilities in art activities, as well as integrating the arts across the curriculum (p. 40). Mason, et al. (2008) also discovered that there were three main themes in the focus group data collected, “...with respect to the way in which students’ social, cognitive, academic, and artistic skills developed through engaging in the arts: voice, choice and access” (p. 40). In respect to “voice,” they found that the arts can provide students with disabilities an opportunity to find his/her voice (Mason, et al., 2008, p. 40). Mason, et al. (2008) state, “Voice closely links to notions of confidence and self-esteem –when people learn they have something to say, they often want to say it” (p. 41). As for “choice” they found that choice is “central to the art making

enterprise” but that students with disabilities often don’t have the opportunity to oversee choices in their lives (Mason, et al., 2008, p. 41). The choice that comes with doing art gives students with disabilities the opportunity for “...decision-making that will enable them to be active and independent members of society” (Mason, et al., 2008, p. 41). In relation to “access” Mason, et al. (2008) found that the teachers in the focus groups agreed that the arts allow students with disabilities to access the general education language arts curriculum, no matter their ability level (p. 41). Mason, et al. (2008) writes that the arts can “level the playing field” and “meet students where they are” (p. 41).

Hillier, Greher, Poto, and Dougherty (2012) conducted a study to see to what extent does participation in music programs, benefit students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), focusing on challenges for students with ASD, specifically: self-esteem, anxiety, and attitudes towards toward and relationships with peers (p. 201-202). The study was conducted on 22 high functioning adolescents and young adults with ASD in two groups, where both groups experienced the same program curriculum and an overlap of program staff (Hillier, et al., 2012, p. 202-203). The students involved participated in a music program called “SoundScape” which was an eight-week program of 90-minute weekly music sessions, where they worked in groups to produce a short movie or soundtrack (Hillier, et al., 2012, p. 203-204). Hillier, et al. (2012) writes, “The program curriculum required minimal musical ability and aimed to present many opportunities to experience success, acceptance from peers, and accomplishment” (p. 205). The students with disabilities and their parents completed pre- and post-test surveys before and after the music program. As a result, Hillier, et al. (2012) found that the students who participated in the music program were positively impacted in the following ways: higher self-esteem, improved attitudes towards peers, and in lower self-reported anxiety (p. 209).

Example Programs Where Art is Included in Special Education

The following four sources present example programs where including the arts in special education programs has shown beneficial to students with disabilities.

Schwartz and Pace (2008) examine a partnership between the special education teacher preparation program at Hofstra University and a school district in Long Island, NY where students from the University run an afterschool program for eighth grade special education students. The program initially emphasized supporting the students in math and literacy in line with state standards and the students' IEP goals (Schwartz & Pace, 2008, p. 50). Schwartz and Pace (2008) present a review of the current literature on the effectiveness of afterschool programming, as well as the importance of incorporating art into both the regular school day and afterschool programs. They found that the research shows that students who participate in afterschool programs have improved attitudes towards school, higher school attendance rates and better work habits (Schwartz & Pace, 2008, p. 51). They also found that there are specific elements that contribute to a successful afterschool program including: structure, caring adults, supportive peer relationships, provide a sense of belonging, chances to be successful, opportunities to learn skills needed in school, and positive behavior models (Schwartz & Pace, 2008, p. 51-52). Next, Schwartz and Pace (2008) present that the literature states that implementing arts into both the regular school day and in afterschool programming helped to improve student academic learning (p. 52).

Schwartz and Pace (2008) describe a specific project that the University students completed with the special education students where they infused arts instruction into the afterschool academic tutorial program. The project included having the students attend a local art museum where they viewed an exhibit showing social and political issues and then made

collages to present their own world view. These collages provided the special education students with an opportunity to express themselves in a nonverbal manner (Schwartz & Pace, 2008, p. 53). Schwartz and Pace (2008) report that the University students could learn more about their students with this project than with any other lesson they had ever completed before (p. 54). The project gave the students with disabilities an opportunity to communicate about the world around them without having to rely solely upon written or spoken language (Schwartz & Pace, 2008, p. 54).

Jennifer Durham (2010), writes about The Lab School of Washington (LSW) which was founded by Sally L. Smith in 1967 when Smith could not find an appropriate school to educate her learning-disabled son (p. 59). The LSW has been educating students with learning disabilities using an arts-based curriculum for over fifty years (Durham, 2010, p. 59). Durham (2010) writes, “Sally Smith’s Lab School of Washington (LSW) is an internationally recognized model for teaching students with moderate to severe learning disabilities...teaching approximately 600 children per year ranging from first to twelfth grade...” (p. 59).

Durham (2010) describes how Sally Smith felt it was necessary to design a program where the arts were infused into all aspects of the curriculum because the arts can be used to, “...ignite motivate, and excite students” (p. 59). Durham (2010) also writes how Smith’s program promotes the fact that, “Self-worth, confidence, and self-esteem, often negatively affected by prior school experiences, are increased when students find success in art form and develop a sense of accomplishment” (p. 59). At LSW, students participate in two art classes each day and as they progress through the grade levels, the art classes become more complex, building on what was taught in prior years (Durham, 2010, p. 59).

Durham (2010) explains that LSW conducted their own research to observe academic

progress of the students over time (p. 60). This research has lead them to believe that art is a very valuable tool when teaching students with disabilities (Durham, 2010, p. 60). The research conducted was based on student assessment scores using the Woodcock Johnson-Revised Tests of Achievement (WJ-R) (Durham, 2010, p. 60). They found that over a period of five years, students in their program had improved in the WJ-R Reading and Writing subtests (Durham, 2010, p. 60). It was also found that students who received their education at LSW starting in primary school scored significantly higher in the Broad Knowledge cluster and Reading Vocabulary subtest, compared to students who did not start at LSW until seventh grade or above (Durham, 2010, p. 60). The students who received an education with the arts embedded throughout the early part of their academic career performed better than the students without an early arts background.

Wexler (2011) discusses how art educators are now having to include students of all abilities in their art classrooms and how these educators are seeking answers from a variety of sources on how best to serve these students. Wexler (2011) provides an example of a program called Arts-2-gether, serving public school children, aged 12 to 19 years old, with developmental disabilities (p. 54). Arts-2-gether is a program founded by Very Special Arts (VSA), the international organization on arts and disability (Wexler, 2011, p. 56). According to Wexler (2011), “Arts-2-gether offers experiences for children and adolescents with disabilities through one-on-one mentorship with trained art educators and therapists” (p. 56). The Arts-2-gether program was offered during the afterschool hours in a variety of environments in order to give their participants an opportunity to have learning experiences away from their school sites (Wexler, 2011, p. 56). Wexler (2011) writes about the Arts-2-gether participants, “The artworks of children with developmental disabilities have not been tentative; the children artists have

represented the urgent seeking for a place of belonging populated by peers and adults who befriend them” (p. 57). In conclusion, Wexler (2011) insists that in teaching art to students with disabilities, the students must have the opportunity to learn from “first-hand explorations, rather than second-hand notions of what teachers think they should learn” (p. 67).

In a final example of an arts integrated special education program, Heitin (2014), describes a program called Everyday Arts for Special Education (EASE). EASE is a program developed and administered by a New York City based non-profit, the Urban Arts Partnership. The program consists of bringing teaching artists (musicians, theater actors, and visual artists) into special education classrooms to mentor special education teachers on how to integrate the arts into their teaching and curriculums (Heitin, 2014, p. 12).

Heitin (2014) provides an example of how a school district (New York City’s District 75) has successfully implemented EASE into their special education classrooms. District 75 serves approximately 23,000 special education students with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disabilities, Down syndrome, emotional disabilities, and multiple disabilities (Heitin, 2014, p. 12). Heitin (2014) writes how, “the district received a \$4.6 million federal Investing in Innovation, or i3, grant—an impressive amount by arts education standards—to offer professional development in EASE at 10 schools and to study the program’s effects along the way” (p. 1). Heitin (2014) reports that Rob Horowitz, the associate director of the Center for the Arts Education Research at Teachers College, Columbia University, heads up the research studies on the EASE program (p. 13). Horowitz states, “...there’s convincing evidence EASE has succeeded in improving elementary students’ academic, socialization, and communication skills” (Heitin, 2014, p. 1). Horowitz explains, “As of now, the results have been encouraging...The evidence is strong so far that, in fact, these activities are helping kids

communicate and develop socialization skills in new ways” (Heitin, 2014, p. 13). The results from Horowitz’s research from 2012-23 show that between 77 and 84 percent of students participating in the EASE program have made progress in communication, socialization, compliance with directions, time spent on task and engagement in school activities (Heitin, 2014, p. 13). As a result, the Los Angeles school district (serving 640,000 students) is now in the process of piloting part of the EASE program to help redesign how the district includes students with special needs in their general education settings (Heitin, 2014, p. 1).

Heitin (2014) writes that many teachers involved in the EASE program have expressed that it is something that anyone can learn, and that it is even user friendly in very challenging special education settings (p. 12). The teachers attend professional development opportunities as well as have artist mentors come into their classrooms (Heitin, 2014, p. 12). One teacher that Heitin (2014) writes about describes that, “EASE differs from some other arts-integration programs in that the arts are not an add-on—they’re the organizing framework for each lesson” (p. 12).

Many of the special education students in New York City’s District 75 are “working on social-emotional or behavioral goals—maintaining self-regulation, following directions, taking turns, and communicating with peers” (Heitin, 2014, p. 12). The EASE program allows for teachers to be flexible so they can differentiate the lessons to meet the needs of individual learners as each of the EASE activities focuses on communication, social skills, group work, and fun (Heitin, 2014, p. 12). Kristen Engebretsen, arts education program manager at Americans for the Arts, a national arts advocacy group stated, “Quality research for arts education with special-needs students is really hard to come by. It’s such a small niche” (Heitin, 2014, p. 13).

Summary

Research shows that including the arts in the classroom provides benefits to both general education and special education students. The arts allow students of all ability levels to gain access to curriculums that may have been traditionally taught through written and spoken language. The arts have shown to provide support for students, allowing them to succeed academically and socially. Though many extensive studies exist regarding including the arts into general education, such as the comprehensive documents: *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (Fiske, 1999) and *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development* (Deasy, 2002), a comparable amount of research is still needed to support the need for including the arts into special education.

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