

Why Teach Art?

“If you want to bring down a civilization, first bring down its arts.”

William Blake

Necessity of the Arts

The arts tell a culture what it is. They are a direct measure of what a civilization values and the only permanent documentation that existed at all. What do we know of ancient Egypt, or Greece, or the European Middle Ages? What physically remains of your own ancestors – except old photographs, perhaps a quilt, or, if you're fortunate, a sketchbook or journal? What will remain of our generation for Utahns a hundred years from now? Not our sports scores, business decisions, or even our laws. They will know us profoundly from our artistic legacy: the churches and city halls that we restored or built, the figures that we painted or sculpted, the novels and plays and operas and poetry we wrote, the music we composed and dances we performed, the fiber and metal and leather we transformed into objects of everyday use and beauty. Art tells us who we are, and it tells the future who we were. Because the arts tend to create and document culture over the long term, their importance is sometimes misperceived or obscured in short-term concerns.

The Importance of Utah's Arts Organizations

For a moment, imagine what life in Utah would be like without the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, the Utah Shakespearean Festival, the Utah Opera, the Utah Symphony, or our visual arts, theatre and dance companies. Art has always held a prominent place in Utah, beginning with the American Indian cultures, continued in the earliest days of Mormon settlement, and sustained into the present with a relatively dense proportion of ethnic and cultural resources for a state with Utah's population. In fact, after only three years of statehood, the 1899 Utah State Legislature was the first in the nation to establish “a state institute of art” to “advance the interest of the fine arts and develop the influence of art in education.”

Utah Art in Education

“The arts must be in the heart of every child's learning experience if they are to have a chance to dream and to create, to have beliefs, to carry a sense of cultural identity.” – James D. Wolfensohn, Chairman of the Kennedy Center

When we teach a child to draw, we teach him to see. When we teach a child to sing or play an instrument we teach her how to listen. When we teach children to dance, we teach them about their bodies and space. As we teach design, we teach the geometry of the world. When children learn about folk arts and the great masterpieces of other cultures, they find their place in the confluence of history and experience the pride of recognizing and celebrating their roots. When they learn to read and write, they also learn the metaphors by which we live.

If we do not teach the universal language of the arts, we do not give our children a complete education. More than that we discourage their astonishing imaginations, we stifle their natural creativity, and we fail to teach them in the many different ways they can learn. Arts education is not simply about art; it uniquely enhances the entire educational process. By ensuring more arts in education, Utah can build those better schools outlined in Goals 2000: Educate America Act.

Excerpts from *Stabilization Report to the Legislature on the State of the Arts in Utah*. Written by Aden Ross, Playwright, Theater Professor at the University of Utah and former Utah Arts Council board member.

The State of Utah's Plan for Arts and Humanities Education

In 1988, a conference co-sponsored by the Utah State Office of Education, Utah Arts Council and the Utah Alliance for Arts Education was held to begin planning enhanced development of the arts and humanities in the state's basic education goals for Utah students. Participation in this conference included representation from arts organizations, individual artists, educational organizations, higher education, the Utah State Legislature, local school boards, the media, classroom teachers, PTAs, principals, and special education instructors.

The following summary is taken from *Keeping the Promise: An Imperative for Survival in the 21st Century*, a report made by the Utah Alliance for Arts and Humanities Education as a result of this planning conference.

Since the beginning of human society and civilization, the arts have been an essential component of the functioning and well-being of social formation. Tribal solidarity has always depended upon storytelling, dance, and the visual arts in the conveying of ritual practices, political philosophies, establishment of leadership and laws, and other activities fundamental to the formation and maintenance of societies.

Pianos, organs, violins, and other instruments had been laboriously dragged across the plains and mountain ranges by the pioneers to the Salt Lake Valley, allowing them to enjoy dances and concerts as part of their community activities. Brigham Young, keenly aware of the importance of the arts in the continuance of this new society he had established, sent aspiring artists to France to study at the finest art schools so they would contribute works of lasting great quality upon their return to the Salt Lake community. Cultural survival and the building and maintaining of community ties has always been a primary role for the arts, whether for the Mormons or the Native American Indians.

Entering into the next century, our societies need an affirmation of this past, giving closer attention to the development of our community ties, but with a new understanding of the kind of skills needed to meet the challenges ahead. "Change" – rapid change – defines the era in which we live today. Our societies need people who are capable of coping with this rapid change and still able to make valuable contributions to the development and solidarity of our communities.

What is a Basic Education?

Wisdom; critical thinking; creativity; the processes of aesthetics, science, and human perception; compassion and respect for others; a system of ethics for societal and professional behavior; and the ability for involvement in life-long learning.

Basic education must embrace the essential elements of the 3 great branches of knowledge; the arts, sciences and humanities, and present them in a balanced and interrelated framework just as these three areas of human and scientific interest exist in our culture, in context with one another. The most effective learning takes place when the student makes the mental connections of these contextual relationships. In short, basic education gives us the ability to use knowledge in all of its forms.

Arts Education

Includes the teaching and learning of skills, concepts, processes, and theories by which the arts are created, performed, exhibited, appreciated, valued and understood. Arts education must include:

- Organized experiences in observing, listening, creating and performing in the arts
- The study of aesthetics, criticism, and the history of the arts
- Experience-based activities which develop creativity and appreciation
- The ability to make discriminating and educated value judgments

For the purpose of this definition, “the arts” refer to dance, design arts, folk arts, literary arts, media arts, opera and musical theatre, music, theatre, and visual arts.

Arts Education and Job Opportunities

Arts education is not antithetical to acquiring skills for practical purposes. A 1992 U.S. News and World Report article in describing arts education in Japan and Germany supports this in that “they also design the most competitive products on the world market.”

Robert E. Allen, chairman and CEO of AT&T offers this insight:

“We live in an age increasingly ruled by science and technology, a fact that only underscores the need for more emphasis on the arts. As we find science encroaching on every field of study, we need to ensure that our humanity does not become a historical footnote. That can best be assured with a solid understanding and appreciation of the arts. A grounding in the arts will help our children to see, and to bring a unique perspective to science and technology. In short, it will help them as they grow smarter, to also grow wiser.”

With our rapidly changing technological capabilities, we must emphasize creativity, innovation and resourcefulness in our approaches to education, for the mind of the student must always remain in control of the tools. Today’s student will be reprogramming the technologies of tomorrow. Incorporating the arts into basic education programs can help further this aim.

Arts Education Across the Nation

From a compilation of several studies, Laura Loyacono in her 1993 article “Why the Arts are More Than a Frill” in *Reinventing the Wheel*, presented the following findings:

- Data from the College Board provides conclusive evidence that students of visual and performing arts score above average on the math and verbal sections of the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Students with 4 or more years of arts instruction score significantly higher than those with less course work in the arts.
- Science research has demonstrated that giving young children musical training stimulates neural activity and expands their thinking ability.
- A study of 200 high schools in the south showed that arts and humanities education had a positive impact on desegregation, self-esteem, and academic achievement.
- Studies involving the use of the arts and humanities as a medium for cross-cultural education have resulted in increased student knowledge about and acceptance of other cultures.

The Utah State Plan for Arts and Humanities Education recognizes the following benefits of strong arts and humanities education programs:

- Thinking and problem-solving skills
- Higher SAT test scores
- Positive self-concept
- Cross-cultural understanding
- Knowledge of past and present civilizations
- More effective preparation for the work force
- Creativity
- Enhanced interest in learning
- Communication skills
- Common information base for problem-solving
- Intellectual, emotional and physical development
- Aesthetic judgment
- Expanded career options
- Improved overall achievement
- Increased school attendance in an improved school atmosphere