



# DM&E Tips on Arts Education for Refugee Youth

## Importance of Arts Education Programs

Arts education—whether with visual arts, music, theater, or other disciplines—nurtures the cognitive, social and personal competencies of youth. (1) Arts education:

- Is highly correlated with success in math and reading;
- Reaches students who are disengaged from school and thus at greatest risk of failure or harm;
- Is a personal experience that connects students to themselves and each other;
- Precludes boredom by providing new challenges to already successful students;
- Teaches students to generate and communicate new ideas.

Arts education also holds particular importance for refugee youth: (2)

- Arts classrooms are non-threatening environments that give refugee youth the opportunity to express traumatic memories and resulting feelings;
- Refugee youth feel sense of empowerment with freedom to consider media choices and operate creatively within secure boundaries.

## Outcomes for Arts Education Programs

Arts education programs have many positive outcomes for refugee youth, including: (3)

- Greater engagement in learning and higher academic performance
- Fewer absences from school
- Higher scores on achievement tests
- Healthier relationships with adults and peers
- Improved sense of self-expression
- Higher self-esteem



## Components of Arts Education Programs

In high-quality after-school arts programs, students adopt three tasks: (4)

- **Production** of arts;
- **Perception** of other art forms about the world and the making of connections;
- **Reflection** about the process of making and responding to works of art.

There is no particular order to these tasks; rather, they are in constant



constant interaction with one another. Below is a closer look at how after-school programs encourage youth to engage in the three tasks.

### Production

Production is active involvement with materials, elements, and the principles of art. It is the “doing” in arts education.

There are three conditions for successful production:

1. Opportunities for *personal investment* through the communication of ideas, expression of emotions, or use of media;
2. Opportunities to explore a concept or idea from *diverse perspectives* over an extended period of time;
3. *Process of development* from beginning to end, each step allowing for ongoing choice and self-assessment. The emphasis should be on both the process of developing the product and the product itself. Students must learn how to recognize and tie up loose ends.



### Perception

Perception activities include the following:

1. *Looking closely at arts from diverse cultures and traditions* in order to diminish the divide between art appreciation and art-making. This process involves both looking and learning.
2. *Looking closely at art by self and peers* to consider technical qualities of the art piece. This reflection can be fostered by informal class discussions (peer, group, individual critiques), reflection questions, and teacher-student portfolio reviews.
3. *Looking at the surrounding environment* to become aware of imbedded forms of art. For example, a young person can gain a deeper understanding of visual space by looking closely at sports action photographs.
4. *Looking at arts materials, styles, and media* to understand how their selection impacts the final product. For example, a silent play conveys a different set of emotions to the audience than a play with spoken words. This understanding comes with both trial and error, using different media, as well as learning the vocabulary and techniques associated with each aspect of the arts.



### Reflection

Engaging in art often naturally leads to reflection. The very process of making art encourages young people to be introspective while learning

to express and communicate their ideas. Despite the inherent reflection component of arts education, students may still need further guidance in this area so that they develop the skills to employ reflective strategies on their own. The ability to self-critique may come about slowly.

Arts programs should therefore provide ample opportunities for students to connect their own art to that of others through journaling, cross-disciplinary studies, and teacher-student reflection meetings.

### Other helpful hints

Arts education programs should also:

- Be intentional and standards-based
- Be relevant to age and interests of students
- Engage in real-world, hands-on activities
- Include and involve families and communities
- Be delivered by well-trained staff
- Seek artists or partnerships with artists to fill in gaps in teaching the arts
- Use strategies of integration or project-based learning to address arts and other subjects
- Be informed by ongoing assessment of student needs and progress
- Develop a broad range of resources to support and sustain the program, especially local resources, including people, material, space, and financial resources

### Role of teacher working with refugee youth:

In the expressive environment of arts classes, refugee youth may reflect on traumatic events they experienced in their early years. (5) Arts teachers need to be aware of the sensitivity of such topics. For example, responsible teachers must take note of the images depicted in visual art, such as figures of war, which may offer insight into the background of the student. What may appear to be nondescript and insignificant might actually carry great weight. Moreover, the more elaborate drawings might signify a greater repression of sensitivity within the child.

Arts teachers are not qualified nor expected to act as psychologists. However, they can offer choices in modes of self-expression (i.e. different art media) and a quiet place to let memories come out. The more teachers know about the backgrounds of their students, the better they can “listen” to their experiences through the arts.





## Key Partners

Effective usage of key partnerships involves :

- Working with **local artists** to supplement teaching of the arts
- Informing **parents** of the benefits of arts education and encouraging them to support youth in their artistic endeavors
- Connecting with **community organizations** to incorporate students' work into local projects, such as city murals
- Expanding coursework with visits to **local museums**
- Developing integrative projects with support from **local libraries**
- Providing training to after-school arts staff from **experts in youth trauma** to ensure that the needs of students are adequately addressed
- Involving **school teachers** in the process of identifying youth who may benefit especially from arts programs
- Complementing the work of the **school arts programs** .



## Key Indicators

### Hard Indicators:

- Number of refugee youth participating in the program
- Length and frequency of students' participation in program
- Number of completed arts projects out of number of initiated arts projects
- Achievement on school math and reading tests
- School attendance

### Soft Indicators:

- Personal development in quality of artwork
- Students' self-esteem



## Data Collection and Assessment Methods

Basic data collection tools that can be used to monitor and evaluate the success of school engagement include:

- Portfolios of students' artwork
- School and program attendance records
- Focus group and individual interviews with arts staff members
- Focus group and individual interviews with refugee youth
- Staff questionnaires
- Youth questionnaires



## Resources for Arts Education

Project Zero: Arts Education Research and Resources  
<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/Research/ResearchArts.htm>

U.S. Department of Education: Arts Education Toolkit  
<http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/art/index.html>

Arts Education Partnership: Toolkit  
<http://www.aep-arts.org/resources/toolkits.htm>

## References for Arts Education

1. Fiske, E. (1999). Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning. *The Arts Education Partnership*.
2. Brunick, L (1999). Listen to My Picture: Art as a Survival Tool for Immigrant Youth. *Art Education*, 52 (4).
3. Stiegelbauer, S (2008). The Arts and Afterschool Programs. National Partnership for Quality After-school Learning.
4. Winner, E. (1992). Arts Propel: A Handbook for Visual Arts. Educational Testing Services.
5. Brunick.

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