

# Arts and Human Development

child development

*The arts play a crucial role in nurturing the holistic development of children, encompassing physical, cognitive, social, and emotional domains. By engaging in authentic arts experiences, children explore their senses and movements, fostering vital neurological connections and enhancing their overall well-being. Teachers can leverage arts activities to identify and address developmental strengths and weaknesses, while also providing a trauma-sensitive approach to support students' academic and personal growth, ultimately fostering a strong mind-body connection essential for learning and healthful living.*

## The Arts Educate the Whole Child

The arts form an integral foundation for living and learning: arts education authentically contributes to the development of the whole child. Human development is tracked through physical, cognitive, social, and emotional milestones as skills and behaviors emerge from birth to adulthood. From birth, human beings are neurologically wired to learn about the world through their senses and movement. The sensory input received through the body influences the developmental journey of each child: learning how objects smell, taste, feel, or sound contribute to a child's physical and cognitive development; learning to sense another person's expression, gait, or tone supports the evolution of students' emotional and social regulation.

Authentic arts-based experiences provide ample opportunities for children to engage and respond to these experiences. Selective arts activities can be integrated in the classroom to improve body sense, increase physical coordination, stimulate neurological activity, and expand mental and emotional attentiveness for improved performance. Singing, drawing, dancing, and pretending are organic activities that demonstrate and reinforce these developmental skills. The interdisciplinary nature of the arts helps students make connections to themselves, others, and the surrounding world.

## Supporting Child Development Through the Arts

Watching students engage in the arts helps teachers identify strengths and deficits in each realm of development. Teachers can leverage arts activities to further develop strengths, nurture weaknesses, and ameliorate developmental gaps.

For example, if a child's eyes cannot track across the page for reading, the child may benefit from stress-free opportunities for visual tracking such as playing catch with a balloon in dance class, or drawing on paper with a pencil or in the air with their hand. These activities relax the body and enhance the mind-body connection by enabling the child to practice eye convergence, visual tracking, and hand-eye coordination in a low-stress environment. Arts activities can provide consistent relaxed practice of developmental skills.

## A Trauma Sensitive Approach

Observing students participating in arts activities can also reveal the effects of overwhelming stress and trauma on the ability to perform normal activities. This is evidenced when people forget words or stutter when talking to a crowd. Relaxing arts activities reduce stress, helping students feel supported and empowered during their academic and personal progression. This section describes several frameworks to help teachers understand the critical importance of teaching within the arts, partly because of their intrinsic academic value, but more importantly to activate an essential mind and body connection for sound learning and healthful living.

## The Importance of Sensory Experiences

Remember, humans are neurologically wired from birth to organically experience the world through the senses. The natural and authentic engagement of the senses in childhood is often embedded within an aesthetically-centered experience where children develop proto-skills for artistry and creativity. Designed to illuminate the connections between arts experiences and human development, check out this blog post “How developmental milestones relate to arts activities” that links arts activities to the developmental milestones from birth to five years.

[Click here to review arts connections to the developmental milestones from birth to five years.](#)



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