

Art education should be embraced in primary schools

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Research has shown that art education in primary schools plays a valuable role in a child's development. The Cambridge Primary Art & Design curriculum was created on this premise, giving learners the space to explore and express themselves freely, supporting the development of social and reflective skills, and encouraging teachers to nurture an environment where learners can take risks and build resilience.



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In the African context of education, the arts are not considered as important as STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics).

Studies show that the cultivation of arts subjects creates the necessary balance to enhance performance in other learning areas that require more intense cerebral activity and are seen as more important. According to art historian, Amy Herman, art improves problem-solving skills, helping us discover why and how things go wrong and how to fix them.

Art and design nurtures creativity in young minds, which supports them in solving problems in other Cambridge Primary subjects, including English, Mathematics, Science, Global Perspectives and Computing. Art develops concentration skills and perseverance - as children explore different tools and materials, mastering their use to create beautiful objects and designs. These are important skills, necessary to excel in all other subjects.

The free exploration of art tools further supports the development of accurate letter and number formation in English and mathematics. When making models in art, learners have opportunities to explore the properties of materials. They also discover which materials can be joined and learn about their density and weight. This enhances and supports their learning about materials in science.

Limitless opportunities through art and design

Since its inception, Cambridge Primary Art & Design was envisaged to create 'limitless opportunities', which describes the range of individual and collaborative opportunities we want every learner to be able to identify and explore.

Art education provides a platform for all learners to communicate and express themselves, which especially aids learners who find communication and interaction challenging, including learners with autism.

The focus on experimental learning allows learners to develop and challenge their motor skills in ways that are appropriate to their physical abilities. The subject also supports those with visual impairments to touch and manipulate materials with different textures and properties, thereby providing a wide range of sensory opportunities. This has created a safe, supportive, and inclusive space for learners to experiment and develop.

Primary education is a pivotal time for developing creativity as this is when learners are most open to new ideas.

An early introduction to art education helps learners develop positive attitudes to creative thinking and creative subjects, which benefits future learning. The subject encourages them to celebrate their own and others' artistic experiences. This builds a sense of community in the classroom from an early age and fosters an openness to diversity as they experience art and design from different times and cultures.

Expression through art, therefore, aids emotional development as learners develop skills such as perseverance and collaboration. They are better equipped to deal with criticism positively as they give, receive, and respond to feedback.

Creative thinking is a valuable skill

Art education provides opportunities for learners to experience and respond to art and design produced for commercial purposes. Art has a place in day-to-day life which learners get to experience as they see its use in architecture and decoration. This leads them to appreciate the commercial benefit of art, further amplifying its practicality and financial benefit to artists and the broader economy. If they choose to pursue art later in life, they are better equipped to create value from it.

To best support this invaluable development, it's important to engage children in art – both at home and at school – and to continue with their creative experience throughout their schooling.

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