

# Visual Arts

## IN AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

### 10 LESSONS the Arts TEACH

By Elliot Eisner

1. The arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships. Unlike much of the curriculum in which correct answers and rules prevail, in the arts, it is judgment rather than rules that prevail.
2. The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer.
3. The arts celebrate multiple perspectives. One of their large lessons is that there are many ways to see and interpret the world.
4. The arts teach children that in complex forms of problem solving purposes are seldom fixed, but change with circumstance and opportunity. Learning in the arts requires the ability and a willingness to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities of the work as it unfolds.
5. The arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what we can know. The limits of our language do not define the limits of our cognition.

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*After school programs offer unique opportunities for children.*

Art can be an important element in after school programs whose missions are to address the needs of the whole child. Through artmaking, children are often able to make sense of their world and their roles within it. Children may be more comfortable in the more informal activities and programs offered in after school care, as they may have opportunities to select from an array of activities to meet their needs and interests.

Offering children an opportunity to create art in after school care can engage children with a broad range of abilities and of various ages. If offered as a center, or a special class, there will be children who will gravitate to art regularly. Offering art in after school programs may meet the needs of students who love to draw or those who want to experiment with art materials. It is important that students be allowed to make choices about the content of their work and whenever possible, the materials and processes they use. Making art is about making meaning. For children to be able to make meaning for themselves and grow as artists, teachers and caregivers need to encourage children to work with their own ideas.

An art program in an after school setting can be as simple or as complex as the facility and staff members are able to support. The program could be as simple as a drawing center or as complex as guided instruction in a variety of art forms such as ceramics, printmaking, painting, or bookbinding.

When leading or teaching children engaged in creating art the instructors should encourage self expression, thoughtful solutions to problems, and exploration of new ideas. The instructor should embrace a variety of expressions that are as unique as the children who are creating them.





**6.** The arts teach students that small differences can have large effects. The arts traffic in subtleties.

**7.** The arts teach students to think through and within a material. All art forms employ some means through which images become real.

**8.** The arts help children learn to say what cannot be said. When children are invited to disclose what a work of art helps them feel, they must reach into their poetic capacities to find the words that will do the job.

**9.** The arts enable us to have experience we can have from no other source and through such experience to discover the range and variety of what we are capable of feeling.

**10.** The arts' position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults believe is important.

SOURCE: Eisner, E. (2002). *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, In Chapter 4, What the Arts Teach and How It Shows. (pp. 70-92). Yale University Press.

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*When considering* how to approach the use of art and artmaking materials in after school settings, some of the following ideas on best practices may be helpful:

- Respect each child's abilities to create.
- Encourage a broad range of solutions to problems.
- Children do their own work, own drawings, and make their own decisions.
- Make-and-take art that is over-directed by adults and where children have little or no voice is of little value to children or to their artistic development.
- Adults do not draw for children on their work.
- Inspirations for guiding groups of children should be appropriate for the age level of the children and open ended so that children can create meaningful work.
- Materials can be simple and used in experimental ways.
- Never use printed sheets for children to color in the drawings of others. Instead allow children to draw for themselves.
- Varying materials and approaches to creating will enliven your program.
- Encourage children to respect materials and use and care for tools appropriately.
- Give children choices.
- Make children responsible for cleaning up their work areas.
- Instruction for complex processes is appropriate, but the content of the pieces made using the processes should come from the children.
- Encourage constructive responses to work between and among children.
- Staff should model encouraging behaviors toward children as they work and in response to the work created.
- If possible, put away work in process and invite children to continue with their work for several afternoons.
- Establish guidelines for what is acceptable and unacceptable in both content and behaviors.
- The environment created by adults should be supportive and safe for the children, free of opportunities for ridicule, and encouraging a variety of expressions.
- When new processes or tools are introduced, children should be shown how to use them through demonstration and how to care for them.
- In a large program, several smaller centers, such as a painting center, a drawing center, and a construction area may produce more positive results than large group instruction.
- If possible, hire a caregiver who is qualified to focus on the planning and implementation of art instruction or creating art learning centers.