

Why Arts Education for Every Child?

"The true purpose of arts education is not necessarily to create more professional dancers or artists. It's to create more complete human beings who are critical thinkers, who have curious minds, who can lead productive lives." -Kelly Pollock, Center for Creative Arts, St. Louis

During the National Association for Music Education Annual Conference in Orlando in November, I had an opportunity to hear about some of the newest research that supports the age-old question, "Why arts education for every child?" In this article, I want to share two reports that caught my eye and that can help all of us make the case for arts education.

In September, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Centre for Educational Research and Innovation held an international conference in London focused on the importance of fostering students' creativity and critical thinking. Participants explored how the arts suffer when states and countries face economic downturns and how to protect and advance arts programs for school-aged children. According to a report on the event:

"Tomorrow's schools need to help students think for themselves and work with others. Schools need to nurture students' creativity and critical thinking, help them look at things from different perspectives, understand the limits of their and others' views, and help transform their ideas into innovative solutions."¹

Another study published by the World Economic Forum identifies trends across 20 economies in 12 industry sectors. It suggests that between 2018 and 2022, 75 million current job roles may be displaced by machines and algorithms. At the same time, however, 133 million new jobs will emerge requiring a new set of skills. By 2022, an astounding 42% of required workplace skills will have changed. The emerging jobs for 2022 require both technological competencies, like programming and systems analysis, and distinctly "human" skills, like emotional intelligence, creativity, and innovative and critical thinking. As we all know, it's the latter set of critical skill sets that the arts provide to our children. (<https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report>)

Victoria Hermann: Arts Education in Action

As supervisor of visual and performing arts and 21st century life and careers for the Paramus Public Schools for 15 years, I've had the opportunity to work with many incredible students. I also have witnessed firsthand how the arts impacted young people's lives and careers in a profound, beautiful, and meaningful way. Dr. Victoria Hermann, a Paramus High School alumnus, is a case in point. At age 29, Victoria is the president and managing director of the

¹ Citation- Vincent-Lancrin,S.etal. (2019), Fostering Students' Creativity and Critical Thinking: What it Means in School, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/62212c37-en>

Arctic Institute. One of her jobs is to use stories to bring attention to climate change impacts and inspire people to act together to find solutions.

Victoria's effectiveness in her work – telling America's climate change story and crafting sustainable, equitable policies for a livable future – requires the foundational skills she acquired in arts classes as a student at Paramus Public Schools.

At Paramus High School, Victoria sang her way through four years of choir classes and poured over AP art history books long after she finished her homework. Her art classes, and in particular art history, were an immersive learning experience that taught her far more than how to describe *chiaroscuro* and what it takes to create an encaustic painting. These courses instilled in Victoria a lifelong commitment to analyze the social, economic, and political contours of art, and to question the consequences of what was visible and invisible to audiences' eyes. She still remembers the excitement and satisfaction she felt handing in an art history final on Francisco Goya's legendary painting depicting the horrors of war, *The Third of May* [1814]. Not only was she able to analyze the painting's symbolism and iconography, but she was also able to explore the socioeconomic and political conditions associated with the French occupation of Spain in the early 1800s and how art can inspire empathy, conviction, and collective action.

Victoria's arts education at Paramus High School helped her develop skills that served her well as an art history major at Lehigh University, and later as she completed a Ph.D. in geography as a Gates Scholar at Cambridge University. Today, Victoria keeps the arts front and center in her life and career as she works with cultural heritage leaders to keep public art, architecture, and history above water as sea levels rise.

When she thinks back to her time in art classes as a Paramus student, Victoria says the most important and lasting impact can be summed up in “three Cs” that her music and art teachers instilled in her: courage, compassion, and creativity.

“Lessons of storytelling and critical discourse analysis my teachers taught me over a decade ago still inspire and elevate my research regardless of where I'm working — whether I am testifying in front of the U.S. House of Representatives or presenting at the United Nations climate change negotiations.”

Victoria was recently named one of the world's top 100 influential people in climate policy by [Apolitical](#). She is passionate about shaping solutions and sharing our shared climate change story. It is demanding, vital work, and she could not do it without the skills gained in her high school music and art classes.

As educators, the most important thing we can continue to do is to create an environment where our students feel supported and safe, and where they can learn, grow and take risks. Sometimes it's hard to remember in the middle of our daily work, but Victoria's story reminds us of something vitally important. Encouraging words, a listening ear, and a mentoring spirit can make all the difference. The time we invest today in our students will shape who they become as confident future leaders in our society.

Keep up the great work, art teachers! I enjoy hearing from you, so please continue to reach out at lvartanian@paramusschools.org