

# Artspedition: Fostering creativity through exploration of and access to the arts

Page McMullen and Lia Woo

Stanford University  
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## Learning Problem

From ages eight to twelve, children are at a critical juncture in their development, where realism takes precedence over uninhibited creativity. As a result of both developmental and environmental factors, children are at risk of suppressing their creative instincts.

## Elaboration and Goals

Children naturally progress through stages of creativity influenced by their cognitive and physical development and environmental forces. The desire to create is rich for children between the ages of four and eight who strive to use art as a form of expression, to tell a story. This intensity to create transforms in children between the ages of eight and twelve. In these middle years, children want to create art that reflects the realism of the world. It is at this age that children are at a critical juncture in their development. As creativity slowly diminishes with age, it is essential that educators foster creativity, pulling children away from the urge to conform.

One way to foster creativity in children is through the exploration and practice of art. Art encourages new forms of expression and communication and new ways of seeing. Art also helps children develop problem-solving abilities and thinking skills. Too often arts curriculum plays a minimal role in public schools. Even though art is considered a core subject equivalent in importance to English, history, science, mathematics, social studies, and other 'traditional' subjects, art is not treated as such.

Our goal is to develop designs that will help encourage creativity in children. Artspedition aims to make the integration of art into school's everyday curriculum accessible and effective. By linking the exploration of art with other disciplines, hopefully, art will move to the center of the curriculum enabling teachers and students to reap the benefits of art.

## Design Proposition

Artspedition targets fifth grade public school students and teachers. Artspedition provides an alternative approach to exploring and practicing the arts. Through an interactive website, classes can integrate arts with their everyday studies of history, mathematics, science, and English by exploring and participating in the creation of art. The website clearly correlates the activities and content provided with state standards for

each discipline. The website and corresponding classroom activities offer students opportunities to construct their own understanding of art and its connection to other disciplines. Artspedition aims to provide teachers with innovative ways to teach curriculum through art using a variety of multi-media tools.

Classes can follow and interact with a professional artist on their journey of creation. Classroom activities will model the expert's process, allowing students hands-on experience in creating art. This apprenticeship approach to learning will make the creative experience visible and transferable.

Students will be encouraged to reflect and record their thoughts throughout their exploration in a journal. This journal will be one means for teachers and students to assess their learning. Students will also be able to share their artwork with others in a virtual gallery. In addition to studying classic works, the gallery provides an intimate space where students can analyze artwork created by their peers.

Artspedition relies on Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences in that the design attempts to develop all intelligences, allowing individual students different ways to succeed. In line with Seymour Papert's notion of guided exploration, Artspedition strives to create a learning space that feels large, but contains the appropriate degree of scaffolding to allow the learner to reach the heart of the lesson. By providing authentic activities and opportunities for users to construct their own learning, Artspedition aims to encourage life-long creativity.

## Literature Review

"The arts are an even better barometer of what is happening in our world than the stock market or the debates in congress." – Hendrick Willem Van Loon

"Creativity represents a miraculous coming together of the uninhibited energy of the child with its apparent opposite and enemy, the sense of order imposed on the disciplined adult intelligence." - Norman Podhoretz

It has been suggested that creativity decreases with age (Kerka 1999, ICAF 2001). Some researchers argue that this decline may be due to environmental factors such as formal schooling where perhaps logical thought is valued over divergent thinking (Kerka 1999) or conventional behavior is rewarded with good grades. In fact, creative behavior may be viewed as disruptive in the classroom and discouraged as a result (DeBord 1997). There are also a substantial number of brain studies that show that cognitive development between the ages of 8 to 12 may also impact creativity negatively (ICAF 2001). It is at this point, according to Piaget's theories, that children enter the concrete operational stage where a more logical thought process develops and abstract thought is limited. The International Child Art Foundation (2001) labeled this time as one of "Creativity Risk." "If the 'Creativity Risk' faced by this age group is not addressed, children are likely to conform and remain 'inside the box' rather than explore freely, believing that 'ideas are divine,' as did Aristotle" (ICAF 2001).

The question remains how to address the ‘creativity risk’ at this crucial age. What measures can be taken to encourage and foster creativity in the concrete operational stage? Many experts believe that art can aid in developing creativity (Hanna 1992, Alexander 1994). “Art is a dynamic channel for creativity; art sparks the imagination that fuels creativity” (ICAF 2001). Additionally, the study and creation of arts are often thought to enhance several creativity-related concepts. For example, longer-range indirect benefits of arts education include “the cultivating of discrimination, the stretching of imagination, and the contemplating of visions of human possibility” (Smith 2001). Intrinsically, “the arts offer a way of thinking unavailable in other disciplines” (Harvard Project Zero 2001). It’s through having a variety of ways to perceive the world that creativity originates. Beyond arts substantial contributions to creativity, the arts are also believed to contribute to improvements in student achievement and teamwork (Hanna 1992). Given the substantial evidence for the positive benefits of arts education, it seems obvious that the arts should be readily apparent in today’s educational system. In order to evaluate this statement, it is necessary to examine the current state of arts education.

Despite the fact that art was recently deemed one of core subjects to be taught in schools (GOALS 2000: Educate America Act), “arts are too often at the periphery of the curriculum” (Goodwin 1999). In 1995, only eight states had adopted the national arts standards and 5 states were assessing arts (Peeno 1995). Five years later, a study conducted by Chapman (2000) found that “none of the arts standards was rated as ‘necessary’ or ‘probably necessary’ to learn prior to high school graduation.” This statement highlights that fact that “standards don’t implement themselves” (Hatfield 1996). It seems that even though arts advocates are making headway in getting some states to adopt standards there is still a lack of implementation and assessment of those standards. Too often arts are viewed as extracurricular activities and not one of the core subjects (Davis 1999). Given that “schools are the only institutions specifically responsible for ensuring that all students learn about the visual arts” (Goodwin 1999), it is an absolute necessity to make art accessible to students and to provide teachers with effective lessons to meet art standards.

## **Competitive Designs**

The following list represents a beginning investigation of the current designs in the art education field. While some are not direct competitors, an understanding of their functions and content will inform the design of Artspedition.

**Eduweb:** [www.eduweb.com](http://www.eduweb.com)

Eduweb creates immersive, interactive, and in-depth adventures involving art, science, and history. The site targets both educators and students. The site provides ideas for hands-on activities, lesson plans for teachers, biographies of artists, a glossary of art terms, and art games. Examples of learning modules include students redesigning online common artifacts (chair, telephone, car) of our society for alien visitors or students

exploring America West in 1870 by traveling the landscape and meeting artists of the time period.

**Arts EdNet: The Getty's Art Education website** [www.getty.edu/artsednet](http://www.getty.edu/artsednet)

Arts EdNet is a comprehensive site designed for educators. The site offers lesson plans, curriculum ideas, a guide to teaching and learning art, assessment strategies, an online talk community (artsednetTalk) and virtual galleries and exhibitions. The site's framework is based on the four disciplines of art: art making, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics.

**ArtsEdge:** <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org>

ArtsEdge supports the idea that art education should be in the center of school curriculums. The site provides creative and appropriate ways to use technology as a tool to teaching and learning art. An educator can find breaking news in the field, lesson plans and curriculum ideas, and professional resources. ArtsEdge links the 'traditional' disciplines with art to encourage comprehensive learning experiences.

**Seattle Art Museum:** [www.seattleartmuseum.org](http://www.seattleartmuseum.org)

The Seattle Art Museum's interactive website is designed for both educators and students. Students can explore art in relation to various cultures and their artifacts. The site provides teachers with curriculum ideas involving art.

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