

# Ask A School Psychologist: Academics + Art = Balance

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As parents, we sometimes put so much emphasis on our children's achievement and progress in one or another core academic subject (language arts, maths, science, social studies) that the importance of participation and achievement in complementary subjects (art, music, languages, physical education) may be undervalued. In an effort to give our children an edge, some parents encourage early specialization in some area of learning. When parents put so much of a focus on core academics, there is a trade-off: increased time focusing on core academic subjects rather than spending time on complementary subjects and interests.

Psychologist, professor and researcher Howard Gardner (2007), known for his theory of Multiple Intelligences, has identified five minds students will need to cultivate to thrive in the future world of work and personal development. Gardner's view emphasizes that to prepare for the future, a student will not only need to develop a mastery and depth of knowledge (disciplined mind), but also be exposed to a breadth of knowledge and opportunities for integration (synthesizing mind), develop the flexibility and stretch to solve new problems (creative mind), gain an awareness and appreciation of differences (respectful mind), and to serve a purpose beyond yourself (ethical mind).

Putting emphasis and importance on a subject like science will be sure to cultivate the disciplined mind, but on its own falls short of tending to the four other minds important for your child's future in their work and personal life.

Education and opportunities that strengthen these 'minds' will also strengthen your child's brain. Music, aerobic exercise, language learning, engaging artistic creativity and play have been associated with healthy brain development and brain health. These subjects also tend to be more cooperative in nature promoting social skills and leadership skills. These subjects focus more on relationship or life skills than core academics, which can impact a child's opportunity to live a balanced lifestyle.

What can I do as a parent to promote balance in my child's education?

At every stage, parents can help by exposing students to activities that complement and add balance to their child's education through:

- school clubs
- sports lessons and teams
- leadership groups (e.g. guides, scouts)
- music lessons and bands
- art activities

Expanding your family activities is also a good way to promote this balance through:

- attending cultural events
- playing games together
- taking part in family sport activities
- visiting historic sites
- volunteering

Summer is a great time to expand your child's activities into areas that they don't often experience at school. Take the opportunity to encourage your child to try something new. We are fortunate that Calgary has a wide array of summer camp options that focus on a variety of experiences. As the new school year approaches, take the time to think about ways your child is cultivating these different minds and seek ways to balance the scales in the choices you help your child make in and outside of school.

Dr. Harriet N. Johnston, R. Psych., has been working in the education field for 19 years as a school psychologist. She teaches university courses on educational psychology topics for teachers and psychologists in training. Dr. Johnston completed additional academic degrees in neuropsychology and neuroscience with experience in brain imaging. Dr. Johnston can be contacted at h.n.johnston@ucalgary.ca. Dr. R. Coranne Johnson, R. Psych., has been working in the education field for over 26 years as a teacher, administrator and school psychologist. Dr. Johnson can be contacted through her website, [helpingchildren.ca](http://helpingchildren.ca).

#### COMPLEMENTARY

- Arts
- Sports
- Languages
- Music

#### CORE

- Language Arts
- Maths
- Science
- Technology