

WHY THE ARTS MATTER: MUSIC, DRAMA, POETRY AND DANCE AS EXPRESSIONS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This opinion article argues that the arts are not merely decorative additions to human life but are fundamental ways of knowing, understanding, and experiencing the world. It explores the interconnected roles of music, drama, poetry, and dance as forms of expression that foster education, empathy, memory, and human flourishing. The article contends that the arts perform three interrelated functions. First, they transform human experiences, including grief, joy, hope, fear, and belonging, into symbolic forms that make these emotions communicable and meaningful. Second, they expand the social imagination by connecting individuals with diverse bodies, voices, histories, and communities, thereby deepening understanding and empathy. Third, the arts are presented not simply as therapeutic tools but as practices that affirm human dignity, recognise individuals as active agents in their own healing, and acknowledge the inherent meaning of their lives. Within this framework, music is understood as relational sound, drama as embodied empathy and moral rehearsal, poetry as reflective language, and dance as a form of embodied knowledge. The article challenges the narrow evaluation of the arts based solely on measurable economic or clinical outcomes, arguing instead that their true value lies in their capacity to humanise individuals and shape education, healthcare, public culture, and everyday life. Ultimately, it concludes that neglecting the arts diminishes society's ability to develop humanely and to fulfill its ethical responsibility toward others.

Keywords: Arts, Music, Drama, Poetry, Dance, Human Experience

Introduction

Throughout history, the arts have been at the forefront of conveying human experiences. Previous to formal school systems, societies performed dances, recitations, acts and created hospitals, archives and courts. These practices were not just embellishments, but means to educate memory, structure emotion, construct identity and articulate public meaning. In today's world however, artistic knowledge must defend itself in terms of economic value, clinical advantages or employment. These are helpful, but not sufficient, measures. The arts are important not just because people are producers and consumers or patients. They are relational, remembering, feeling and imagining beings. This broader claim is supported by recent scholarship about the concept of flourishing, arts participation, creative interventions, and embodied therapy, which all show that arts engagement is related to well-being, empathy, social development, education and human dignity (D'Olimpio, 2022; Fan *et al.*, 2024; Shim *et al.*, 2021; Tay *et al.*, 2018; Vazquez-Marin *et al.*, 2023). This article argues that music, drama, poetry and dance are fundamental aspects of human life. They can be used for more than just entertainment. They help us to feel, listen, speak, move, remember and live more fully with others. This is not a love letter to art, but a letter of criticism to humanity in the life of culture.

Arts as Human Flourishing, Not Decorative Pleasure

The first principle of a serious defense of the arts is to break down the false distinction between usefulness and beauty. In all modern institutions, there is a tendency to define usefulness in terms of what can be counted quickly, for example, in terms of income, test scores, medical symptoms, attendance, employability, or productivity. The arts can help to achieve such outcomes, but the meaning of the arts is much broader. They form the presence of human beings. They assist people to identify experience, understand suffering, build community, and envision a better future. Hence the importance of the arts not being considered an afterthought to "serious" social needs. They form an integral component of the definition of serious needs of societies.

This argument has been well supported by the available literature on human flourishing. Tay *et al.* (2018) explain the importance of the arts and humanities to flourishing, in terms of their role of supporting meaning, engagement, reflection and social connection. Similarly, the authors of this article (Shim *et al.*, 2021) demonstrate the ability of arts/humanities interventions to foster flourishing in healthy adults. This is important as it takes us off the "illness" or "treatment" track. The arts are not just helpful when something is amiss, but they are also helpful because they enrich the normal.

The psychological benefits of the arts participation are also associated with emerging adulthood, which is characterised by the process of identity development, social pressure and uncertainty (Fan *et al.*, 2024). Creative arts interventions can contribute to good health and resilience, especially for adolescents and young people in low resource communities, where mainstream systems of care are stale, weak or unequal (Bux & Van Schalkwyk, 2022). These conclusions are consistent with the general social stance that the arts cannot be sidelined from the development process but are integral to the development of individuals and societies. An opinion article is a summary of evidence. The more compelling one is that the arts are important because of their role as a preservative of human complexity. A society that cares only for speed and productivity and skill risks producing people who can work but not love; who can hear but not listen; who can read but do not read. D'Olimpio (2022) believes that the arts are essential to education for flourishing. This is right, since if education is separated from the aesthetic and imaginative formation, it is an incomplete education. It can shape the mind but it does not stimulate the senses, emotions, and moral imagination.

The arts work also in relational aesthetic engagement. There are evidence of the relational and aesthetic processes of creative arts therapies given by Vaisvaser *et al.* (2024) and mechanisms of change as given by De Witte *et al.* (2021) in the creative arts therapies. In these works, art is not an object, it is an encounter. It occurs when there is a connection between the sound and the listener, the actor and the audience, the poem and the reader, the dancer and the community. During that encounter, people realise the awareness of themselves and others.

Music: Sound as Memory, Emotion and Relationship

Perhaps the most immediate of the arts is music, which penetrates the body before it is completely comprehended by the mind. Rhythm moves the feet, melody unfolds memory, and harmony achieves the balance of grief and joy. Music is integral to human nature, with its close connection to communication, time and common emotion as described by Malloch and Trevarthen (2018). This implies that music is not just entertainment that is learnt. It is linked with human attunement.

Music is thus a relational value. A song may be a family story, a national fight, a religious sentiment or a personal loss. Music has the power to bring back memories to people; they tend to remember events through music. In early childhood education, music and the other arts have the potential to contribute to social and human development in various ways, such as influencing professional practice, communication, and the early learning environment (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2025). This is significant as it demonstrates the formative influence of music at the onset of children's lives where they develop their rhythm, voice, listening and responding to music. Music also is important because it can be used in conjunction with drama and social development. Boal-Palheiros & Ilari (2023) reveal a relationship between music and drama and social development in children. It is not surprising for this to be the connection. In music and drama, timing and turn taking, expressing and shared participation must both be addressed. One singer can lead and another can follow a song. A Drama is a conversation between one character and another. These patterns of art teach sensitivity to society.

The thesis put forward here is that music on its own is a medium to learn how to listen. Listening is an active process. It takes work and patience and being open to another presence. Music can promote listening skills in an orderly way in a world of noise. It can also impart a quality of silence which is also vital to music. It is for this reason that music continues to play an important role in worship, in mourning, to protest and celebrate, and in education. It makes the feeling form and does not turn the feeling into an explanation.

Drama: Human Conflict, Empathy and Moral Rehearsal

Drama is important because it represents the life of man before men. Drama is a way to gaze at society through role, speech and gesture and through conflict. It is not just putting injustice, fear, love or betrayal in the mouths of people, it puts them in their bodies and voices as well. Drama is of moral force because of this. It provides a venue in which human beings can practice life, but without the financial loss of failure.

Theatre can have an impact on social competencies as demonstrated by Lewandowska and Węziak-Białowska (2022). Troxler *et al.* (2022) also indicate that fostering more involvement in live theatre has a positive impact on empathy and perspective taking for middle school students. At the level of the practitioner, these results corroborate the fact that when people enter the dramatic world, they practice seeing through another person's eyes - a fact known by theatre practitioners since the beginning of time.

Drama is also important in the workplace and in the educational setting. The creative drama and forum theatre technique can promote empathy and awareness of professional conflicts in teacher education, as demonstrated by Briones *et al.* (2022). The study by Basit *et al.* (2023) also reveals that role-play with drama elements can

influence the feelings of sympathy and altruism of nursing students. The examples are also critical as they show that drama is not only an art of the stage, but it is also a way of ethical learning. It provides teachers, nurses and other professionals the opportunity to experience the human impact of action.

Empathy, moral education and Theatre of the Oppressed are also examples of how the moral aspect of drama is seen in Corsa (2020). The audience may be disturbed by the drama. It can help to bring injustice to light and facilitate action. Thus, drama is a democratic art in this regard inasmuch as it allows social life to be discussed. It enables people to address what regular speech does not mention.

Communication and critical thinking is also supported through drama. Batdı and Elaldı (2020) demonstrate the drama methods and social communication skills, and Hu and Shu (2025) explore how drama education can be combined with critical thinking via collaboration and communication. These studies buttress the idea that Drama is a valid method of teaching learning. Develops confidence, dialogue, interpretation and judgement.

Drama and role-play can assist children to develop their socio-emotional skills. Frydman and Mayor (2023) explore the possibilities of drama therapy in early childhood and Van Berkel and Bosman (2023) looked at drama as social skills training for elementary school pupils. In addition, Tuncdemir (2025) introduces creative drama as a learning method that is played in teacher education. Combined with the studies demonstrate that drama is a systematic means of learning to relate. It is not as though people just perish of goodness. On the contrary, it provides them with a place to engage in role-taking, conflict, voice and responsibility.

Poems Convey, Reflect and Reveal the Inner Life

Poems are important because they get language out of people's hands. It tends to slow down our speech, and adds weight to our words. People usually talk rapidly and forget very well during a normal conversation. Poems cannot so easily be converted. It employs rhythm, image, metaphor and silence to shape the unformed things that might be fuzzy in the mind.

There is a connection between creative writing/poems and emotional processing/well-being. Creative writing can be used to allow participants express feelings of grief, depression and enhance feelings of well-being, with evidence found by Deveney and Lawson (2021). Forsell *et al.* (2020) also define creative writing as having a relationship with emotional release, understanding of self and human becoming. The results are consistent with a broader concept, that writing is not simply the documentation of experience, but it can also change experience. Poetry is particularly significant in that it helps to put the inner life into communicable form. Poems are used by Carvalho *et al.* (2021) to communicate emotions in mental health education, to engage the students with complexity and therapeutic communication (Alordiah, 2020). Hanauer (2022) also relates the processes of writing to insight and emotional clarity. The results from these studies indicate that poetry can be used to guide a disciplined investigation of self. It helps the author to stay on the outside of the pain, the confusion or the hope without getting lost in it.

Sharing of reflection can be facilitated by poetry. Since the time of COVID-19, there has been a coming together of poetry as a means of dealing with feelings of isolation, loss and uncertainty (Caleshu *et al.*, 2023). This results in no surprise. When the crisis comes, it is common for societies to go back to a form of language that is squeezed into the deepest essence of the language: prayer, lament, song, elegy, proverb and poem. Poetry is publicising private feelings.

Poems can be used to help build empathy and emotional health in education. Jack & Illingworth (2023) demonstrate the ways in which poetry could be used to help in learning by rehearsing empathy. A component of Majorana and Van Deusen's (2022) exploration of the use of poetry to support emotional wellness in the university classroom. Poems and prose are also included as means to creative critical reflection by Moran (2024). These studies indicate that poetry is not a way to avoid serious academic study, but it can enhance it. Creative writing in the eyes of children could foster self-regulation and cognitive flexibility (Iepan & Turda, 2025). This is important because it is a contradiction to the idea of poetry being a "decorative" language. Poetry & creative writing - attention, interpretation & emotional control. They engage in learning that involves thinking and feeling. It is the opinion which is here advocated that any instruction that omits the teaching of poetry is doomed to leave man unacquainted with the finest of experience and incapable of fully comprehending it.

Dance: The Body as Knowledge, Memory and Belonging

Dance is important because people have more than just a mental and verbal experience. The world is known to people in the body. They have memory in the way they stand, fear in the muscle, joy in the gesture and

movement in the body. This embodied knowledge becomes visible by means of dance. It demonstrates that there is no separation between body and meaning; that the body is a vehicle of meaning.

This is supported by the literature relating to the subject of dance and wellbeing. Chappell *et al.* (2021) demonstrate the aesthetics of dance, artistic and creative role in supporting health and well-being throughout the life course. They have an important job to do as they elevate dance beyond mere physical exercise. Dance is an aesthetic, social and expressive form of physical activity. It has to do with rhythm, imagination, culture and relationship.

Dance is also significant in a trauma/healing setting. Liang & Bryant (2024) summarise how dance and movement are utilised in embodied healing with women and girls who have been affected by interpersonal trauma. Dance/movement therapy is also offered as a whole person trauma and resilience approach (Serlin, 2020). These are studies that indicate that some experiences cannot be accessed via language. Movement can be a part of recovery as there is often trauma which resides in the body.

Dance is also important to identity. Erickson (2020) discusses the concept of an embodied identity development model in dance/movement therapy. This is helpful when not rehearsing or performing the dance. Movement can allow individuals discover themselves, identify relationships to others, and how they move in space. Dance movement therapy groups can also enhance social functioning and positive embodied experiences in social situations as demonstrated by Veid *et al.* (2022). The body can then be a place of resurgence and re-confidence. There is also a cultural aspect of dance that is equally important. Serlin (2022) speaks of dance, movement therapy on cultural and professional crossovers. Ma *et al.* (2025) explore the Chinese ethnic dance therapy from the cultural anthropology and health science perspectives. Dance and culture go hand in hand as seen in these works. Dance has ancestry, place, ritual(s) and communal memory. It enables individuals to do their belonging. Dance can also produce flow, liminality and *communitas* as can be demonstrated through five (5) Rhythms dance, as done by Keltner-McNeil and Banfield (2025). These ideas are important because they refer to the phenomena involved with interacting groups of people when they move together and enter into a temporarily shared expressive world. Dance-based interventions also can be used to promote mental health via embodied mindfulness, as demonstrated by Zafeiroudi *et al.* (2025). Dance is thus important because it engages the body, the mind, emotion and the community.

The Four Arts as One Human Argument.

While music, drama, poetry and dance are distinct, they share a common purpose: to help people share their experience. Music has its own language of sound, Dramatic language embodied/dialogue, Poetry-figurative, and Dance has its own language of movement. Experience is transformed into form that can be seen by others in each of the art forms.

That is why the arts are vital to the education process. They impart forms of knowledge which do not lend themselves to examination answers. They learn to listen, pay attention, imagine, empathise, be aware of their bodies, interpret symbols and reflect on morality. The authors of this study, Vazquez-Marin *et al.* (2023), link the arts to education to sustainable human development and positive psychology. Ballantyne and Klein (2024) further demonstrate the possibility of using research to inform arts making to enable experiences of flourishing. In this regard, the works made here show that the importance of arts education goes beyond being an add-on, it is on the path to enriched human development.

The arts are also significant because they cannot be isolated. Activities in the arts, such as in Choir, Theatre, Poetry Workshop and in Dance Circle, provide a way for people to make contact. It enables people to present themselves to others as workers, students or patients - but also as a whole person. Artistic growth, as described by Glass (2025), is creative flourishing; a systems approach will be useful because artistic growth requires a personal, social and cultural system to be developed. This is a participatory, individual and collective experience.

The danger, too, is the defensive attitude toward the arts, which is expressed in the therapeutic language. The evidence on well-being is key, but the arts are not just for the purpose of reducing distress. Delight, beauty, protest, memory, identity and wonder are all values that they have. The arts also enable individuals to ask themselves, "How can I feel better?" as well as "What does this life mean?", "Who are we?", "What have we suffered?" and "What might we become?"

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study are significant for the field of education, for cultural policies, in the field of personal development, for community life and the general understanding of human well-being. The study demonstrates that music, drama, poetry and dance are expressions of the human experience and therefore not secondary or decorative. They are to be seen as integral components of aspects of human growth, social bonding and cultural development.

Firstly, the study suggests that more attention is needed to be paid to the arts in making curriculum plans and in teaching practice in educational institutions. Pupils' imagination, confidence, emotional awareness, communication skills and critical thinking are developed through music, drama, poetry and dance. These are the qualities that are important for intellectual and personal maturity. So, the schools and higher education institutions should not make arts education about performances and entertainment as a regular occurrence. It should be used as a legitimate area of learning, which will allow the learner to be fully developed.

Secondly, the study can have implications for human development and human well-being. The arts give opportunity to individuals to express feelings, give meaning to experiences and to make sense of their lives. Music can evoke memories and emotions, Drama can allow a person to experience a conflict and human interaction, Poetry can inspire them to reflect and express emotion, Dance can bring together the body, identity and social inclusion. This indicates the possibility of the arts to be used as an aid to emotional balance, self-understanding and personal resilience.

Thirdly, the study suggests that society must understand that the arts can be used as means of empathy and social understanding. People can go into experiences other than their own with drama, poetry, music and dance. They assist the person to hear, visualise, sense and react to the real world of other people. The arts can offer a place of dialogue, healing and shared reflection in the context of division, conflict and misunderstanding in society.

Fourthly, the study is of importance for cultural preservation and cultural identity. The arts are a repository for the memory, values, beliefs and histories of the communities. Societies pass on their tradition using songs, dances, poetic traditions and performances to the younger generation. This implies that communities may lose their sense of cultural identity and their capacity to recall and make sense of their own past if they do not take care of the arts.

Finally, policy makers are advised to consider the arts as a component of national and community development, based on their findings. Supporting the arts cannot just be interpreted as support for entertainment. It should be seen as an investment in creativity and cultural identity, social cohesion and human dignity. Theatrical, cultural, musical, poetic, dance and community art public policies have a role to play in a more balanced and humane society.

Sixthly, there are implications for health, counselling and social care practice. The arts can be helpful in a supportive, therapeutic and/or community-based setting because of the non-threatening ways in which they can be used to express difficult feelings. It is possible to convey experiences which may be hard to communicate with normal words, by using poetry, drama, music and dance. This can help the arts to be relevant in situations where an emotional release, a recovery, confidence and social reintegration is required.

Lastly, the study suggests that the worth of the arts ought not to be gauged just on monetary value or amusement worth. Their significance is more in the fact that they are able to humanise the society. The arts engage people in deepening their feelings, reflective thinking, careful listening and meaningful living with others. The human person is loved in a greater way in a society that loves the arts. Hence it is necessary to safeguard, foster and resituate Music, Drama, Poetry and Dance as integral components of human experiences.

Conclusion

The arts are important because they provide unique ways of communicating and interpreting the human condition. Music transforms emotions into sound and preserves memory through shared experience. Drama brings conflict, empathy, and moral decision-making to life by allowing individuals to inhabit the perspectives of others. Poetry offers a reflective language through which inner thoughts, emotions, and ideas can be explored and expressed. Dance embodies identity, trauma, culture, and belonging through movement. Together, these art forms reveal the emotional, social, embodied, imaginative, and historical dimensions of human experience. This opinion article argues that the arts must be defended against the misconception that they are merely forms of entertainment or secondary supports for supposedly more useful disciplines. Their significance extends far

beyond these limited roles. The arts humanize education, enhance health and well-being, strengthen social relationships, and preserve cultural memory. They cultivate the capacities to listen, speak, move, feel, and imagine in ways that foster meaningful engagement with others.

A society may continue to construct buildings, formulate policies, advance technologies, and expand markets without giving priority to the arts. However, it risks losing its capacity for authentic mourning, meaningful expression, collective memory, empathy, and moral imagination. This is the real danger of neglecting the arts. They are not luxuries to be enjoyed only after development has been achieved; they are fundamental to development itself. Protecting music, drama, poetry, and dance is therefore an investment in the fullness of human life and in the flourishing of individuals and communities alike.

Recommendations

- All of the arts should be enhanced throughout the educational system. Music, Drama, Poem and Dance should be given due consideration by the schools, colleges and universities as a serious area of knowledge. The arts should not be considered as inconsequential discipline or simply a tool for ceremonies and entertainment.
- The arts should be a part of general education. Aural skills and the use of music, drama, poetry and dance to enhance other subject areas should be encouraged to provide benefits of creativity, communication, confidence, imagination and expression.
- To promote greater support for arts from policy makers, government and education, Theatres, Music programmes, Dance centres, Poets, cultural festivals and community arts projects should be a priority for public investment. This will contribute to maintain the culture and foster social development.
- Teaching methods should be developed to artistic aspects and teachers should be trained in that. Role play, music, storytelling, poetry reading and movement/learning should be used in creative ways in teacher education programmes. This can help to make learning more interesting and meaningful to students.
- There should be emphasis on the use of the arts to support emotional well-being. In schools, hospitals, counselling centres, care homes and communities; music, drama, poetry and dance activities should be promoted to being used as supportive measures to emotional expression, healing and self-understanding.
- Local art tradition should be sustained throughout the community. Traditional songs and dances should be recorded, learned and performed, as well as oral poetry, festivals and dramatic performances. This will help to develop the younger generation's sense of identity with their culture and history.
- Artists have a role to play in contributing to society and should be recognised as such. Musicians and dramatists, poets and dancers should not be looked upon as entertainers only. They should be considered as cultural activists, teachers, social critics and guardians of human life.
- The arts should help to build empathy and social connection. Drama, poetry, music and dance can enable individuals experience the emotion and life story of others. It is therefore necessary to use them to facilitate peace building, social inclusion, citizenship education and community dialogue.
- Provide additional opportunities for young people to engage in artistic activities. Opportunities for young people to sing, act, write poetry and dance should be offered in Schools, religious organisations, youth centres and cultural organisations. That can help them increase their confidence, self-discipline and positive self-identity.
- The arts have economic value. They can be used to aid employment, tourism, and the creative economy. They serve a function of humanising the society. They should also be recognised for their role in memory, identity, beauty and emotions.
- There is need to have arts-based programmes in health and social care. Often times, difficult experiences may not be easily communicated verbally so people can use music, drama, poetry and dance to communicate them. Arts- based activities should therefore be included in all aspects of support in health and social care institutions.
- There should be public awareness on the value of the arts. Media, schools, cultural centres, community leaders should raise awareness of the importance of the arts as human expression and not an indulgence.
- It is necessary to promote collaboration among the various groups of actors: artists, educators, health workers and policy makers. Collaboration can include helping to create practical, arts-based programmes that can aid in the process of learning, emotional health and development, cultural preservation and social development.
- Further research is needed in the fields of music, drama, poetry and dance, to understand their impact on education, emotional development, cultural identity, social cohesion and human flourishing.

- All societies should acknowledge the need for people to have a sense of beauty, expression, memory and imagination. Thus, it is necessary to encourage music, drama, poetry and dance as an integral and wholesome society.

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