

# **Bridging Worlds: Why the Humanities are so Crucial in STEM High Schools**

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Humanities, encompassing a range of disciplines such as literature, history, philosophy, and the arts, play a crucial role in the holistic development of students. In the context of high school education, the humanities offer unique contributions to the intellectual, emotional, and moral development of young people. This article explores these contributions and argues for the sustained inclusion and emphasis of humanities in high school education.

One of the fundamental benefits of humanities education is the development of critical thinking and analytical skills. Studies by Pellegrino & McElhinney (1982) highlight that humanities encourage students to engage in critical analysis, challenging them to examine, question, and reflect upon complex ideas and issues. This form of engagement is essential for developing the ability to think critically and independently.

The humanities play a vital role in enhancing empathy and cultural understanding. Through the study of literature, history, and the arts, students gain insights into different cultures, histories, and perspectives, which fosters a deeper understanding of and empathy for others. Research by Kidd and Castano (2013) demonstrates that reading literary fiction, for example, improves a person's capacity to understand what others are thinking and feeling.

Humanities education is also instrumental in improving communication skills. The emphasis on reading, writing, and discussion in humanities subjects hones students' abilities to express themselves clearly and persuasively. As indicated by Trilling and Fadel (2009), these communication skills are crucial not only in academic settings but also in professional and personal contexts.

The study of humanities significantly contributes to students' moral and ethical development. By engaging with philosophical and historical texts and ideas, students are encouraged to contemplate and develop their own ethical beliefs and values. Challenging humanities courses, as noted by Damon (2008), can inspire students to consider their role and responsibilities in society.

Humanities education fosters creativity and innovation. Contrary to the common perception that these qualities are solely nurtured through the arts or STEM subjects, studies by Starko (2013) suggest that the humanities provide a rich ground for creative thinking and innovation, through encouraging original thought and the exploration of diverse ideas and themes.

In the current educational climate, where STEM subjects often dominate discussions of curriculum relevance, the inclusion of humanities is crucial for balance. The argument for a well-rounded education, as presented by Mi and others (2013), posits that the humanities are essential for providing a counterbalance to the technical and often decontextualized knowledge offered by STEM subjects.

The humanities prepare students for active civic engagement. By studying history, government, and philosophy, students gain a deeper understanding of societal structures and the importance of active participation in democracy. Research by Hess (2009) emphasizes the role of the humanities in preparing students to be informed and engaged citizens.

Despite their importance, humanities subjects often face challenges such as underfunding and undervaluation in the educational system. As lamented by Berliner (2010), the increasing focus on standardized testing and practical skills can lead to a diminished emphasis on humanities education. Addressing these challenges is essential for maintaining the vitality of humanities in high schools.

In conclusion, the humanities hold a critical place in high school education. They contribute to the development of critical thinking, empathy, communication skills, moral reasoning, creativity, and civic engagement. In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, the skills and knowledge imparted by the humanities are not just valuable but essential. As educational paradigms continue to evolve, it is imperative that the humanities maintain their rightful place in the high school curriculum, not as relics of a bygone era, but as vital disciplines that prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. The future of our society depends not only on technological and scientific advancement but equally on the empathetic, ethical, and critically-minded citizens shaped by a robust humanities education.

## References

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