

Integration of the Arts: The Why's and How's of Art Integration Across the Curriculum

A school district's curriculum is perhaps the second most precious cargo on the education ship behind the students themselves. It is an embodiment of what a district holds dear through the lenses of federal, state, district, community, parent, teacher, and/or student values. Curriculum communicates what those of today believe tomorrow should be; it prepares the present for the future. To change a curriculum, much thought and research must take place in order to make changes that correlate with the needs, values, laws, etc. of those concerned. It should meet federal, state, and district standards, be research-based, and be implemented via best practices. For The Mountain School at Winhall, a change has come that does just that...the integration of the arts across the curriculum.

First, integrating the arts meets federal and state standards. The much-debated law No Child Left Behind (NCLB) gives provision to the arts as a "core academic subject" (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). With the obvious push towards reading and math, the arts—a common reference for subjects such as dance, theater, music, art, etc.—have oft been neglected, even considered a "lesser" subject by teachers, parents, and lawmakers alike. However, the arts are not lesser as the U.S. Department of Education makes the arts equivalent to reading, math and science. In the journal *No Subject Left Behind: A Guide to Arts Education Opportunities in the 2001 NCLB Act*, core academic subjects have been defined as: "(t)he term 'core academic subjects' means English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography" (p. 7). Further confirmation of federal support of the arts exists in assessment. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) created assessments for the arts in 1997, available for dance, music, theater, and visual art. These tests can be used to evaluate a school's effectiveness in fostering artistic creativity and to measure a student's artistic ability (*Good Schools Require the Arts*, 2004; *No Subject Left Behind*, 2004).

The arts are also a part of most state curricula. Some states, such as Florida, have separate standards for the visual and performing arts (*Sunshine State Standards*, 1996). Vermont includes the arts standards throughout their curriculum (*Vital Results Standards*, 2000). For example, some of the expectations for the visual and performing arts can be found throughout the following Vermont standards:

- 1.0: Communication Standards;
- 2.0: Reasoning and Problem Solving;
- 4.0: Civic/Social Responsibility;
- 5.0: Fields of Knowledge;
- 6.0: History and Social Sciences; and
- A.0-E.0: Learning Opportunities.

Both specific and general references are made throughout the Vital Results Standards concerning the arts that make it required yet simplistic to integrate the arts into any subject.

Second, change in curriculum should be based on scientific research, not simply community or district decision. The arts have long been associated with higher student achievement and self-perception, and now much data supports those associations. In 1999, Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga found that students involved in visual and performing arts experienced higher academic development in reading and math, as well as gains in self-concept, motivation, and empathy and tolerance for others (Fiske, 1999). These positives held especially true for students of low socio-economic status (SES), oft times eclipsing the percentages of achievement for other student groups. In 1999, Rose confirmed that a reading/dance curriculum increased student achievement in reading comprehension and oral reading (Deasy, 2002). DuPont's 1992 study found the same true for drama students (Deasy, 2002). Catterall and Waldorf (1999) found that overall achievement for all academic disciplines was higher for students involved in any of the multi-arts programs. Bilhartz, Bruhn, and Olson (2000) confirmed that music increased student memory, and Vaughn's 2000 study connected music and achievement in mathematics (Deasy, 2002). Catterall—a prominent published and respected figure in the study of arts and achievement—also did a study in 1999 on student perception of integrating the arts. He found that 94% of elementary school students, 50% of middle school students, and 86% of high school students thought that the integration of the arts made learning more enjoyable (Fiske, 1999). These few examples of hundreds of studies show a positive relationship between academic achievement and performance and the arts. They do not, however, address many of the countless studies of the arts and their effect on positive student self-perception and motivation. The arts can teach to and help improve the “whole child.”

Third, curriculum changes such as integrating the arts must also be supported by best practices. Arts integration across the curriculum can fulfill just that. Three examples of best practices are integrated curriculum, multiples intelligences, and differentiated instruction. These strategies, recognized by educators around the world as proven and effective tools for teaching students, easily allow arts integration into all disciplines.

“Integrated curriculum” has many names (i.e. interdisciplinary teaching, thematic teaching, synergistic teaching, etc.) and definitions. Corporately, however, they all include the same central ideas. Kathy Lake states that these ideas include: a combination of subjects; an emphasis on projects; sources that go beyond textbooks; relationships among concepts; thematic units as organizing principles; flexible schedules; and flexible student groupings (1994). Including the arts in other core subjects can attend to most—if not all—of these central ideas. As art and social studies, music and math, or theater and reading blend, so to does core disciplines, student interest, and academic achievement (Deasy, 2002; Fiske, 1999).

The theory of multiple intelligences, presented by Howard Gardner in 1983, is one of the great theories of our age. Gardner believed that I.Q. based on testing limited the creative capacities of the human mind (Wood, 2002). He offered several types of intelligences, each existing within the human brain in varying levels, including:

- Linguistic intelligence ("word smart");
- Logical-mathematical intelligence ("number/reasoning smart");
- Spatial intelligence ("picture smart");
- Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence ("body smart");

- Musical intelligence ("music smart");
- Interpersonal intelligence ("people smart");
- Intrapersonal intelligence ("self smart");
- Naturalist intelligence ("nature smart"); and, later,
- Existential intelligence ("existence smart") (www.Thirteen.org; Wood, 2002).

Understanding the uniqueness of each individual student and the multiple intelligences can allow teachers to develop activities based on these intelligences, including artistic expression and creation (Tomlinson, 1999; Willard-Holt, 2003). While not all students are dance artists, some are and need to be given dance as an outlet of expression and understanding, just as a mathematical equation can be an outlet and expression for a different student.

Differentiated instruction—a close relative to the previous two best practices—is another avenue for effective teaching. Tomlinson defines the aims of differentiated instruction as to maximize each student's growth by meeting each student where he or she is, and then helping each student to progress to a new level (1999, 2001). Practically, it involves offering several different learning experiences in a class lesson or unit in response to the students' varied needs. Those learning activities and materials should vary in difficulty to challenge the students at different levels, but also through their interests and their preferred ways of learning or expressing themselves (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001). The objective of the lesson, however, is not altered—only the outlet. That means that each student's goal is mastery of the standard. Again, integrating the arts into differentiated instruction is an easy and natural process in which the student remains central in goals, objectives, practice, and performance.

Some simple yet practical examples of integrating the arts across the curriculum:

- Language arts—write plays, create scripts for videos or movies, sculpt “verb” trees, and perform story summaries;
- Math—recreate world structures, perform a dance describing a mathematical process, and design a home or school;
- Science—build models of atoms, reenact/recreate a crime scene, paint a scene representing genetic traits/heredity, and write and/or sing a song on parts of a plant;
- Social Studies—write/perform a Renaissance play, learn a Hindu wedding dance, create a collage of space travel, and write a song about the Sixties;
- Foreign Language (i.e. Spanish)—make native jewelry, sew native clothing, learn native songs and dances, cook native foods, build/play native instruments, and write and perform drama in Spanish.

In closing, the integration of the arts across all subjects can meet federal and state legislation and is research-based. However, more importantly it meets the needs of every child in order to provide them with the best possible learning situation that is both equal and equitable.

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