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# Introduction

## Arts Integration: The Ripple Effect


What happens when the arts are integrated into the curriculum? What effect, if any, does integrating the arts have on students? teachers? curriculum? learning? the classroom and school community? How do the arts support the Common Core and state standards? The intention of this book is to explore these questions and dive deeper into the theory and practice of what it means to truly and authentically integrate the arts.

Imagine a still pool of water. A pebble, when dropped into the middle, splashes quietly. Slowly the ripples emerge and travel outward in expanding circles. It becomes clear that the consequence of the seemingly simple initial event, the dropping of the stone, goes far beyond the place where it started. The impact is far reaching. There is not only a surface ripple effect, but also a ripple effect that is felt far beneath the surface.

Teachers enrolled in an M.Ed. Integrated Teaching through the Arts (ITA) program with Lesley University were assigned the task of creating a metaphor or simile that accurately demonstrated the power of arts integration. They were asked to somehow demonstrate what happens when the arts are infused into the curriculum as a learning and assessment tool.

Having experienced the arts themselves and with their students over a period of several months, each group of teachers came up with amazingly creative solutions. One group thought of the arts as transformative—like yeast in bread dough or the startling change of moving from a black and white photo to color. Others thought it was like tending a garden or traveling to unknown places. The solutions were creative and meaningful, each illustrating how the arts transform, nurture, change things at a deeper level, and allow for multiple perspectives and multiple voices to be heard and honored.





One group of five students created the metaphor of the ripple effect. They demonstrated this by filling a kiddie pool with water and then throwing in about 20 corks, which bobbed around, seemingly without any particular direction or relationship to one another. We all quietly stood over the pool, watching the corks. They seem to float aimlessly in the water. Then someone dropped one stone right in the middle of the pool. Everything immediately changed. The stone, having broken the surface, immediately disrupted the quiet pool and the bobbing corks. As the ripples began to spread, one circle multiplied into another, and then another (Shafak 2010).

We stood in awe as we watched the corks, no longer meaninglessly floating about, but moving, connecting, creating patterns, and working in synchronization. What became quickly apparent was that the total effect of the dropped stone was not immediately evident. The consequences went much deeper than what was witnessed on the surface. As we continued to observe the ripples, the connections between the ripple effect and integrating the arts became more and more evident and more profound.

## What Is Arts Integration?

*Arts integration is the investigation of curricular content through artistic explorations. In this process, the arts provide an avenue for rigorous investigation, representation, expression, and reflection of both curricular content and the art form itself.*

—Diaz, Donovan, and Pascale (2006)


For many educators, although the idea of integrating the arts seems somewhat appealing, the challenge of having to be “comfortable” in every art form seems overwhelming. “I can’t do it,” is a familiar response. “I’m not an artist. I can’t draw. And for heaven’s sake, don’t ask me to sing!”

It is important to remember that integrating the arts is not about creating professional artists. It is about deepening learning and about reaching all students of every ability, ethnicity, and linguistic background. It is most definitely about teaching students who learn in a variety of ways, not just through reading and writing.

Another misconception about arts integration is that if we integrate the arts, we risk eliminating the art and music specialists. Nothing is further from the truth. We need both! The specialists focus on teaching the specific skills and elements of a particular art form. In the classroom, the arts are a vehicle for strengthening the core curriculum, and deepening and assessing learning. When the arts are integrated, learning is experienced in a variety of ways, allowing every student to be successful in various content areas.

Several prominent educational leaders in the country, such as Jonathan Kozol, Deborah Meier, Nel Noddings, Linda Darling Hammond, Maxine Greene, and Elliott Eisner, have spoken out against the narrowness of current curriculum, and have expressed the need to reform our educational system and nurture students to become creators, meaning-makers, and empathizers (Pink 2005). It was John Dewey (1931) who remarked that the problem is “with our lack of imagination in generating leading ideas. Because we are afraid of speculative ideas, we do, and do over and over again, an immense amount of specialized work in the region of ‘facts.’ We forget such facts are only data... uncompleted meanings, and unless they are rounded out into complete ideas—a work which can only be done by...a free imagination of intellectual possibilities—they are as helpless as are all maimed things.”





The arts provide an educational approach that addresses these concerns by engaging students in their learning, developing curriculum where curiosity is central and where students tap into their creativity while developing the skills needed for the 21st century, including creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication. The corks, whether you think of them as curriculum content, individual students, or the entire classroom, no longer bob around aimlessly and in isolation, but react, respond, and interact.

When students learn about cells or molecules by actually “becoming” a molecule through a movement exercise as a way to internalize and personalize the understanding, or by writing a persona poem about who they are, what they do, and how they think and feel as a lung or blood cell, or by dramatizing, through a tableau experience, the meaning of the word “metamorphosis,” deep learning occurs. It goes way beyond the “right answer.” Learning sticks and is meaningful and relevant. They are indeed mastering 21st century skills—creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration—that are essential for higher-order thinking.

As Silverstein and Layne (2010) note, “Arts integration provides multiple ways for students to make sense of what they learn (construct understanding) and makes their learning visible (demonstrate understanding). It goes beyond the initial step of helping students learn and recall information to challenging students to take the information and facts they have learned and do something with them to build deeper understanding.”

## **The Arts Are Not an Extra**

A second grade teacher writes about the difficulty of finding space for the arts in her curriculum even though she knows it is an effective tool to enhance learning for her students. She says, “Our district is currently using a prescribed basal program utilizing specific stories. We have little freedom or time to work or think outside the mandated box. Our students, as well as

ourselves, have less opportunity to create and use imagination beyond the curriculum that everyone hears at the same time and in the same way.”


Her dilemma is one that many educators across the country are facing. However, if we truly want children to learn, we have little choice but to include ways to teach that reach the diverse learners who make up today’s classrooms. It is not about “fitting” the arts into the curriculum, but weaving them into the curriculum as a natural part of how the content is presented and assessed. The arts must be thought of as a foundation, the supporting structure that carries the importance of learning.

Jonathon Kozol (2007) worries that artistry and imaginative creativity on the part of teachers is under serious assault. According to Kozol, “The over-determined lesson plans now commonly in use in inner-city neighborhoods, which are often written word for word from scripted programs that are handed to the teachers and intended to keep children on an absolutely straight line to the destination of the next high stakes exam, leave little time for teachers to pay close attention to those children who won’t give the answers we are told we must elicit from them or who, even more unpardonably, ignore our pre-planned questions and insist on asking better questions of their own” (50).

The arts are central to human learning and can serve as a foundation for education in many different settings. We live in a wonderfully culturally diverse society. By practicing culturally responsive education we acknowledge, affirm, and celebrate diversity through many lenses, including differences in learning styles, age, class, levels of mental and physical ability, gender, race, and ethnicity. Modeling understanding of differences in our teaching and examining with students the richness and the challenges of a diverse society is essential. “Learning to look through multiple perspectives, young people may be helped to build bridges among themselves; attending to a range of human stories, they may be provoked to heal and transform” (Greene 1992).







The arts provide a variety of ways for students to use what scientists and mathematicians refer to as *representational fluency*—the ability to use different symbolic systems to represent meaning. A concept that grew out of science and math disciplines, representational fluency “includes visualizing and conceptualizing transformation processes abstractly...transforming physical sensory data into symbolic representations and vice versa” (Lesh and Doerr 2003, 288). The arts provide opportunities for students to move between different representations of content. For students to create arts-based work, they must translate their understanding of content into new forms. They cannot translate without understanding. In order to move between languages and symbol systems to create new representations, students must draw upon higher-order critical thinking skills such as analysis and evaluation, leading to artistic creation. In poetry, students use words in new ways that are fresh and derive new meaning; in drama, they explore ideas through character, dramatic context, and multiple perspectives. Visual art harnesses the power of metaphor, and movement boils concepts down into their essence in ways that defy literal interpretation. Students translate information into new forms, blending ideas with their own unique perspectives, background experiences, voice, and intent.

Research continues to show how the arts are not mere window-dressing in the public school setting, but rather that when integrated properly into a curriculum, they can increase learning in key content areas. In a Ford-funded research study, *Voices from the Field: Investigating Teachers’ Perspectives on the Relevance of Arts Integration in Their Classrooms* (Bellisario and Donovan with Prendergast 2012), teachers were asked what benefits they discovered from arts integration practices in their classrooms. The data suggests that arts integrated teaching:

- leads to deep learning and increased student engagement.
- provides a variety of strategies for assessing content and expressing understanding.

- is culturally responsive and creates learning that is relevant in students' lives.
- engages students in creativity, innovation, and imagination.
- renews teachers' commitment to teaching.

Why should the arts be an integral part of teaching and learning?

- The arts address multiple learning styles, recognize multiple intelligences, and reach across cultures and languages to address the needs of every student.
- The arts promote analytical and critical thinking skills and can be used to motivate learning and assess it.
- The arts address diversity by helping teachers create classrooms that teach to the needs of every student by presenting multiple perspectives, engaging parents and communities in learning, helping teachers critique schools as institutions, and instituting education reform.
- The arts promote more democratic classrooms by expanding the number of languages able to be used in learning and by encouraging multiple perspectives.

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## In the Classroom

Katie Palmer, fifth grade teacher in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, reports that "only 20 students out of 63 received A grades on last year's science test on plant and animal cells. This year, I integrated music and poetry throughout the science unit, and 40 out of 63 got As. They really nailed it this year thanks to the arts!"

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## Addressing 21st Century Skills Through the Arts

Educators and schools continue to face tough educational challenges. Amid the pressure to raise test scores, lower dropout rates, increase cognitive outcomes, and decrease disciplinary issues while effectively teaching to a wide range of abilities and ethnicities, there is increasing concern about how to best prepare today's students for success in a creative global economy.

There is a set of life and career skills and knowledge that most educators would agree are required in order for students to succeed:

- They must think critically and creatively.
- They must have organizational skills.
- They must be able to work well with others.
- They need to be self-confident, self-motivated, and self-disciplined.
- They need to understand and use mathematics, science, and technology.
- They need to be highly effective communicators.
- They need to understand and appreciate cultural diversity.

James Bau Graves notes that, "The new imperative is creativity. We don't need our schools to inculcate the habits of menial labor; the new economy needs a workforce that is trained in creativity. And that fundamentally implies a new and unprecedented attention to the arts" (2005, 129).

The practice of arts integration has proven to help students understand and practice these important skills. Arts integration employs strategies that build a strong platform for deep and meaningful learning. Students do not merely acquire information, but process and apply it. Observing, recording and organizing,


collaborating, planning, practicing, revisiting, making predictions, experimenting, and communicating are among the life and career skills that are enhanced through arts integration (Burdette 2011). This is the kind of deep learning that students will need in the future. “More than ever, their health and well-being, success in the workplace, ability to construct identities and thrive in a pluralistic society, as well as their sense of agency as active citizens depends on gaining these skills” (Dunleavy and Milton 2008, 4).

## Addressing Differentiation Through the Arts

Through differentiated instruction, teachers use varied strategies, resources, materials, and procedures to ensure that all students access curriculum and achieve learning goals. This includes providing scaffolds for struggling students while at the same time challenging advanced students. “All students, from the most struggling to the most advanced, need to have curricula that lead to the enduring understandings, essential knowledge, and fundamental skills that are at the heart of the unit of study” (Conklin 2009).

There is also distinct evidence that differentiating instruction through the arts has a unique ability to reach children who might otherwise be left behind by academics. In 1999, the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities released a study, *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning*, which shows that young people with arts-rich experiences achieved higher grades in school and scored better on standardized tests across all subject areas, including non-arts subjects. Achievement gains were most significant for youths from multicultural and low-income backgrounds—communities that are too often underserved. The arts have the power to engage youth in positive learning and personal growth (Fiske 1999).





By integrating the arts with content instruction, teachers can effectively differentiate to ensure that all learners reach chosen learning goals. The arts embody many paths to learning and inherently encompass multiple modalities through which students can show what they know. For example, kinesthetic learning is an essential aspect of creative movement, drama, and storytelling. The visual learning modality is engaged not only through the visual arts, but also through gesture in storytelling and tableaux in drama. The auditory modality is used not only in music, but also in storytelling, drama, and poetry.

In the same way, multiple intelligences are also engaged when students learn content through the arts (Gardner 1983). For example, music not only utilizes musical intelligence, but also logical-mathematical intelligence through rhythm and pattern and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence through singing or playing rhythm and melody. Drama engages spatial, linguistic, interpersonal, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences. The visual arts can employ spatial, logical-mathematical, intrapersonal, and even naturalistic intelligences.

Arts integration can also provide open-ended assignments, vocabulary development, self-paced activities, “sense-making” activities, and choice-based activities driven by student interest, all key strategies for differentiated instruction. For example, presenting an array of art-making supplies and encouraging students to think critically about which materials they will use to create a visual arts piece requires students to use critical thinking skills and provides opportunity for student choice. Working with English language learners to create a song about science content is an open-ended task that bolsters vocabulary development and helps students make sense of the curricular material.

To truly differentiate instruction for all learners, teachers must continually assess student progress and understanding and adjust instruction accordingly. The arts provide flexible ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge at various stages of the learning process. For example, when students

improvise scenes about mathematics content at the beginning of a unit of study, they demonstrate their prior knowledge of the content. The teacher can then plan instruction to meet students' needs based on the information learned through the scenes. The same improvisational activity performed during the course of the unit can be seen by both students and teacher as a formative assessment, showing what students have learned and demonstrating continued gaps in knowledge. Further instruction can then be adjusted to address student needs. When the dramatic activity is completed at the end of the unit, it can serve as a summative, performance-based assessment to show everything students have learned about the content.

The arts provide multiple, varied, open-ended ways for students to show what they have learned. A range of languages and symbol systems is available to students outside of the written expression students are expected to use in writing essays and taking tests. In the visual arts, an endless array of materials can be used to create pieces, in both 2D and 3D formats, and students can use line, color, texture, shape, and all the languages of visual art to show what they know about content. Pitch, tone, rhythm, and melody in music can be used to represent learning through voices, instruments, or simply clapping. Every student's product will be different. Students understand, through rubrics, checklists, and formative feedback, what they are expected to show they have learned, but there is no one "right" answer.





## In the Classroom

Elementary teacher Sunie Caballero reports, “After nine years of teaching in the same elementary school that I attended as a child, I was beginning to feel bored.... Every day, I felt like a reading drill sergeant. I would faithfully administer 90 minutes of reading instruction plus an additional 30–90 minutes of interventions for the poor kiddos who were not reading at the expected level. Once I would suffer through the reading, I would then cram in 90 minutes of math instruction and if possible throw in some science, social studies, and writing. I would try to make my lesson plans creative and enriching, but I was frustrated, and so were my kids.”

Sunie discovered that by integrating the arts, every student’s strengths were accentuated and even her least productive students proved to be more successful. She had students use the reading material to create their own stories and illustrate them (storytelling and visual arts), create short improvisational skits based on the reading texts (drama), and make up songs and chants to summarize key facts (music and poetry). The curriculum was presented in a way that was innovative and interesting because it engaged many different learning styles, and to her delight, Sunie found she was much more easily addressing the Core Curriculum goals and state standards. Neither she nor her students were bored and behavioral management issues decreased! In fact, the students looked forward to reading time because they were personally engaged.