

ARTS INTEGRATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Discussion about integration is not limited to PreK-12 schooling. As part of the Harvard Interdisciplinary Studies Project, Mansilla and Gardner (2004) commented on the increased attention to interdisciplinarity, while simultaneously raising awareness of its often dubious quality. They pose three core “symptoms” of quality interdisciplinary work based on an analysis of current institutional interdisciplinary programs and practices: consistency, balance, and effectiveness.

Ross Miller (2005), Director of Programs for the Office of Education and Quality Initiatives with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), affirms the importance of quality in assessing student learning in higher education integrative learning experiences.

He notes that at the college level, integration can involve knowledge and skills from different disciplinary areas, the consideration of multiple perspectives in problem solving, adapting skills across contexts, and reflecting on connections (pp. 11-12). Miller underscores the value of Mansilla’s foundations for assessing integrative learning:

1 Disciplinary grounding (Have appropriate disciplines been selected and are the concepts used in accurate ways?);

2 Integrative leverage (Has a new understanding been generated that would not have been possible using a single discipline?);

3 Critical stance (Is the goal of the work significant and does the integration withstand critique?) (Mansilla, as cited in Miller, p. 13).

Both of these criteria for quality are or could be applied to arts integration initiatives at all academic levels.

The Southeast Center for Education in the Arts (SCEA) at the University of Tennessee has proposed a comprehensive definition for arts integration (<http://www.utc.edu/SCEA>). The characteristics provided by SCEA summarize the key elements in definitions provided by practitioners, evaluators, and researchers. SCEA has also situated arts integration in the larger context of curriculum integration, as we have chosen to do. No single definition accurately characterizes the field; however, the elements identified by SCEA are consistent with the literature in this review.

Arts Integration is instruction combining two or more content areas, wherein the arts constitute one or more of the integrated areas. The integration is based on shared or related concepts, and instruction in each content area has depth and integrity reflected by embedded assessments, standards, and objectives.

Integrated instruction is often designed, implemented, and evaluated in collaboration with other teachers, arts specialists, community artists, and institutions; and delivered, experienced and assessed through a variety of modalities: artistic processes, inquiry methods, and intelligences.

Integrated (or interdisciplinary) learning uses the knowledge and methods of several disciplines in combination to explore a central concept, object or

issue as a framework for building student competence. The arts can enrich and deepen student understanding in this educational framework. Knowledge and study of the arts develop the abstract thinking skills necessary for complex and imaginative problem solving.

Curriculum integration is a way of organizing studies around real-life issues that are significant to both young people and adults, and applying content and skills from many subject areas and disciplines at the same time. Curriculum integration is a teaching approach that enables students and teachers to identify and research problems and issues without regard to subject-area boundaries, providing students the experience in a learning setting that will prepare them for effective teamwork in the future.

Integrating curriculum with the arts involves:

- *Organizing instruction that is often drawn from life experiences—allowing students to question and engage in real-life issues*
- *Combining subject areas—not separating them. Students learn and use skills from all disciplines and across disciplines to become knowledgeable about personal and global issues*
- *Developing skills and applying knowledge in more than one area of study*

In an integrated curriculum, education through the arts allows students to learn how to analyze, evaluate and draw reasoned conclusions from what they see and hear. They learn to reflect on the meaning of their perceptions and experiences. They learn to convey ideas, feelings, and emotions by creating their own visual art and by performing dance, music, and drama. Knowledge and experience in the arts provide children the capacity to expand their

reasoning ability, to make connections, and to think creatively.

Integrated arts lessons can be extremely rich and deeply layered learning experiences for students who experience them. Teachers report that with an integrated curriculum that includes the arts, students have moments of exhilaration, personal transformation, and academic or life choice change.

Teachers and artists who have successful experiences report profound changes in their approach to individual students, to learning, and to the classroom in general. Many teachers, parents, students, and administrators believe that integrating the arts makes classrooms better learning environments. The arts provide a window to understanding the connections among all subject areas. (reprinted by permission of the author) ■