

A Collision of Art, Language and Creativity:

Art Integration at the Middle School Level

by

Shannon Andrews

B.A., Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2002

B.Ed., Vancouver Island University, 2007

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This paper emphasizes the importance of visual arts integration in the English language arts classroom, focusing on effective ways of providing meaningful and creative opportunities for students to visually demonstrate their learning. The entire project reflects a personal passion for the arts and literacy, a desire to inspire students and foster creativity in the classroom.

Included is a collection of resources intended for teachers to use as a starting point to promote creative integration and the arts in the classroom. The importance of teaching and supporting our students in an ever advancing, visually rich and aware society is essential; and a meaningful way to do so is through arts integration. This project supports teaching visual awareness and fluency to our students, allowing them to become arts literate, creatively confident and willing to express their understandings through a variety of art forms.

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Chapter One: An Artful Life

Overview

My time spent as a middle school teacher has revealed to me the importance of diverse, hands-on learning experiences, the value of students creating their own understandings, and the positive impact of cross-curricular integration in our subject areas. I have come to believe that learners should be fully supported in a variety of visual learning ways, with support from educators, technology and creative outlets to create and genuinely experience their education, allowing them to be thoroughly engaged - emotionally, socially and physically. I believe the importance and effectiveness of cross-curricular integration in our classrooms today cannot be underestimated. When it comes to providing authentic and meaningful learning experiences and opportunity into a classroom, allowing students to find a creative way of expressing themselves is an essential option.

“Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life” – Pablo Picasso

These words resonate with me as a language and literacy teacher, and I believe that he speaks to a pedagogical possibility for passive or unengaged students. For me, artistic practice has the capability to inspire and invigorate the senses. In my own classroom, I would like to see students dust off what they think they know about a Language Arts, and to shine new light on those experiences. In the following chapter I will share my own personal attachment to the arts and the integral role they played in my upbringing and life experiences, my creative mind processes, how teaching to our passions can alter an educators experience

Rooted in the Arts

Anything is possible. Without a doubt I believe these words to be true when it comes to the arts, creativity and exploration. In fact, I have a hard time believing the opposite could be

true in most facets of life. I still cannot decipher if I was told explicitly, or if it was a general progression of experiences, people and events while growing up that essentially built up this internalized framework for an arts-focused life, career, and existence. I recognize the importance of my family and the involvement my parents had while I was growing into an expressive, curious and creative young adult. Access to books, cameras, paint, building materials and the outdoors was an integral part of my adolescence. I loved to draw, photograph and explore the incredibly beautiful and inspiring surroundings of our small town. I would read for hours, play make believe and build forts that turned into exciting new worlds. No one said I could not, and no one said I should not use my imagination. I was an average academic student with an above average creative character that developed and grew over the years. By the time I left middle school I knew that the art room was my sanctuary, and that English teachers were magical storytellers who left me feeling inspired and in a state of wonder. I felt lucky with my educational experiences, focused in the French language and then streamlined into any and all visual arts courses offered in high school. I finished my K-12 schooling with confidence and ambition while immersing myself in graphic design and visual communication studies at the postsecondary level. I could see the potential for art everywhere, and I wanted everything I touched to be art.

The Way my Mind Works

I think in pictures. For as long as I can remember I have had the tendency to visualize what has been said to me with incredible detail. Whether asked to complete an activity, create a nametag, or if I am told someone is coming to visit, I picture it all clearly in my mind before moving on in conversation or action. This generally happens in a flash and is not seen as a distraction. Snapshots flip through my mind. I keep what I need and ignore the rest. I also have a

tendency to get emotionally attached to stories told to me as they are so clearly pictured in my mind. I feel connected to them, almost as though they have become my own. When it comes to building and actual creation, my thoughts wander. I frame and shape an idea, interpreting all the bits and pieces of a project and filter it through my arts-motivated mind. Then I willingly go about finding the means or the required skills and materials to make these conceived ideas a reality. I love acquiring new creative skills and I actively seek them out now as an adult, which speaks to my goal of being a lifelong learner. In its simplest form of explanation - I love to make things. I get incredible satisfaction from pulling something out of my mind and turning it into a tangible piece; something to hold, touch, see and share. It can be any format; print, paint, wood, writing, photos, an organized layout, a presentation - anything that looks and feels appealing.

The one thing that I find more satisfying than bringing my own ideas and creations to reality is inspiring others to do the same. I knew once I completed my first degree in visual communication my studies were not done. I knew then that I would go on to become a teacher. What I could not have predicted was returning to teach at my own former middle school and becoming the art teacher in the same classroom that I found so inspiring as an adolescent. Indeed, anything is possible.

Creative Expression and Understanding

Whenever I had the opportunity to create something tangible in a class to demonstrate my learning, I was definitely at my best. I can remember working with individual teachers who allowed us to express ourselves in a variety of ways. We would build scenes, paint, draw and collage our way through social studies with our teacher as a guide. Our English classroom was plastered with visuals, inspirational quotes, and beautiful book covers. My memory of middle and high school years are vivid and rich, and I aspire to provide the same learning experience for

my students. My current teaching assignment feels much like my own personal, coveted ‘dream teaching job’. At present, I am responsible for educating and inspiring grades six, seven and eight students in the visual arts. I also instruct English language arts to two groups of grade eight students.

Returning to teach after a year away from work with my growing family, I feel that I have gained a new perspective or different lens on the importance of communication with and amongst our youth. There is an obvious attachment to technology for the generation of teens that I am teaching, and it appears to me that a large part of this population has a difficult time unplugging from their devices – whether it is their smartphones, their computer screens or the like. But I also often see young people with their heads down in books; engaged and interested in new authors and intense stories. Yet, I find these same avid readers lacking the motivation to compose, create or express themselves orally. I also have many students who simply do not want to write; lacking the inspiration or motivation to do so. Upon first glance it would appear that not much is dynamic or stimulating enough to attract and hold their attention in language arts classrooms. However, if we look at output and expression, I ask myself, “Is it possible that teachers are not providing a diverse enough palette to allow students to show us what they know?”

What I desire in my classroom is more sharing, explanation and interpretation of student learning; students actively participating, being open and willing to have a dialogue about their learning and lived experiences. I believe that when students are willing to speak about their work, describe and elaborate on their products, real learning has happened and students become confident in their work. I feel that there is a general lack of oral and written communication amongst our current student population, especially around the topic of what they know and have

learned. I think that investing time and energy into the arts, and integrating the arts as a form of student expression in the language arts classroom will provide a new platform for discussion. I believe that this will open doors of communication and sharing – especially for those learners who are passive and disengaged.

“I found I could say things with colour and shapes that I couldn’t say any other way -
things I had no words for.” - Georgia O’Keeffe

Teaching to and Through my Passions

I feel as though I always knew, that there was no question that I would have an arts-based focus in my graduate project. It became clear to me that the focus of this work needed to be in the area of the visual and language arts when I examined the building blocks of my own personal journey to becoming an educator. My story is infused with exposure to a variety of arts and cultural experiences, something I share with many of my own students. I love languages and the many ways in which we communicate. I need to make and to create, as well as share my enthusiasm and joy when it comes to the visual arts. My purpose is to move forward with an investigation into the possible benefits of applying a variety of visual arts activities in an English language arts classroom. Informed by a critical reading of the literature, I will combine reading, writing and oral expression with various two and three dimensional art lessons and activities. My goal in these arts-based ELA lessons and activities is to impact students’ communication output and engagement. By investigating what can be learned through the arts in an English language classroom, I aim to inspire creative practices for teachers and students in non-traditional settings. We know arts-based activities utilizes a variety of higher level thinking strategies and cognitive functions, and I aim to exploit a variety of these avenues in my project.

A consciously cut up collection of Cs: Finding meaning in the creative method.

A consequential curriculum keeps us motivated.

Moving. Evolving.

A collection. A connection. A contemporary combination.

Cross curricular consideration goes beyond commonplace practice.

Capturing the classes, keeping them keen and consumed.

Charged with curiosity, releasing considerable control.

Haunting. Daunting.

Creeping in, curious creatures collect. Capture. Captivate.

Inspiring. Collaborate.

Commit to it. Believe in it.

Doubt creeps in.

Is it clear? Choose a path. Believe in it.

Child development. Change. Conceptual understanding.

Curriculum. Where do we fit in?

Can we find meaning in more than the letters?

Reading. Writing. Creating. An arts way of life.

A beginning. A day in the life of. A as an assessment.

Let us question the concept of comprehension.

While being open about our judging of computation.

Question curriculum in a curious light.

Wonder which concepts commit to creative minds.

Connections. Creative webs. Cultivating curiosity.

Combine our passions and evolve with time.

Where does this fit in?

This cogent and compelling curriculum haunts us.

Charges. Cues. Convinces.

Convincing outsiders, insiders, everyone involved.

Encourages collaboration in depth weighs.

Haunting. Daunting. Deep knowing. Shallow doubting.

Are they growing? Building? Gaining? Gathering?

Am I?

An individual crusade that is far from solitary.

Ideas we have heard before. Mulled about. Studied.

Contemplation. Time ticks on. Contemplation.

Calculated and contrived.

Cultural questions, configuration, questions come back again.

Daunting. Haunting.

Creeping in. I am curious, a creature of collections.

Capturing. Captivating. Inspiring.

Committed to collaboration. Cross curricular contamination.

Doubt creeps in. Is it clear? Choose a path. Often less ventured.

Volunteer your voice. Dedicate your practice. Focus on your choice.

Child development. Change. Conceptual understanding.

Curriculum. Creatives. Collectors of all things.

These choices stay with me. They stay with my students.

Shape them. Act as a catalyst. Commit them to art.

Constructed understandings.

A cognitive contract.

Change rides the tide. Change goes with the flow.

Or do we change against the grain?

Change comes only with commitment.

Clouded by the crowd.

Communicate your intentions. Clear. Concise.

Be creative. Be courageous.

Where do we fit in?

Continue.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

This inquiry into the impact of an arts-infused middle school experience in the English language arts classroom explores the potential for meaningful learning experiences that emerge through the engagement of cross-curricular studies; specifically in the area of the visual arts. Further, it examines the implications of creative adaptations and inclusion into the (Language Arts?) curriculum. This examination is grounded in the author's own personal experiences and passions as an educator, the existing research and literature, and the British Columbia Ministry of Education Curriculum Resource Guide. In particular, this literature review discusses the importance of recognizing the diversity of our students learning styles, creative courage in students and teachers, as well as the cognitive connection to creativity, the potential for improved student engagement through creation and a creative catalyst in the classroom. Finally, student success, the enrichment factor as an educator and the language arts content connections through arts integration are all discussed.

Including Visual Arts in Classroom Instruction

In my own teaching and learning experiences, work that has been created and shared when combining the visual and language arts becomes far more meaningful to the students, parents, and the entire school culture. The resulting benefits to the creative self-esteem of the students, the teacher-student-parent relationships, and the overall classroom learning environments have also been evident in my classroom context. Visually representing learning has the potential to provide more opportunities to share and communicate class work during conferences, at home during conversations with family, and especially in the hallways of the school. Leigh (2012) states that our current society is embracing a more visually aware culture,

and “schools are called to accept broader definitions and practices of literacy”. This in turn “requires teachers to provide their students with visual literacy instruction” (Leigh, 2012, p.397).

Schools hold the potential to come alive with meaningful, integrated, visual representations of student learning in all curricular areas. Students have the capability of becoming arts aware. This implies more than just creative or content knowledge. Rather, it also means being curious as to how something has been created, presented or communicated. Eisner (2004) speaks to educators’ roles in this visually engaging time. He writes that “the kinds of minds we develop are profoundly influenced by the opportunities to learn that the school provides” (p.8). Arts-integrated experiences challenge the norms of everyday schooled experiences, extending the potential of learners and expanding the role of teachers.

Eisner (2004) further argues that, “Imagination is no mere ornament, nor is art. Together they can liberate us from our indurated habits. They might help us restore decent purpose to our efforts and help us create the kind of schools our children deserve and our culture needs” (p.11).

Gardner’s (1999) expanded understanding of learner intelligence clearly identifies that students, “be given multiple opportunities to apply their knowledge in new ways” (p.129). Arts-based instruction acknowledges the differences among learners, encourages children to assume further responsibility for their learning, and presents understanding in a way that opens up opportunities for learners to master concepts as identified in Gardener’s (1999) model.

Multiple ways of being and knowing are addressed in the potential cross-curricular integration of the visual and language arts. Such integration may be viewed as essential rather than being an option or alternative method to meeting students’ needs. The British Columbia English Language Arts IRP (2006) for Kindergarten to Grade 7 explicitly encourages the integration of multiple communication strands. It states that “all the language arts (i.e., speaking,

listening, reading, viewing, writing, and representing) are interrelated and interdependent: facility in one strengthens and supports the others. Students become confident and competent users of all six language arts through having many opportunities to speak, listen, read, write, view, and represent in a variety of contexts” (p.15).

In a society seemingly immersed in visual information with learners seeking engaging activities to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, Language arts educators can further value the importance of visual arts as a form of self-expression and learning. Such integrated visual and language arts experiences in the teaching and learning environment have clear connections and support within the literature in all learning domains – affective, psychomotor and cognitive. As Gullatt (2008) mentions “it is ironic, then, that the arts are frequently dismissed as merely emotional, not cognitive” (p.14). Together, these complex cognitive, emotional, and social experiences are potentially beneficial and meaningful acts of learning for students to have. Thomas and Arnold (2011) argue that the “integration of the arts strengthens learning and creates a positive instructional environment” (p.96). Additional positive effects of curricular integration in the classroom may be recognizable in such areas as student engagement, hands-on learning experiences, and student communication skills. Marshall (2005) highlights the positive effects of arts integration by stating:

Connecting art to other areas of inquiry in a substantive, integrative way not only reveals the foundations of each discipline, but also makes for sound pedagogy because it: (a) is congruent with the way the mind works - how we think and learn; (b) highlights and promotes learning, especially learning for understanding and transfer; and (c) catalyzes creativity” (p.229).

Throughout the literature, it is evident that student success and confidence corresponds with arts integration, in some cases noting improved attendance with the presence of alternative arts curriculum delivery, as well as cultural enrichment and understanding through student practice and studies.

Recognition of Students' Diversity

Educators, need to make an effort to understand, appreciate and support the variety of ways in which students acquire or construct knowledge through their learning. It is important for teachers to consider arts integration in their planning methods, the necessity to foster positive learner and teacher relationships, ways of becoming an integral part of the school culture, and effective assessment practices. Marshall (2005) states that “understanding the way people think, learn, and create is important for learners, for artists, and especially for art educators” (p.233). He, as other theorists in the visual and language arts, understand “learning as essentially a situated, socially-constructed, and culturally mediated process of making meaning” with an emphasis on “the connections between the body, context, experience, culture, emotion, and high-order thinking” (p.227). All of these aspects are necessary for understanding.. Gullatt (2008), in our visually-oriented culture, reminds us that “students naturally depend on the arts to construct meaning of the world around them”, whether this be in the form of photographs, paintings, digital media or any of the other visually rich arts (p.20). Gullatt (2008) supports the integration of language and visual arts stating that “through the arts, students are able to journey through the aesthetic world to discover new information. This form of learning allows students the opportunity to expand their imaginations and creativity while gaining new information” (p.21). The importance of recognizing the diversity amongst our learners and the need to consistently respond as educators with a variety of engaging and creative learning opportunities, in the arts

and beyond, is further forwarded in Gullatt's (2008) notion that "students have different strengths and providing activities to accommodate those strengths while bridging to the weaker areas is at the heart of diversified instruction" (p.22). Marshall (2005) also encourages the integration and diversification of the arts across the curriculum. "Knowledge is no longer thought of as divided into discrete domains, but is seen in terms of an integrated system" (p.228).

Integration and diversification is clearly a key aspect in the success of learners in the classroom today.

Creative Courage

As important as the visual arts are in today's society, and as often as students use them in their own lives for digital, educational or personal communication, students often say and very likely believe, that they are not creative. "I am not artistic" is something that I have heard many times in my own English classroom as well as in the art room. Such students may have a very specific and narrow idea of what it means to be *creative* or of being an *artist*. Eisner (2004) draws on the ideas of Herbert Read, forwarding his argument that:

The aim of education ought to be conceived of as the preparation of artists. By the term artist neither he nor I mean necessarily painters and dancers, poets and playwrights. We mean individuals who have developed the ideas, the sensibilities, the skills, and the imagination to create work that is well proportioned, skillfully executed, and imaginative, regardless of the domain in which an individual works. The highest accolade we can confer upon someone is to say that he or she is an artist whether as a carpenter or a surgeon, a cook or an engineer, a physicist or a teacher. The fine arts have no monopoly on the artistic (p.4).

Gullatt (2008) furthers that the arts can “assist students with new ways to view and appreciate opportunities for interaction within the world around them” (p.21). He believes that the arts are capable of allowing students to comprehend that there are many ways of problem solving (Gullatt, 2008, p.21), thus not just being an outlet for the ‘creative types’. Part of a Language arts educator’s role is help students overcome creative blocks; creativity is not to be confined to an art class or to be thought of as something that only artists *do*. Marshall (2005) explains that “a central tenet of learning and creativity theory is that learning and creativity are essentially connection-making. Consequently, teaching is a practice of making connections or helping students to make connections” (p.239). Highlighting the in-between moments, the connections, thoughts and creations that happen in various learning spaces – of page, screen or classroom - is imperative for fostering creativity in our learners. Being able to recognize the independent thoughts that come from the crossing, or integration of ideas and processes, is creativity in practice and to be valued in diverse classrooms. “The everyday expression of creativity often takes the form of trying out a new approach to a familiar dilemma. Yet half the world still thinks of creativity as a mysterious quality that the other half possesses” (Goleman, Kaufman & Ray, 1992, p.42). In addition to this, Gullatt (2008) believes that students are able to gain proficiency in the arts, just as they have the ability to become proficient in all other educational disciplines. This will enhance their life-long journey as a learner, their overall skills necessary to becoming a successful student, as well as their creative ability (Gullatt, 2008, p.14). An educator’s ability to offer alternative perspectives through an integrated language and visual arts curriculum can clearly be of benefit to all learners.

Cognitive Connections

As a language and visual arts teacher I have experienced moments when students are

creating; completely engaged in an art-based learning activity. Here, students become consumed in their work, ceasing to see the division of the subject areas. Eisner (2004) writes that “work in the arts cultivates the modes of thinking and feeling... one cannot succeed in the arts without such cognitive abilities. Such forms of thought integrate feeling and thinking in ways that make them inseparable” (p.5). Marshall (2005) identifies a cross-disciplinary study in which it is noted that transfer – between thinking and emotions - is involved with cross-context applications of knowledge and ideas. It is primarily associated with learning and has implications for creativity. “When ideas are transferred or applied from one area to another, recoding occurs and matters are re-conceptualized. Curriculum integration, therefore, fosters creative thinking” (Marshall, 2005 p.232). In addition to this he references the 1963 work of Piaget finding that “learning occurs when new information is attached to prior knowledge and placed in existing conceptual compartments or ‘schemata’” (Marshall, 2005 p.229). Such experiences of accommodation and assimilation is noted in a variety of learning contexts, but especially within arts-based cross-curricular contexts. Thomas and Arnold (2011) share their findings, and that of other researchers who have investigated the relationship between application of the arts and corresponding cognitive abilities:

Brain research by neuroscientists has merged with educational studies to discern the best practices to influence students’ intellectual growth. Although scientists have questioned existing theories of intelligence and offer their own observations or interpretations, researchers appear to support the use of active learning strategies that are common in arts instruction (p.97).

These studies are not a new phenomenon, and they continue to evolve with the access to new advancements in technology. Gullatt (2008) supports the aforementioned findings adding that:

Recent developments in cognitive science and neuroscience help explain the power of the arts as enhancing teaching and learning in numerous ways. These developments have shown that the mind is embodied and that the brain and body make up a single, fully integrated cognitive system (p.14).

This fully integrated and embodied cognitive system – where emotion and cognition are symbiotic – is at the center of art-based learning experiences. With body and mind being fully present for an integrated and complete learning experience allows individual learners to add their own experience, interpretation and understanding to the cognitive process. “Abstract thought is consistently represented through metaphors that are associated with physical experiences and emotions” (Gullatt, 2008, p.14). We are always creating new understandings of the information that is presented to us. The importance of the delivery and the cognitive recognition of these formations is where creative possibilities are truly maximized. The British Columbia IRP for English Language Arts (2006) recognizes:

Students who can monitor their learning, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and set goals for improvement become independent, lifelong learners. By thinking about how they think and learn, they gain personal control over the strategies they use when engaged in literacy activities. This control develops through metacognition – that is, becoming aware of and more purposeful in how to use strategies to improve learning (p.17).

Student Engagement through creation

Learners need motivation, variety within their educational experiences, and also the opportunity to come to their own understandings in learning. A majority of students are capable, at the middle school level, to create their own journey with the support and guidance of their teachers. Many educators have come to understand that a ‘stand and deliver’ teaching method is

ineffective, disengaging and antithetical to learner creativity. Thomas and Arnold (2011) find that “occasionally changing the instructional method in the classroom can engage the students and refocus their attention, giving students practice in multiple processes (visual learning and deductive reasoning) and will invigorate their mental energies” (p.98). They also advocate for “the presentation of content, choice of process, and choice of product according to the needs of each student” (p.98). Being open to student-based interests as expressions of understanding or allowing for a variety of interpretations of a given theme, would likely lead to a plethora of products within an established framework set by a teacher. At times this may, potentially, feel like a lack of control on the teacher’s part, however if we consider the independence afforded to the student by allowing such choices, one can recognize the satisfaction that would be granted to them. Creating more opportunities in the classroom for students to take control of their own learning journey, including a choice of creative outlet, holds the potential for increased student engagement and interaction. Studies in arts-based lesson implementation done by Charland (2011) demonstrated that:

Faculty members who regularly implemented the lessons felt that they had improved as practitioners, and shared their observations of student learning. These included growth in students’ communication skills, advanced depth of thought during discussions, the ability to build on, or respectfully critique, the comments of others, and exhibiting greater comfort sharing ideas, considering multiple interpretations, and taking risks (p.11)

This implies that not only would personal confidence build for students through their arts based learning, but it would also increase for the teacher involved.

Also of note in this study’s findings is the potential increase in student communication amongst themselves through critique and reflection. This form of engagement is often lacking in

our classrooms with many students preferring to remain quiet when it comes to general discussions. Through creative practice, the products created can allow for conversation starters and alternative forms of expression. In my own teaching experience, students are more willing to talk about their art pieces than more traditional writing or reading activities. Gullatt (2008) affirms this idea by highlighting that “the arts enhance instruction by allowing students to ask questions, explore for answers, and generate new questions from recent learning experiences” (p.20). In addition, he adds that “visual stimulation is one more way to enhance the thinking and creative learning process of students” (2008, p.20). Gullatt (2008) conducted studies to examine the causality of arts-integrated programs and their effect on standardized test score results. The implementation of arts programs show a clear connection to academic gains across the curriculum (Gullatt, 2008, p.14). He concludes that “through this integration true understanding and meaningful curriculum will prevail” (Gullatt, 2008, p.22).

A recent study completed by Thomas and Arnold (2011), centered around the A+ School model of arts-centered learning which is primarily being practiced in Louisiana. Findings suggest that “the largest potential impact of the A+ schools may be in the *affective* or emotional domain, influencing students’ interest in school and creative expression” (p.96). These results were based upon surveys of participating art teachers and administrators at these institutions, and the reports all stated and emphasized the affective and cultural benefits of the A+ Schools Program. A general finding that has been recognized in their study is that “arts-centered schools typically experience lower dropout rates and higher attendance” (Thomas & Arnold, 2011, p.98). This outcome leads to further consideration of whether these learners had a more ‘complete picture’ without as many missing pieces due to fewer absences. Are these students then afforded a more thorough understanding of the expectations and outcomes of the curriculum and classroom

conduct, as well as more participation in school culture and activities. Lack of consistent attendance can cause gaps in students' learning journey, and detract from their creative output which in itself takes planning and coordination of materials and space in the school setting. Along with creative process, one can also consider the impact of creative products on students' learning in English language arts.

Creative Catalyst

Marshall (2005) declares that “creativity, like learning, is rooted in finding or making connections” (p.230). It is all connected; these individual acts of investigation, student practice, and combinations of curriculum woven into engaging and enriching experiences. At the end of the class-time, a unit, or a school year, what do students take away from their learning endeavors? With artifacts, *art in fact*, teachers have the potential of creating lasting pieces of evidence for learning and understanding. Paintings that hang on classroom walls, photos that cover our screens, and crafted pieces all serve a purpose while containing stories composed by the student. Marshall (2005) continues, stating:

Postmodern art helps us in developing integrative curriculum by providing insight into the nature of substantive integration. Rather than understanding integration as simply using art to explore and communicate ideas from other disciplines, these works suggest that integration is actually a form of cross-disciplinary collage - a juxtaposition of disciplinary elements that reveals or generates connective ideas” (p.240).

While it may be unrealistic to expect all students to be creating works of art that will be displayed and admired in the traditional sense, it is important to acknowledge Hetland (2013). She encourages educators to focus on “nurturing creative persons through creative processes in creative places” (Hetland, 2013, p.66). This broader sense of recognizing creative practices

throughout the school can potentially lead to a more enriched school culture as a whole, and to students who are more creatively minded. Hetlands'(2013) believes that creativity in general “makes new things old and makes old things new - new problems, new solutions, new realities - things not conceived before” (p.68). Hetland terms this broadening through creativity as “adaptive novelty” (Hetland, 2013, p.68).

Marshall adds to considerations of originality and imagination by stating that it is “an active process in which the mind constructs linkages between tangible entities. A leap of the imagination occurs when the mind projects ideas and constructs new relationships” (Marshall, 2005, p.230). One could argue that there are no new thoughts, creations or inventions, that everything is rooted in something else. Even so, each new piece of art that is created by students is something that did not exist prior to their unique hands bringing it to life. This idea is what makes their work worth making, sharing, and celebrating. This is surely part of the reason that I have consistently witnessed parents choosing to take their child’s art work home with them, keeping it, and cherishing it. Marshall (2005) alludes to a further explanation: “... art is a reflection of the inner structures and the perceptions of the mind of the artist and the art viewer” (Marshall, 2005, p.234). This allows parents to see their child's understandings through their work, in a potentially visually pleasing format, while arriving at their own conclusions.

Goleman, Kaufman and Ray (1992) add that “interpretation is, in fact, a creative act” (p.46).

Student Success

The integration of arts in the curriculum has the potential to increase confidence and feelings of success for students. If writing or oral representation does not serve them, creative or visual representations may. Increasing student exposure and building confidence in their practice is a focus for the arts-based educator. Goleman, Kaufman and Ray (1992) relate that:

The more you can experience your own originality, the more confidence you get, the greater the probability that you'll be creative in the future. The idea is to develop the habit of paying attention to your own creativity. Eventually, you will come to place greater trust in it and instinctively turn to it when you are confronted with problems” (p.42).

Utilizing the arts and a variety of creative outlets in Language arts education is a meaningful and impactful endeavor for teachers and students. Gullatt (2008) warns that “some educators view integration of the arts into the curriculum as simple activities that may be used as extras or time fillers. This misrepresentation or simplistic view of the arts tends to trivialize the importance of the process” (p.16). In addition to crediting the arts with due importance across the curriculum, Leigh (2012) adds that “students need opportunities to explore art elements and principles of design in illustration so that they can critique and reflect on visual ideas presented and apply them to their own image making” (p.397). Students need to be supported and guided by being taught the elements used in art to find success in their own creations. Eisner’s (2004) ideas regarding the relationship between the message and the form in which it is shared is linked to this notion of providing the creative tools for success:

How something is said is part and parcel of what is said. The message is in the form-content relationship, a relationship that is most vivid in the arts. To recognize the relationship of form and content in the arts is not to deny that for some operations in some fields form and content can be separated (p.6).

The goal would be for students to become so fluid with their representations in the visual arts that it would be seamless, and the choice for how to demonstrate their learning would be expanded. Marshall (2005) speaks to the role of art teachers in this equation, urging them to “see

themselves ‘spinners’ who pose questions that challenge students to take things further, follow ideas, and mine their implications” (p.240). Here teachers have the potential to be a guide, encouraging students to create their own understandings and shape their experiences. Hetland (2013) urges that by “aiming schooling toward understanding, learning takes on the character of being *for* something. Students must learn to use knowledge to achieve an intention” (p.67).

Being Enriched as an Educator

There are moments in my career as an educator where I have taken a moment to experience what my students were doing, saying, and creating. At such moments I have felt moved and enriched.. I can remember such moments vividly, and they all have arts-based activities in common. Leigh (2012) speaks about ways of knowing and her interest in the generative potential for learning provided through the arts. She realizes that teachers play incredibly dynamic roles, but they are also affected by the participation in the arts (p.399).

Eisner speaks further to the important role of the teacher:

We need to help students learn to ask not only what someone is *saying*, but how someone has *constructed* an argument, a musical score, or a visual image. Curriculum activities can be designed that call attention to such matters, activities that refine perception in each of the fields we teach. This will require activities that slow down perception rather than speed it up (p.5).

As engaged and impactful language arts teachers one can take this role to heart. In the language and visual arts, the effort to engage students in meaningful, multifaceted, and thoughtful activities takes intensive and extensive planning, especially when collaborating on integrated curricular studies. Gullatt (2008) points out that often “arts teachers and classroom teachers are not usually afforded the time to collaborate”. As a result, “arts-integrated instruction is difficult

to plan and implement to the fullest” (p.15). He continues by cautioning that without this type of genuine integration and collaboration “students may view school as a place where they learn isolated, unrelated content facts and miss the opportunity for infusion of the arts into the learning process” (p.15). This reaffirms the notion that an entire school culture that supports, celebrates, and integrates the arts into the classroom is a site of meaningful and successful practice for learners.

Hetland (2013) is forthright regarding the challenges in moving toward a creative, integrated, arts-based approach in our schools. “[I]t’s a serious endeavor to shift the weight of schooling’s work-related legacy and reframe schools as places to aim for the higher cognitive processes of creative and critical thinking” (p.67). It takes action, sharing, students from different groups having positive interactions with art in their classroom and around the school. Classroom displays and hanging work in the hallways to share what is happening creates discussion and attracts positive attention. Charland (2011) conducted a study which involved school culture and the participation of students in art based activities. He found that students who were regularly involved in these activities “were offering more detailed analyses when discussing the art works, and were transferring that skill to other subject areas as well” (p.9). The research goes on to show “they were becoming more explicit in speaking and writing, and contributed more readily to classroom discussions” (Charland, 2011, p.9). This transfer from class to class is what encourages teachers to communicate and share as well. Collaboration is key to active art experiences in a school setting.

Language arts Content Connections

The language arts classroom presents itself with many authentic and engaging opportunities for arts integration. Gullatt (2008) suggests that “in order to make literature

meaningful, students must be given aesthetic opportunities to respond to the printed text” (p.17). He writes that researchers have continuously noted over the years “that literature comes to life in more exciting ways through the arts” (p.21). These exciting and memorable experiences can happen in a variety of ways for our students. When they start to engage in “the visual arts, dramatic reenactments, and group discussion, the text becomes more meaningful to them (Hoyt, 1992)” (Gullatt, 2008, p.21). Leigh’s (2012) research identified a distinctive connection between students’ abilities to visually capture ideas and use the details to fully express themselves in their writing, by incorporating meaningful talk about the importance of pictures and application of visual concepts and skills in their own work (p.403). “Cognitive science and metaphor theory give us clear descriptions of learning and creative thinking that help teachers to recognize these processes when they occur in student work, and to design integrative curriculum that catalyzes and nurtures these processes” (Marshall, 2005 p.239). Through integration and with support from other teachers it is possible to find acceptance and engagement within the school culture and curriculum for arts based practices, especially in the language arts classroom.

Conclusion

Marshall (2005) “implies that artmaking is essentially a learning process that spans the entire continuum between learning and creativity” (p.233). By infusing this creative practice into our curriculum areas we are allowing for a more meaningful and practical experience by our students. According to Goleman, Kaufman and Ray (1992) “the need for creativity is changing how the workplace is organized and what people do. These changes center on the use and interpretation of information: the basis for ideas” (p.46). It is clear that creativity and the ability to think differently is an asset and skill essential to successful students in society today. Goleman, Kaufman and Ray (1992) encourage integrating the arts in education:

People often hold back in their efforts because they are afraid of making mistakes, which can be embarrassing, even humiliating. But if you take no chances and make no mistakes, you fail to learn, let alone do anything unusual or innovative” (p.43).

As demonstrated throughout this literature review, the potential learning opportunities presented by the integration of the arts into everyday language arts learning experiences has the potential to increase the engagement of students, and allow for more creative thinking practices in our schools today. The following chapter will provide a guide to a variety of effective integration strategies, with emphasis on the application of visual arts activities, in a middle school language arts classroom.

Chapter 3: An Arts Integration Workshop

Overview

The sections that follow contain the necessary information to set up a workshop for educators that will incorporate the visual arts into a language arts classroom. The workshop is defined, materials and resources listed and ideas for presentation are shared. Educator specific support and potential problems are addressed to ensure success of implementation in the classroom. In culmination a creative resource is shared and teachers are encouraged to embrace creative chaos in their classrooms in hopes of inspiring their students to engage with the arts.

Workshop Logistics

The following information is provided to support the implementation of creative arts based activities in the classroom for teachers and students. The guide for educators may be interpreted on an individual basis, and allows for personal adaptations in various classroom environments. Ideas for successful classroom management and the teacher resource is presented as a starting point and may be adjusted for all ages and levels of education. Points that are specific to teacher needs and potential problem areas are discussed to support a positive experience for everyone involved. Participants should consider setting a goal that focuses their energy and ensures their intentions for integration at a classroom level or for the whole school community are clear and well communicated.

Focus of the workshop. This workshop has been created as a result of an investigative inquiry into creative literacies and visual communications. The content speaks to the importance of integrating the arts into all learning environments with priority given to the English language arts classroom. The primary focus is on the integration of a middle school level English language arts classroom with a variety of visual arts outcomes. In addition, anyone seeking to inspire

students; add engaging visual art activities to their plans; or infuse new creative strategies into their teaching practice will find the following content useful and immediately applicable.

Faces, places and materials. The format is intended to be open and accessible. This workshop could be run as an afternoon session at school with a mixed group of educators, new to visual arts or experienced art teachers, from any background of academics. The session could run as a briefing for educators, with an overview of topics and a teaching resource to be taken home as a guide. It would be ideal to run the workshop at the beginning of a school year, or during a summer session. This timing would enable year-long integrated planning into the classroom curriculum from the start of the school year. In addition, it would allow for continuous immersion of the educator and students into visual communication and visual literacy focused activities for an entire academic session. A portion of the workshop could be presented as a resource that is shared electronically as an alternative to face to face presentation, allowing educators to choose areas that would meet their needs at set times of the school year. The online format, or a PDF version would also be useful for individuals on a personal quest to bring creative inspiration into the English language arts classroom setting. Teachers can refer to the workshop content when they require support to engage a group of learners visually, creatively and through meaningful art based activities.

Hands on opportunity to create. An engaging and successful arts integration workshop combines information with hands-on activities. Upon first arrival participants are visually and creatively stimulated by thought provoking quotes, hands-on opportunities, and the opportunity to create using materials provided. Depending on the activities selected from the resource list that follows the materials required for the face to face workshop would vary. Please see the

resource guide for ideas and lists of art based activities that would suit individual workshop needs.

Presentation with a purpose. Eisner (2004) provides us with motivating thoughts on the infusion of creativity in education and planning for the future:

“Imagination is no mere ornament, nor is art. Together they can liberate us from our indurated habits. They might help us restore decent purpose to our efforts and help us create the kind of schools our children deserve and our culture needs. Those aspirations, my friends, are stars worth stretching for.” (Eisner, 2004, p.11)

The purpose of the proposed workshop is to inspire, educate and provide opportunities for arts integration that seem possible. In order to make meaningful change participants need to have goals, whether individual or school-wide, goals which should be visualized from the beginning. Allow participants to reflect upon their personal creative aspirations, as well as the aspirations of their students. Encourage them to keep these in mind while working on their creative inquiry.

Educator Specific Instruction

Teacher expectations and individualized demands guide planning and content delivery for students. There are many variables that come into play when arts-based activities are introduced to the classroom, as well as potential problems and challenges. Support, thoughtful planning and resources are necessary for success in our schools. Even with all the pieces necessary planned and in place, there is always potential for problems along the way. Educators are encouraged to be creative, be open to the potential for chaos, and always look for opportunities to incorporate creativity across the curriculum.

Teaching creatively requires flexibility. When teachers are aware of the individual needs and interests of their students there is potential for student led inquiry and personalized

projects. When the educational commitment is made for arts infused curriculum, and the entire school is involved, the results are inspiring. This encourages us as educators to be, and allow our students to be, immersed in the arts from the moment you walk through the school entrance in the morning. Some questions to consider are; am *I* modelling a creative way of being for my students? Is one art educator enough to sway the school culture and population towards a more art oriented existence? It is a beautiful thought to believe. It also sheds light on the incredible privilege it is, being *the art teacher* in a school. Our learners need motivation and variety within their educational experiences.

Students should be given the opportunity to construct their own understandings in creative and purposeful ways. Thomas and Arnold (2011) find that “occasionally changing the instructional method in the classroom can engage the students and refocus their attention, giving students practice in multiple processes (visual learning and deductive reasoning) and will invigorate their mental energies.” They also advocate for “the presentation of content, choice of process, and choice of product according to the needs of each student” (Thomas & Arnold, 2011, p.98).

In order to increase student engagement and interaction in the classroom students may be given opportunities to take control of their own learning journeys with choice based activities and creative freedom. Being open to student-based interests as an expression of their understanding leads to a plethora of products within an established framework set by a teacher. At times this may, potentially, feel like a lack of control on the teachers part, however if we consider the independence allowed to the student by making such choices, one can recognize the satisfaction that is granted to them.

Studies in arts-based lesson implementation done by Charland (2011) found that:

“Faculty members who regularly implemented the lessons felt that they had improved as practitioners, and shared their observations of student learning. These included growth in students’ communication skills, advanced depth of thought during discussions, the ability to build on, or respectfully critique, the comments of others, and exhibiting greater comfort sharing ideas, considering multiple interpretations, and taking risks.” (Charland, 2011, p.11)

This finding suggests that arts-based lessons can improve communication confidence, verbal expression and skill opportunities for both the students and the teachers involved. Also of note in Charland’s (2011) findings is the potential increase in student communication amongst themselves through critique and reflection. This form of engagement is often lacking in our classrooms and all too often, students prefer to stay quiet when it comes to general discussions. Teachers can support open communication by asking questions related to feelings or providing opportunities for anonymous questioning without singling out individuals.

The products that come to life through creative practice allow for conversation starters and alternative forms of expression. In my experience, students are more willing to talk about their art pieces than their traditional writing or reading activities. Gullatt (2008) affirms this idea of art being a tool in positive communication by stating “the arts enhance instruction by allowing students to ask questions, explore for answers, and generate new questions from recent learning experiences” (p.20).

Potential problems for teachers. How can we be true to ourselves, committed to an arts way of living and create engaging and inspiring opportunities for our students, while continuing to follow the curriculum that has been assigned to us? Personal interpretation of daily activities, options, and variations on what has happened in the past as well as resources, time, support and

courage all come into play. These are thoughts and questions that come up when planning, building, and constructing a path with purpose for our students.

Often the biggest problem for educators is the lack of resources to implement arts integrated activities, including materials and teacher support time, in addition to the self-confidence as an individual artist to share creative content with students. Some of the art based activities that are shared in the resource below focus on using found materials or recycled materials which can at times offset cost of purchasing art materials. Often schools have the basics, and it just takes a few things to top off the supply lists. Another opportunity that can often be of use is inviting practicing artists in the community to come in and work collaboratively. Generally there is a fee involved for a workshop if the artist is teaching students directly. If cost is a concern a recommendation is to inquire or collaborate as professionals, and plan with an artist directly to get their insight. Then teach your students the necessary skills yourself. This has the potential of adding value to arts integrated activities without bringing an artist into the classroom, and will expand your own creative practice as well.

Being creative and connected to the arts is often a very individualized and personal perspective. We each interpret ideas and thoughts differently, and represent our understanding in a variety of ways. This also applies to planning and delivery of content to our students. Adding individual spins on lessons and applying personal touches or flair to daily creative activities provides variety and uniqueness in the classroom. We must recognize that what happened with one group of students may not be the same experience with a different group of students, with the variety of creative variables that are present.

Open to creative chaos. There will be successes and there will be failures. At times it will feel like the creative chaos has won, and it might make more sense to go back to sitting,

listening, writing, reading and speaking. The reality is, the chaos is worth it. The art pieces created in those moments are the ones students will share and want to talk about. It is those experiences that are the most fun, memorable and motivating. The truth being, the more frequently we expose students to creative chaos, the less chaotic it will be.

Parents want to see the evidence of learning that is created in a work of art, these are the pieces they want to take home and display. Students who create and share their art work with family begin to build a visual story of their learning experiences. Over the years the variety of pieces that form their collection are often cherished well beyond their time at school. Believing in the process and product of creative activities is essential to long-term success, and encourages life long creative endeavors.

Creative Connections

Fostering curiosity and creativity in our students takes time in curricular planning, frequent exposure to meaningful creative opportunities and continuous modelling on the teachers part. Art needs to be appreciated and recognized beyond the classroom walls, and shared with an audience. Art integration amongst all curricular areas benefits the learning experiences of all students and supports their positive attitude towards art appreciation. Providing opportunities for inspiration to ignite in our students and recognizing the importance of acting upon inspiring ideas is essential to make creative connections in the classroom.

Combining creativity and curriculum. In my teaching and learning experience the personal work that has been created and shared when combining the visual and language arts becomes far more meaningful to the students, parents, and the entire school culture. The benefit to students, their creative self-esteem and recognition of the arts is entirely positive. The

communications between teacher-student-parent and fostering of positive relationships have also been noticed in my classroom context.

Visually representing learning has the potential to provide more opportunities to share and communicate class work, during conferences, at home during conversations with family, and especially in the hallways of the school. Leigh (2012) states that our current society is embracing a more visually aware culture, and “schools are called to accept broader definitions and practices of literacy”, which in turn “requires teachers to provide their students with visual literacy instruction” (Leigh, 2012, p.397). Our schools should be coming alive with meaningful, integrated, visual representations of student learning, in all curricular areas. These middle school students have the capability of becoming more arts aware in their educational journey. This is more than just *being creative*, or being a *good artist*, but rather being open and curious as to how something has been created, presented or communicated. Eisner (2004) speaks to our roles as educators in this visually engaging time, telling us “the kinds of minds we develop are profoundly influenced by the opportunities to learn that the school provides” (p.8). By providing these engaging arts focused opportunities we have the capacity to capture the curiosity of these creative minds.

Creative engagement. When we are creating, completely engaged in an art-based learning activity, you can almost feel the ‘creative juices’ flowing in the room. Often students don’t even realize they are genuinely involved in the creative process, it is an amazing sight to see as a teacher. Students so consumed and carried away by their work, even they cease to see the division of the subject areas. Eisner says that “work in the arts cultivates the modes of thinking and feeling” and continues with “one cannot succeed in the arts without such cognitive

abilities. Such forms of thought integrate feeling and thinking in ways that make them inseparable” (Eisner, 2004, p.5).

Marshall (2005) makes mention of a cross-disciplinary study in which it is noted that transfer as involved with cross-context applications of knowledge and ideas, and primarily associated with learning, has implications for creativity. In addition to this he references the 1963 work of Piaget finding that “learning occurs when new information is attached to prior knowledge and placed in existing conceptual compartments or ‘schemata’” (Marshall, 2005 p.229). I consider this cognitive system mentioned as the heart and soul of art-based learning experiences. Our body and mind being fully present for an integrated and complete learning experience allows us, as individual learners, to add our own interpretation and understanding to the cognitive process. “Abstract thought is consistently represented through metaphors that are associated with physical experiences and emotions” (Gullatt, 2008, p.14).

We are always creating new understandings of the information that is presented to us. The importance of the delivery and the cognitive recognition of these formations is where creative possibilities are truly maximized. The frequent exposure to such experiences is necessary for our students to have confidence in their creative potential.

Sources of inspiration. To ensure students are exposed to thought provoking artistic activities, educators need to highlight creative thinking strategies on a daily basis. Once these daily prompts become woven into the classroom culture, and it becomes less of an afterthought for teachers and students, one can see openness to inspiration that may not have been there before. The willingness to create and react to inspiring stimuli involves trust between educator and student, as well as plenty of talk around artistic vocabulary and art in general. The more frequently students are exposed to visual examples, they are more likely to receive positive

reinforcement in supporting visual communication as a meaningful form of expression. Students are more likely to feel inspired by creations and inspired to create when they are surrounded by an environment that values original works of art, literature and other forms of creation. We, as educators need to fuel creativity in our classrooms with diverse sources of inspiration; images, artwork, creative quotes and meaningful messages around an arts-inspired existence.

Inspiration road blocks. Students must recognize the difference between feeling inspired *by* something and being inspired *to act* upon it and create art or represent their inspiration otherwise. The teacher, or the creative activity that is presented, may not inspire students. We cannot demand or expect a student to respond to all sources of inspiration, it is far too unique and individualized experience as that. Creative action, *to do* a creative activity is a personalized, internalized, and individual response. There needs to be a catalyst between the inspired *by* and inspired *to* that students can connect with. Students must recognize a desire to express themselves in order to create a visual representation or a piece of artwork. Students need to have a connection to what they are experiencing in order to get to the point of creating an art piece to represent their understanding. The continuous exposure to a variety of creative activities in the classroom and school environment is of benefit to students, and is likely to reduce the creative roadblocks individuals may encounter.

Arts Infused Activity Resources

A ready to use resource. Teachers and students, as well as the school culture, benefit from frequent infusion of the arts into our classrooms. The following collection of arts based activities was created as a result of the creative inquiry into the visual and language arts.

Activities are linked primarily to the language arts curriculum, and range from complete lessons

to creative quick starts, which may be adapted to various curricular themes. The ideas are intended to inspire, and are open to interpretation as well as individualized adaptations.

Activity: Story sticks. Students will create a story stick that represents a life event, an activity or experience they have had - or a fictional story, by painting lines and symbols in sequential order along and around a found stick. These visual elements will help in the oral retelling of the story or event, and act as a support to retell the story. As well the story stick acts as a visual reminder, an artifact of the story. Story sticks may be autobiographical and collected together as a group to represent the classroom community, or they can be personal and kept individual, and are best used in a sharing circle setting. They may of course be fictional stories represented; however in past experience actual life events appear to make the most powerful story sticks, and are most useful while retelling orally.



Figure 1. Story Stick

Grade Level: Appropriate for all ages including adult learners

Estimated time line if applicable: 3-4 opportunities; one class or an experience such as a field trip to collect a stick, one class to create and paint then one or two sessions to share once dried and finished. This may vary if you are including time to find a stick (involving a field trip to the woods or a shoreline to individually find a stick that speaks to the story which will be told), or

simply pre-select sticks and bring them into the classroom for students to choose from. They will then need a painting session, time to dry, and an oral storytelling session.

Curricular integration opportunities: English language arts, oral storytelling, cultural connections (see the First Peoples Principles of Learning www.fnesc.ca), visualization, creative thinking strategies.

Resources and Materials: A collection of sticks, one stick per person to choose from (long, skinny driftwood ideal - of various widths, lengths and textures). Paint in a variety of colors, acrylic works best. Brushes in a variety of sizes, small, medium, and not too large.

Extras for the regular classroom (if you are not painting in the art room): table covers, paper plates for ease of clean up, sink to wash up materials and hands, drying space for sticks.

Focused visual language vocabulary:

These terms may be integrated into your sessions. Start while collecting sticks, discuss texture and the potential to work with the natural feel as well as add your own texture. Include terminology as you are demonstrating techniques, refer to a word wall if you have one accessible. Repeat and emphasize the terms as often as you can.

Color theory - warm and cool color combinations, neutral colors. Reflections such as; how do colors make us feel? What do they represent?

Varying texture - looking at the stick itself and the lines added to it (for example are the lines painted on the stick thick, thin, dotted, swirled, continuous, bright, tight together, spaced out, zigzagged etc.)

Pattern and repetition (how does this affect the emphasis? a recurring theme in the story?)

Ideas for inspiration: How can we reduce ideas and events down to a symbol, a shape or a line?

What are some of the most interesting and memorable moments to include in a story or a life event? How can you capture these visually? Colorfully?

Art specific techniques and methods to be taught: Painting with acrylics, looking at details in lines, patterns, symbols and repetition of these elements. Varying color and texture application. Utilizing found objects as art resource materials.

What students will accomplish: The student will find a stick that speaks to them and their story. They will add their own visual interpretation of their story to the stick in a creative and aesthetically pleasing way, including the use of color to represent meaning, and texture to imply variation in events and story elements. The student will be able to retell their story while referencing their story stick as a visual aid and artifact.

Details in sequence: Find a stick that suits the story (either on location, or from a collection presented to the group). Break down the story to be told into main events, in chronological order and associate color, texture and pattern with these elements. Paint your story onto the stick and allow dry time. Sit in a sharing circle with a group and retell stories using the story sticks as a guide and talking tool. Optional, keep the group of story sticks as a collection and display as an installation in a classroom setting.

Activity: Pop Art portrait. Students will create a Pop Art style painted portrait on a transparency to be overlaid against an autobiographical writing piece of one page maximum. The skin on their face will be left blank in order to see part of their writing through the finished art piece. The portrait will be hinge taped at the top of the page in order to lift the face and read the writing.



Figure 2. Pop Art Portrait in Progress

Grade Level: Elementary, Middle, High school

Estimated time line: Approximately 5-6 sessions. Writing instruction around autobiographical work. One session to take portrait photos, download, print in black and white and trace onto transparency. One-two painting sessions. A brief assemblage session to mount the finished pieces. Writing time in between art sessions, access to writing while waiting for photo to be taken, paint to dry or other transitional periods.

Curricular integration opportunities: English language arts, writing specific.

Resources and Materials: First part: computer, digital camera, printer access and white paper to create a contrasting portrait of each student. Second part: 8.5x11 transparencies, pencils, Sharpies, acrylic paint in various bright color options, small brushes. Black paper for mounting finished work. Paper plates and table covers if you are not working in an art room setting, a sink for washing up.

Focused visual language vocabulary:

Pop art - graphic style of art that uses bright colors, distinct line and shape to create strong visual impact. Popularized by Andy Warhol, and often seen in commercialized items today, such as music infographics and tshirt design.

Layering information - looking at the effect created by leaving transparent sections in their painting to see their writing piece through the portrait.

Graphic style - looking at the impact and effect of high contrast images.

Foreground & Background - What is the main object of focus? What is in front and what is behind in the portrait painting?

Ideas for inspiration: Look at a variety of Pop Art style paintings, discuss Andy Warhol and his artworks, including his series of portraits. Ask students to envision themselves as superheroes, what would their strongest features be? What colors would represent them?

Art specific techniques and methods to be taught: Portrait photography, including keeping a standard set up to ensure continuity in portraits. Tracing technique to define distinct lines, and highlight specific shapes, emphasizing character of the portrait. Acrylic painting on plastic transparency. Mounting technique for a finished piece of artwork with a purpose.

What students will accomplish: The student will identify a distinct character in themselves and create a Pop Art style painted portrait by tracing a photograph which connects to an autobiographical piece of writing that is limited to one page.

Activity sequence:

1. Provide students with writing instruction in order to keep them working on the autobiography piece throughout the various steps of the Pop Art portrait creation.

2. Provide background information and examples of Pop Art style, including many visual examples. Either the instructor takes one portrait style photo of each student or have a student run station to ensure continuity in the photos (imagine passport style photograph for cropping and closeness). Print all portraits in high contrast black and white.

3. Have students use a pencil to trace the shapes and features they want to include on the black and white copy, this is their practice to trace with a purpose, including some information and leaving other information out. Overlay the transparency and have students trace the pencil lines in Sharpie on the clear sheet. Make sure lines extend to the edge of the page to create a definite foreground and background space.

4. Choose colors and paint with acrylics on the transparency, the entire piece should be solid paint, *with the exception of the skin of the face* - this is intentionally left clear to see the writing through from behind. Depending on the paint used, you may need to let first coat of paint dry and do a second coat to ensure good coverage and not see any brush strokes. You want a solid color fill. Some students will want to add graphic elements similar to comic book illustrations, which is a welcome addition.

5. Once the portrait is complete and dry, students will take both the portrait and the 8.5x11 piece of writing (with the narrowest available margin settings), and tape them together along the top edge. Portrait laying ovetop of the writing. This piece will be mounted on plain black paper to create a frame. The painted portrait should be hinged along the top to allow the reader to flip it up and read the autobiography behind it.

Activity: Character portrait collage. Using an array of character traits, students will visually create a portrait of a fictional character through magazine collage, by cutting and gluing

bits and pieces together. Using this visual representation of their character they will write a descriptive short story emphasizing the character in their collage work.



Figure 3. Character Portrait Collage

Grade Level: Middle, High school

Estimated time line if applicable: 3-4 initial sessions including; one session on generating character traits, listing and categorizing, two-three sessions to create a portrait collage (including finding physical features in magazines, images that represent personal interests, family life, employment or any other life aspects, cutting out, and gluing together on a background), and several writing periods to create a short story that highlights the character which has been created.

Curricular integration opportunities: English language arts, writing specific.

Resources and Materials: A variety of magazines, scissors, glue and a portrait outline background base for the collage.

Focused visual language vocabulary:

Collage - Including the ability to focus magazine searches, and scan the images to find bits and pieces of what you are searching for, eyes, hair, skin, all in various sizes, shapes and color. Add interest and personality to your collage through variation in texture.

Visual representation - Which pictures, symbols, colors and patterns can represent a general or specific idea about your character? How can you create a picture of your character that speaks to the audience without words?

Ideas for inspiration: What are some of the common physical characteristics we see amongst teenagers today (for example: hair styles, piercings, and other visual features)? What are some ways we can visually represent or attach a symbol to interests or activities (for example: basketball, love of reading, the outdoors)?

Art specific techniques and methods to be taught: Artistic collage, including selecting appropriate subject matter, detailed cutting, gluing and organizing an array of pieces to create color fields in skin, hair and other feature areas. Using found materials to create meaningful artwork.

What students will accomplish: Students will create a visually engaging character portrait which is transferred and included in their short story writing.

Details in sequence: Investigate character traits, personality, interests, family life, education, employment, likes and dislikes, amongst other ways we can categorize and describe character. Have students build a fictional character with the most detail possible, one may provide a handout to help guide them, and a specific age or personality type could be given for direction. Based upon their choices students then search various magazines to find bits and pieces of physical features (various shades of red hair and two mismatched blue eyes for example), as well as imagery and texture to represent their character. Students should gather ample materials prior to gluing their portrait together. Emphasize variety and encourage students to be creative in their fictional representations, they can exaggerate features. Assemble the collage, including foreground and background. The background should give the viewer insight into their interests, and anything beyond their physical features. Keep collages small and contained, preferably 5.5x8.5. Display the collage with a finished piece of writing that includes the character.

Creative quick starts. This section contains ideas to use frequently in the classroom to jump start creativity and keep your students drawing, thinking visually and creating.

Title: Drawing circle

Have students each start with a piece of paper and make a simple mark, or series of marks. Limit their time and materials used. Once the first person adds to the paper, have them pass it to the next person in the circle, allowing everyone to add something to the illustration. Once complete share the illustrations and discuss what interpretations and ideas come alive for your students.

These ideas may lead students to compose a creative writing piece or a short story.

Title: Typography word art

Explore fun and functional fonts and the art of handwriting. Have students express an idea, thought, adjective, emotion, or experience visually through the letters they create. Add illustrations to letters and words to communicate the word or idea visually. If your students have a desire to create their own font and have access to iPads, you might share an app such as iFontMaker which allows you to create your own typeface.

Title: Graphic retelling of an existing story

Check for understanding of a story or concept by having students reduce each page or idea to a single image, symbol, icon or illustration. They can retell an entire story visually by breaking it down to key scenes or images, looking at the meaning or main message.

Title: Personal logo identity

Investigate logo and symbols, the use of simple and effective illustrations to represent meaning. Have students create their own identity logo, a classroom crest, or whole school identity. Ask them to identify what they would remake the school logo as and justify why they chose the content. Have them express their choices visually. The study of logos and symbols will support students in making quick illustrations, planning, sketching and drawing for other activities. They need to be assured that not all drawings are expected to be realistic renderings.

Title: Illustrated alphabet

Students can create an entire illustrated alphabet to visually represent a story, an event or other theme. For each letter of the alphabet have them depict an idea that corresponds to that letter.

This can be done for whole unit studies as well, to start or as a culminating activity.

Class/Unit Routines. These activities may be built into a consistent classroom schedule.

Title: Daily drawing

Students should have a sketchbook, or a specific location to keep track of their daily drawings. This could be used as a sponge activity or starter for discussions, or an activity that promotes focus and attention to detail. Provide students with a letter of the alphabet and have them draw whatever comes to mind when they hear the letter, or illustrate a word that starts with that letter, or simply draw the letter in a variety of different ways to fill their page while considering the elements of art and design such as line, repetition, pattern, value and others. Another source for daily drawing is a handful of ‘trinkets’, sea shells, matchbox cars, leaves, or whatever is in your top drawer. Allow students to pick an object and draw it in detail. Use holiday themes, school activities, and other life events as sources of inspiration. Similar to silent reading, allow time and give importance to daily directed or silent drawing.

Title: Inspiration journal

In a journal or sketchbook have students keep an ongoing record of images, quotes, words and visual paraphernalia that inspires them. Have them create and describe inspiration, in color, collage, paint, ink and other drawing mediums. Add photographs, cut and glue things into the sketchbook. Often this type of journaling is done very early in life, or as an adult. Encourage teenagers to keep a personalized collection of arts inspiration in their books. This may be used for future artwork or creative writing activities.

Title: Visual language interpretation

To be used as an idea generating activity, emphasizing various forms of visual representation. Give all students one word, the same word, and have them draw their version or interpretation of that word. This can be curriculum theme based, or idea specific to a classroom focus, or simply

an investigation into ways in which we see the world around us. For example, use the word ‘wolf’. With twenty-five students in a classroom you are sure to get twenty-five different views of what a wolf looks like. Consider different drawing styles, representation, stance, cultural interpretations and other variables. All drawings could be collaged into a classroom idea or inspiration board.

Title: Daily creative talk

When having discussion with your students provide open questions that allow for individual interpretation and responses, allow them to draw an answer or represent their responses visually or artistically. Provide many visual examples and allow time to discuss the elements of art and design in relation to the visuals. In language arts classrooms watch videos and discuss them, read picture books and look at the illustrations while discussing them, talk about various art forms and artists frequently and continuously.

Visual storytelling ideas, I see what you are saying.

Title: Graphic novel creation

This may be done by students individually or as a whole class activity. Investigate the main elements of graphic novels, the strong, bold illustrations and use of captions to tell a story.

Theme ideas are applicable to a variety of curricular study areas.

Title: Mini storybooks

Look at picture books, lift the flap books and other repetitive format childrens books. Have students tell a story in one a series of one page illustrations.

Title: Still life, big voice photographs

Investigate still life photographs and paintings. Have students create or stage their own still life images, or found objects in the world and photograph them. For example, while on a field trip to

a farm look for old abandoned farm equipment, or an old bike left at the beach, something that might have a voice - and photograph the object in a meaningful way. Have students consider what the object might say, or what story it has to tell, and use the image as a source for a creative write, encourage students to speak in the voice of the object.

Title: Photo journalism

Have students report a news article or current event story through digital photography. Focus on the saying “A picture is worth a thousand words”. What can they add to their own photos, or photographs taken by others? When taking their own photos discuss the elements of design, as well as the difference of a still life staged photo in comparison to an action or real life event image.

Title: Story-setting maps

Create maps of fictional lands, communities or worlds. Use collage format, or individual drawings. Can be created continuously while doing a novel study, or reading a personal choice book. When speaking to setting, use the maps to visually in addition to orally explaining where events take place. Consider various ways of representing land, water, buildings, pathways etc. How do we read actual maps? What are some of the key characteristics necessary to ensure someone can read these visual maps being created?

Title: Story stones

Using river rocks, smooth and flat, have students illustrate or include individual words that could potentially be used to piece together a story. For example, in groups of five they could create a set of story stones, five each, twenty five stones total. Ideas for content could be character, setting, nouns, adjectives, problems or other story features and elements. Students can use them to make up quick stories, funny ad libs and as a source for a more developed piece of writing.

Keeping the stones in the classroom and referencing them allows for a meaningful creation with purpose. If drawing or painting on the stones is not an option for students, they can collage and varnish over illustrations as an alternative using found images.

Conclusion: Immerse yourself and your students in art.

Teachers, students, and the entire school culture benefit from frequent exposure to the arts in our daily lives. Our visual landscapes become more interesting and engaging with art added. Whenever possible consider opportunities to incorporate the arts into your planning and presentations in the educational setting. Learn something new yourself that may be shared with your students, get your hands into a new project and engage in creative collaboration with others. Model creative thinking and action for your students, so that a creative way of life is integral to the daily function of your classroom.

The resources included are intended as a starting point, and should be adapted and applied as suited to individual classrooms. By exercising your creative license and adding your individual touch to these activities, new ideas and artistic opportunities will develop.

Chapter 4: Final Reflection

The following section contains a summary and overview of my project, a reflection on the personal and professional impact of my work and future plans for sharing my discoveries. I also provide ideas for other educators to be successful with arts integration in their own classroom.

Project summary

With key words such as visual literacy, arts-based activities, creativity, inspiration and cross-curricular integration, the focus of my Master of Education final project has emphasized the importance of visual arts integration in the English language arts classroom. My project reflects my passions, and is a personal interpretation of how the arts, literacy, inspiration and creativity can be seen, developed and promoted in the middle school classroom today. I have delved into the importance and benefits of cross-curricular integration; considered challenges in this area for educators in the school system today; noted the benefits to students and parents; and examined the positive impact on the school culture. As my contribution I have compiled a useful collection of resources for teachers to use in a variety of ways in their planning for instruction, and continue to promote creative integration and the arts in my current school setting.

The main focus of my studies relates to visual arts and creative literacies integration in the classroom. While planning for English language arts instruction, I have been keeping the visual arts at the forefront of my thoughts and continuously looking for ways to include arts-based activities into specific lessons, and promoting visual literacy conversations generally in the classroom. I believe the importance of teaching and supporting our students in an ever advancing, visually rich and aware society is essential; and a meaningful way to do so is through

arts integration.

My own engagement with the visual arts and tendency to think in pictures and express myself in a variety of hands-on and visual ways has guided my inquiry. The interest and positive feedback of students and parents alike, as well as past educational successes achieved by integrating the arts into a language arts classroom has fed an inner creative fire throughout this research. By recognizing the engagement of students and channelling the inspiration that emerges when provided with arts-integrated assignments I am further along in my quest to see creativity thrive in the classroom. I am promoting the importance of developing visually aware and capable students, who are arts literate, creatively confident and willing to express their understandings through a variety of art forms.

As a culminating body of work I have provided a collection of resources teachers can immediately apply in the classroom to promote creative activities connected to curricular studies. There is an array of ideas including large scale integrated projects, as well as daily activities to promote art making and creative thinking. The resource package may be shared in an engaging workshop for educators, with hands on activities and ideas to inspire our students to become more visually aware, confident in their creativity and capable at creating art. All of these pieces have led to me model a more arts-rich approach in education for my students as well as my colleagues.

Changes as a result of my studies

I am fortunate to teach in an area where much of the research I have been doing can be applied on a daily basis, and the relevance of cross-curricular integration has been reinforced through my inquiry. Currently I teach English language arts 8 as well as general art studies at the

grade 6, 7, and 8 level. Not only has my investigation allowed me to consider and apply current best practices and research, but it has also increased my confidence in teaching and in communication with regards to the importance of arts-based activities across the curriculum. Through arts integration I am better able to support my students, I have more meaningful and rich conversations with parents with regards to their students work, and I have engaged in more collaboration with colleagues.

From conversations and feedback, I believe that my modelling of creative endeavors and by increasing the art-based activities in my English language arts classroom, my desire to foster a more visually aware school culture has been recognized. The school community has been more engaged in the visual arts, my colleagues search for opportunities to collaborate on projects and I am accessed as a resource for support in art-integrated activities.

My two-year study program has differed slightly from the majority of our cohort. Life changing events took precedence and I began my journey later than anticipated. As a result I have had the opportunity to work alongside my colleagues, as well as develop and design my own independent studies, which have had an arts-based focus as well. What may have been considered a hinderance to some has been a welcomed opportunity in my eyes. It has enriched my learning and allowed further exploration into the arts than originally anticipated. I feel as though these independent studies have broadened my research and planning skills as well as given me confidence as a lifelong learner.

The confidence that I have gained through my studies and inquiry is invaluable. It is one thing to have a personal belief in the value and importance of the arts, but to have this solidified and reinforced through academic research and investigation, and by integrating it with my professional beliefs is empowering.

Professional impact now and in the future

It feels as though my arts-focused studies have been gradually weaving their way into my 2014/2015 school year plan with ease. With the positive results I have seen in the classroom this year, I will revise and include much of what I have focused on in my studies to future course overviews and be sure to note an arts component to unit plans, as well as daily activities. The positive feedback in conversation with students and from parents on the increase of arts-based activities in our classroom has given me confidence and guidance on reworking the English language arts plan for next year, has motivated me to share our class creations more frequently and has enriched the visual displays shared in our school environment. The conversation that stems from the visual display of student work has been very positive in our school environment. I believe I have increased the awareness of the visual culture in our school and boosted the support for meaningful arts-based activities across the curriculum amongst my colleagues. Through openly communicating my studies and project I have gained recognition as a support and a resource to other teachers looking to infuse the arts into their classroom. Not only am I consulted for ideas on materials and techniques to use in art making activities, but also for integrated unit plans, school wide projects and community-linked developments.

My active promotion of the arts in our school has spilled out into the district, and increased communication and connections between schools and colleagues, and fostered collaboration projects between our elementary feeder schools across grade levels and middle school. I am building relationships through the arts with colleagues I would have previously not been linked to. I anticipate these initial contacts and projects to lead to continuous and annual project collaborations and more interaction between students and teachers revolving around visual art projects.

I foresee facilitating a professional development workshop in our district to share language and visual arts integration ideas with other teachers and have plans to share what I have collected in my research at that time. Currently I am involved in a variety of visual art workshops offered to teachers in our district providing hands on activities with different materials to get teachers using things such as clay, printmaking and painting in their classrooms. The confidence I have gained through my experiences and studies has provided me with a voice to share my passion for the arts not only in my classroom, but beyond as well.

Recommendations for other educators

In addition to the collection of creative activities and ideas I have included in my project I suggest the following to any educators looking to infuse the arts into their teaching and learning environment:

Be brave. Integrating the visual arts into our classrooms can be intimidating. There are so many things to consider beforehand, from materials, space and clean up, right down to the actual technique involved in the project. Often including the arts in our classrooms feels like an add-on, an extra activity that requires more effort than it is worth. I assure you it is not, and once you start you will continually build confidence and your students will quickly get on board with applying the arts as a way of expressing their learning. Students are capable of stepping up and being responsible, especially when they are motivated and inspired. They can help keep materials organized, clean up afterwards and will certainly look forward to frequent exposure to creative activities.

I recognize that if one does not have an arts background or has little experience in creative endeavors they are less likely to integrate the arts into their daily practice. Use your

resources; connect with creative colleagues and artists in the community. There are many ways you can use experts to support you and find success with arts integration in all curricular areas and grade levels. By exploring various art techniques and gradually building your own confidence in the arts you will create a classroom environment that thrives through the creation of art as well.

Immerse yourself in the visual culture. We are part of a society that is inundated with visual information on a daily basis. The visual messages shared today and the ways of representing information are infinite, and span a vast expanse from hand-crafted to digital data. Quite often our students are more adept and up to date on the latest trends and creative technologies than we are as teachers. Get to know what software they are working with, search out new ideas and technologies being used by other educators, share what you have made on your own and combine ideas and techniques to create new forms of art and visual representation. I encourage students to blend technology-based work with hand-touched techniques as well. There is often something captivating about a piece of artwork that combines old and new techniques, nostalgic and new at the same time. Soak up all the possible ways to visually share ideas, information, thoughts and feelings – and then share them with an audience, in classes, at school and in the community.

Encourage visual displays in classrooms, hallways, inside and out of school spaces. Incorporate media through televisions with rotating slideshows in the school and by adding signage and sculptures to outdoor spaces such as gardens and pathways around the school property. By immersing ourselves in a visual culture, creating within it, and contributing back to it we are maximizing the creative experiences and opportunities for our students and ourselves.

Make art whenever possible. I have found that the most genuine form of inspiration when working with my students in arts-based activities is positive modelling. As educators we need to make time to make art, be creative and find an outlet for our own expression. There are many demands and requirements, as with all professional careers, however, if we do not find happiness in our area of expertise and enjoy it ourselves, we cannot expect our students to fully engage with it either. In order to foster a positive learning environment for the arts, we need to believe in it, and *do* it ourselves. When students see a teacher fully engaged in their own art work they are often intrigued by it, will question what they are doing and are more likely interested in trying it out themselves after seeing it being done – a similar experience can happen with reading. If a teacher models reading in a positive manner, students have the potential to become avid readers as well. Make art and share it with those around you. Get involved in community classes if possible, take part in professional development opportunities that promote the arts in your school district and attempt some do-it-yourself activities found online – you never know what you will create, and what potential it has to be integrated into your classroom studies. I have committed to a journey of lifelong learning, and I encourage others to do the same by incorporating new art techniques into their practice whenever possible.

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