

Differentiation the Curriculum Using The Arts

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Barry A. Oreck, Ph.D. / barryoreck@aol.com

Integrating the Arts and the Academic Curriculum

A lesson that integrates the arts with an academic lesson involves students in an artistic process that helps them discover deeper meanings in the academic content and makes what they learn more interesting and memorable. The structure and the content of an arts-integrated lesson is designed to provide opportunities for students to solve problems and make discoveries while offering multiple entry points for students with various strengths, talents, learning styles, and intelligences. The key in designing the lesson or unit is to find a balance of activities that maintain the integrity of both the artistic process and the curricular objectives. The term “integration” carries different meanings in different situations but in most cases includes:

1) **an authentic arts experience.** The arts experience in each lesson should be an open ended, problem-solving, discovery oriented process. Students have opportunities to express their individual ideas and feelings, and the activity can be developed further to stand alone as a piece of art, aside from the content objectives or curricular goal.

and

2) **specific curricular objectives that are enhanced by the arts experience.** The arts experience should be designed to improve student performance and achievement of learning objectives in specific ways (e.g. more effective use of descriptive language, increased comprehension of scientific processes, better understanding of vocabulary or terms, etc.) and further students’ ability to apply their knowledge in other contexts. The arts clearly offer many significant benefits for students including the development of learning skills and self-regulatory behaviors, and increased self-esteem, cooperation, enthusiasm, and enjoyment. In order to support the academic benefits of arts integration, however, student learning must reflect that the content was taught effectively.

Clearly, not every curricular objective can be reached through an arts experience. Nor can the arts alone be expected to teach the academic content. The arts tend to be more effective in enhancing the understanding of processes, characteristics, and relationships than in remembering facts in subjects such as science and social studies. In literacy, the arts tend to aid students’ use of descriptive language, metaphoric thinking, and imagination, more than grammar and usage rules. This is not to suggest that learning facts and rules cannot be made more memorable, interesting, and fun with mnemonic devices (e.g. singing the A,B,C’s). In this definition of arts integration, however, such activities would probably not qualify as a complete artistic experience. In general the arts tend to have a more direct impact on complex, higher order thinking and problem solving, rather than on memorization or single correct answer questions.

In each of the major subject areas some arts processes seem to work more effectively than others and each teacher is more comfortable with some art forms than others. The key to successful implementation of a lesson is a solid lesson plan, clear learning objectives, a level of comfort as a facilitator, preparation of the students, and an unwavering focus on the process as it unfolds.

The Artistic Process in Teaching

Most arts activities can be applied to a variety of subjects and content areas. Teachers need not be highly skilled in each art form in order to use it in the classroom. They do need to understand the processes involved in each art form and be skilled as a facilitator in order to nurture the creative expression of the students. Some of the aspects of the artistic process that are most critical are:

- 1) **Practice and play regularly.** Students need to be familiar with the activities before introducing academic content. They need to develop some basic skills, be comfortable working together, and know how to work within the structure of the arts activity. These skills can be developed using academic content but the emphasis, at first, should be on the artistic skills more than the content links.
- 2) **Warm up is always needed.** In order to relax and be spontaneous and creative we need to get the juices flowing. Even if we warmed up in the morning, by afternoon we need to loosen up, re-energize, and reestablish the brain-body connections. Warm-ups need not take long but when we forget to warm-up the whole process may seem more labored and less exciting and the results are often much less satisfying.
- 3) **Trust the structure.** Creative processes emerge from clear structures and careful preparation. Paradoxically, that preparation and reliance on established structures are what allow artists to relax and not feel pressured to always be “in control”. In order to be spontaneous and responsive to students, the artist/facilitator needs to trust the plan and the participants.
- 4) **Expect the unexpected.** What separates an authentic arts experience from a craft project, according to Eliot Eisner, is that a craft typically has defined steps towards a preconceived end, while an artistic process is an emergent process of discovery. This is a difficult mental transition for both teacher and students during the course of a school day packed with subjects to be covered. With the pressures for specific outcomes and the limitations of time, the unexpected answer or event can seem like a distraction or annoyance. In the arts, these surprises open the door to discovery and often, the conflicts and confusion that arise are an essential part of the process.

Developing Arts-Integrated Curriculum

While there are many ways arts processes can be used in the classroom, it is often very challenging to find the best match of arts activity and curriculum objective. We need to continually remind ourselves of the objectives of the lesson and be certain that the arts activity is, in fact, helping students reach those objectives while maintaining the integrity of the artistic process. We also have to consider the skills and prior experience the students will need and the time, materials and space required to complete the lesson. The following questions can help guide you in the development of arts-integrated lessons.

Curriculum Adaptation Guide

I. Activity

- Does this activity allow the students to be active?
- Will this activity allow the students to use their strengths?
- What content will this activity teach?
- What problem will the students have to solve?

II. Arts Process

- What arts process have you incorporated into this activity?
- Are you using the arts as a way of teaching content rather than as an add on?
- How will using the arts process enhance comprehension and understanding and add to knowledge?
- What arts process are you modeling for your students?

III. Self-Regulation

- Does this activity allow students to exhibit self-regulatory behaviors?
- What self-regulatory behavior will you be highlighting during this activity?
- How will you introduce and reinforce the highlighted self-regulatory behavior?
- Has the student set a goal for him/herself?

IV. Debriefing (Possible Questions to Ask Students)

- What things did you do during this activity that made you successful/unsuccessful? (Try to elicit specific behaviors and strategies)
- What would you do differently next time?
- How did you use (highlighted self-regulatory behavior) to complete the activity?
- How might you use (highlighted self-regulatory behavior) in other situations in your life and in your regular classroom?

Self-regulatory behaviors

1. **Paying Attention**

- avoids distractions
- comes back to task after interruptions
- shows good concentration
- listens carefully
- follows directions
- makes appropriate contributions and comments

2. **Using Feedback**

- uses criticism to improve work
- maintains corrections
- is open to other points of view
- evaluates own work

3. **Problem Solving (Curricular)**

- is able to identify the problem
- comes up with different or unique approaches to a challenge
- doesn't stop with one answer
- thinks for self -- is not swayed by the opinions or answers of others
- is able to identify extraneous or missing information
- relates other information and experiences to the problem

4. **Self-Initiating**

- takes responsibility for learning
- moves self to a productive place to learn
- works on task without explicit instructions from the teacher
- uses own strategies to become a more effective learner
- self-starts

5. **Asking Questions**

- asks good questions
- is not afraid to ask when instructions or information is unclear
- will pursue an area of curiosity
- is motivated to find solutions for unanswered questions

6. **Taking Risks**

- offers opinions, even if they are unpopular
- volunteers readily
- will do or show something rather than just talking about it
- is ready to try new things
- is willing to explore difficult or vague concepts

7. **Cooperating**

- works well in group activities
- follows instructions
- listens to, observes, and learns while interacting with peers and teachers
- can negotiate and compromise with others to achieve a goal

8. **Persevering**

- doesn't stop when it gets hard
- continues even when the teacher is not looking
- exerts effort throughout the activity
- seems to enjoy challenges
- follows task through to completion
- doesn't get stopped by criticism

9. **Being Prepared**

- does homework
- is ready to begin the exercise or task at the beginning
- has supplies
- remembers information and instructions
- is organized

10. **Setting Goals**

- sets up specific interim goals to solve a problem
- is motivated towards the goal
- recognizes the sequence of tasks needed

Arts Process Activities

THEATER

Slap Pass:

The participants stand in a circle. The person who starts claps his/her hands together, making a sound and directing the slap to another person on the circle by pointing. The receiving person then “passes” the slap on to another person on the circle.

Sound Ball:

Again, the participants make a circle. The person who starts throws an imaginary ball to another person on the circle, making a distinct sound as he/she throws it. The person receiving the ball catches it while making the same sound with which the ball was thrown. The receiver then throws the ball to another person on the circle, making a new sound.

Gift Giving:

This activity is done in pairs and reinforces the basic rules for creating successful improvisations (always say “yes,” and always make your partner look good). One partner mimes giving the other a gift (referred to as “making an offer,” because the giver is providing the partner with a suggestion for further ideas). The giver does not tell the receiver what the gift is, but allows the receiver to infer what the gift is from movement (is the gift heavy, or is it so small that it can fit in the giver's pocket?). The second partner takes the gift, using physical cues and verbal expression, to clarify what the gift is and says, “Thank you.”

Character Walk Around:

This group activity explores the effect of physical attributes on the portrayal of a character. Participants walk around the room in random patterns. They develop instant characters by changing things about the way they walk, and letting those changes affect everything else, including voice, attitude, etc. Simply changing the part of the body that leads, the length of stride, or the width of stance, for example, completely alters the way a character is perceived. Is the character confident or shy, aggressive or timid? This exercise can move on to impersonating types of people in the participants' lives, such as siblings or teachers, or impersonating themselves in the presence of others (such as parents, younger family members, someone smarter, or someone who irritates them).

Character Interview:

This activity creates characters through improvisation. The actor starts by miming a physical activity, suggested by the audience, with a particular attitude (timidly cleaning out a closet, for example). The audience asks the actor questions about physical characteristics, personality traits, family members, lifestyle choices, possessions, vocation, or hobbies and interests. The character is created by the actor's answers.

MUSIC

Name Go-Round:

One person on a circle sings out his/her name and the group echoes it back. The second person then sings his/her name and the group echoes it back. The process continues around the circle with each student spontaneously singing out his or her name and the entire circle, with the same spontaneity, echoing it back. This activity can be used to explore elements of music such as rhythm and melody, while giving positive feedback to all who participate.

Vocal Community:

Participants are broken into three or four groups around a circle. The group begins with underlying beat in the feet, hands or body. Keeping the underlying beat going, the leader or a participant gives a repeating rhythm, melody, phrase, or word, and everyone picks it up. Group 1 then keeps that first part going while group 2 begins a new part that works with the first part. Group 3 then begins and so on until all the groups are playing, speaking, or singing. Once the parts are established the groups can disperse and meet and greet the other groups in the circle before coming back and reestablishing the circle.

Sound Orchestra:

Working in a circle participants can be broken into groups as in vocal community or can play or sing individual parts. Again an underlying beat is established and each group or person begins a repeating part (hand claps, body percussion, singing, or speaking) which they make up or is given to them and which fits with the other parts. One person acts as conductor bringing separate parts in and out, louder or soft, faster or slower, with agreed upon gestures.

DANCE**Qualities (Stretch & Melt):**

This activity encourages to students to explore the elements of dance (the *body* in *time* and *space* with *force*). Students begin in a low-level shape and take eight slow counts to rise with a stretching quality while the instructor asks students to think of things that stretch -- rubber band, gak, elastic, etc. -- and to use those images as they move to their fullest height. They then take eight counts to return to a lower level with a melting quality assisted by images such as ice cream, candles, wicked witch, etc. The same process is followed to the count of four (rising) and four (lowering); then two and two; and finally one and one. This structure lends itself to many contrasting elements and qualities such as sharp and smooth, heavy and light, curved and angular, etc.

Isolations:

Students can take turns leading simple warm-up activities with various body parts: head side-to-side, shoulder circles, small knee-bends, stretching arms, balancing on one leg. . . whatever they come up with. The teacher should serve as a guide, setting rules ("No touching others; no cartwheels or forward rolls; careful with head movements; etc.") and helping simplify.

Name Pass / Energy Pass:

One student says his or her name while looking directly at the person to the right. That person turns his or her head to the next person, saying his or her own name at the same time, and so on around the circle. The names can also be passed to the left or switched back and forth around the circle. The same can be done with movement: students might try to (1) pass the same movement around the circle; (2) pass very different movements around; (3) pass movements that are different but share the same quality.

Away & Back:

Each student has a spot in the room to which he or she will return after moving through the space. A period of time is established (e.g., 8 counts; 16 counts; 10 seconds by a stopwatch; the length of time to read a haiku; etc.) and specific students are chosen to travel away from their spots and back in that time frame. Methods of traveling depend on the idea being explored (e.g., qualities -- sharp, smooth, etc. -- or expression/character; different body parts leading; levels -- low, middle,

or high; tempo -- fast, medium, slow/accelerating and decelerating; etc.). Students not traveling should hold their spots and observe the others to see if they meet the time, space, body, and force requirements. (This can also be done with students traveling to new spots, rather than returning to the same.)

Curriculum Adaptations

Teacher _____

School _____ Grade Level _____

Title of Unit: _____

Subject area, Academic Skill and/or Content to be Taught:

1. **Arts processes used (be specific):**
2. **Purpose or rationale of the lesson:**
3. **Instruction objective(s) – arts, academic content, behavioral - (What the students will know and be able to do):**
4. **Materials, resources and space (needs and adaptations)**
5. **Assessment of student learning (how you will assess what your students have learned; describe the assessment process and criteria for both arts and academic outcomes)**
6. **Prior arts experiences (the artistic preparation and skills necessary for teacher and students to be ready to apply the arts processes to academic content):**
7. **Most Relevant Standards (Arts and subject area standards):**
8. **Step by step development and description of the unit (the specific procedures, discussion, debriefing and reflection and questions for students, arts processes, homework, and flow of the lessons)**

Curriculum Integration Checklist

Teacher _____ Teaching Artist _____

Grade Level _____ Academic Subject Area _____

Title of Lesson or Unit _____

1	Subject Area, Academic Skill and/or Content to be Taught	
2	Arts Processes to be Used	
3	Purpose of Lesson(s)	
4	Instructional Objectives What will students know and be able to do at the end of the lesson/unit?	
5	Problem to be Solved What problem will the students explore and try to solve?	
6	Self-Regulatory Behaviors How will the lesson(s) help the students understand their own learning process and strategies?	
7	Materials, Resources and Space What things do need to complete the lesson(s)? What arrangements need to be made or resources collected?	
8	Assessment of Student Learning and Growth Does the assessment measure what you have taught? How will you conduct the assessment? Do you have a scoring rubric?	
9	Prior Arts Experiences What arts experiences will the students need to have before the lesson(s) to feel comfortable using the arts process?	
10	Step by Step Development of Lesson/Unit How will the lesson(s) be structured? Does the lesson(s) teach your instructional objectives? Does the arts process teach content and increase comprehension? Could another teacher follow this plan? Are you excited about the lesson(s)? Does it sound like fun? Will the children in your class enjoy it?	
11	Practice Leading the Arts Activities Have you tried leading the activities in front of your peers? Have you received feedback from the artist after practicing leading the activities? What changes have you made as a result of this practice?	

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Barry Oreck, Ph.D.

Professional Development, Assessment and Research Consultant
in the Arts and Gifted Education

291 Prospect Pl., Brooklyn, NY 11238

718-622-2176 / barryoreck@aol.com