Integrating Visual Arts into the Curriculum

By

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A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
Acknowledgements

I would first and foremost like to thank all of the professors that I have had during my experience at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). I have learned and experienced so much, and feel that what I have gained at OISE has solidified my ambition of becoming an educator. I would like to thank my fantastic research supervisor, Dr. Clare Kosnik, for her caring, support, patience, and encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr. Hilary Inwood for all of her guidance; and my interview participants for taking the time to share their knowledge and experience with me for this paper. Lastly, I would like to thank my family and my boyfriend for all of their love and encouragement.
Abstract

This research paper is designed on planning meaningful visual arts integration into the classroom curriculum. The findings are to providing clear reasons for arts integration, and offering strategies as to how to best use the integration through thematic curriculum, obtained through an extensive literature review and face-to-face interviews. Differentiated instruction, inclusive education, and opening the classroom door to both fellow faculty and the community are addressed throughout the research paper. The findings from the research are highlighted in three key points that mirror that of the literature review: 1) why is visual arts integration necessary towards an authentic learning process, 2) how best can one implement visual arts integration without jeopardizing the legitimacy of visual arts itself, and 3) potential issues and considerations that need to be kept in mind throughout the integration process. This research paper will hopefully not only encourage others towards visual arts integration, but gradually all of the arts, creating a heightened, socially relevant, and real-world connected learning experience.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgement ........................................................................................................ 2
Abstract ...................................................................................................................... 3
Chapter One: INTRODUCTION .................................................................................... 6-13
  Background of the Research Study ................................................................. 6-7
  Purpose of Study .................................................................................................. 7-8
  Research Questions .............................................................................................. 8-9
  Significance of Study .......................................................................................... 9-11
  Background of the Researcher ........................................................................... 11-12
  Overview of this Study ...................................................................................... 12
Chapter Two: LITERATURE REVIEW ...................................................................... 13-30
  Introduction .......................................................................................................... 13-14
    Case Study ........................................................................................................ 16
    Visual Arts and Psychology ........................................................................... 17-19
    Authentic Instruction and the Community .................................................. 19-21
  Visual Arts Integration Strategies .................................................................... 21-27
    The Role of the Teacher ............................................................................... 21-24
    Thematic Instruction .................................................................................... 24-26
  Issues Associated with Visual Arts Integration .............................................. 26-29
  Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 29-30
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................... 31-38
  Introduction .......................................................................................................... 31
  Participants .......................................................................................................... 31-32
  Procedure .......................................................................................................... 32-35
  Ethical Review Procedures .............................................................................. 35-37
  Limitations of the Study .................................................................................. 37-38
Chapter 4: FINDINGS ................................................................................................. 39-56
  Introduction .......................................................................................................... 39
Integrating Visual Arts into the Curriculum

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Study

The Arts especially address the idea of aesthetic experience and aesthetic experience is one in which your senses are operating at their peak. When you’re present in the current moment, when you are resonating with the excitement of this thing that you’re experiencing, when you are fully alive.

- Sir Ken Robinson (Robinson, 2008)

Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution. It is, strictly speaking, a real factor in scientific research.

- Albert Einstein (Einstein, 1931)

The world is changing. What was once predominantly a world of industry has transformed to that of information, mainly due to the technological advancements many easily have at their disposal. With technology comes the increase in global and diverse communication, the necessity for proficiency in problem-solving, conceptualizing, critical thinking, and the appreciation and comprehension of different cultures and points of view (Educational Leadership, 1997). However, we still find the standardization of education based around the Industrial Revolution’s model for economic purpose and core concepts of Mathematics and Literacy, omitting all forms of the Arts (Robinson, 2008). For the new generations to succeed in the new perspective of the global-economic world, a reformation is needed: emphasis on the Arts needs to be reaffirmed in our education system and given greater claims and legitimacy in the classroom.
From my experience as a teacher candidate, my immediate thoughts are: how can we teach and prepare our students while making the lessons universal and differentiated to each student’s individual need? With the pressures to successfully teach the core curriculum, will I find the time to integrate visual arts? How do I go about planning for visual arts integration without allowing the arts to lose its own unique authenticity?

When students are given complex, more challenging tasks, high-level thinking and products are achieved. When students feel legitimately engaged with their learning process, the learning process itself becomes relevant and authentic to the student in the real world connections made. Visual arts integration helps that: it will not help increase overall academic achievement in itself (Winner & Hetland, 2000), but more-so the “hidden curriculum”, the creative, challenging, and imaginative link to our learning process. It is the process of reflection, evaluation, learning from successes or failures, perspective, and perseverance. What visual arts can teach us is intrinsic to the successfulness of our own livelihood and society. “The arts are a fundamentally important part of culture, and an education without them is an impoverished education leading to an impoverished society,” (Winner & Hetland, 2000).

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative research paper is to make evident the need for visual arts integration into the curriculum, not for the sake of Mathematics or Literacy, but for what visual arts integration offers the learning process as a whole.
It is what researchers Ellen Winner and Lois Hetland of the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s arts-education program, Project Zero, call “dispositions of mind”, meaning, “a trio of qualities—skills, alertness to opportunities to use these skills, and the inclination to use them—that comprise high-quality thinking.” (Hetland, Winner, Veneema, & Sheridan, 2007).

Through the use of one-on-one interviews with teachers who excel at visual arts integration in their own classrooms, and an extensive review of the literature on this topic, this research paper aims to explain why visual arts integration should be in each classroom, strategies for implementing visual arts integration, and an in-depth consideration of key issues related to visual arts integration. Lastly, it is my goal as a teacher candidate and researcher to learn from this experience and improve on my own teaching pedagogy.

Research Questions

The following, fundamental research question framed my work:

Why should visual arts integration be a necessary component of a differentiated and inclusive classroom?

In addition, other key issues will be addressed through the following sub-questions:

1. How does one plan visual arts integration without jeopardizing the legitimacy of visual arts in itself?
2. How does one structure an integrated visual arts lesson to ensure inclusion for all students, especially English language learners (ELL) or students with modifications or special needs?

3. What is necessary for successful visual arts integration in the curriculum?

4. Why might some teachers be hesitant to create lessons with visual arts integration?

5. What are some challenges faced by teachers implementing such practices in their curriculum?

Significance of the Study

During his keynote address at the March 2005 New York University and ArtsConnection conference, Steve Seidel began with a joke:

"Why did the arts educators and the other teachers in the school integrate their curricula? To get to the other side. Okay, that's not really a joke. It's actually serious and it's the title of this talk"

Luckily, Seidel explained what exactly he meant by “the other side”:

"...I'd say that on the 'other side' are the knowledge, skills, and understanding that we need in order to create a world and live lives that we consider decent and morally acceptable."

(Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, & McLaughlin, 2007)

The arts are not easily assessable, and therefore cannot easily be viewed under a quantifiable lens like other subjects. This means, when it comes to the
rigors and expectations of standardized testing, the arts are not a high priority; and due to financial limitations and budget cuts, the arts are usually the first to get pushed aside. This is a travesty to the very core fundamentals of what education is: when we learn through visual arts, we are learning more than artistic technique and the invaluable artistic process (improvisation, composition, interpretation, practice, performance, and critique (Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, & McLaughlin, 2007)), but the complex “big ideas”, such as human rights, emotions, communication, culture vs. globalization, the “other side” topics (Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, & McLaughlin, 2007).

This research paper hopes to make apparent that visual arts integration is not as daunting a task as many educators or administrators may feel because of its natural inclinations in the learning process. This study will apply psychological, abstract theory to practical implications in the classroom. It will review the mentalities, determinations, and routines of two exemplary teachers who have successfully implemented visual arts integration into their curriculum. And most importantly, it will hopefully motivate fellow teachers to reassess and restructure their own teaching pedagogies to that of a more whole, naturalistic, and cohesive model of thematic curriculum through the introductory use of visual arts. It is important to note here that I do not want to limit teachers to only one form of the arts, but essentially “open the door” to all. The integration of visual arts is just the first step of many – due to a personal connection primarily towards visual arts, I chose to focus my research on just this aspect of the arts. At the very least, I hope that this study will motivate fellow educators to consider integrating the arts in
general into their curriculum to create greater real-world connections and perspective for their students.

**Background of the Researcher**

At this time, I am a second year graduate student of the Primary/Junior division of the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Personally, I grew up loving the arts. I was fortunate enough to have parents who not only encouraged my love for the arts from an early age, and also had the financial resources available to support extracurricular artistic learning. I have also grown up attending schools from various points of the socio-economic spectrum and I feel that this has perhaps fueled my passion for this research paper. I feel that the arts should be available to everyone at any age, but this unfortunately is not always true. From my practicum and personal school experiences, I have seen how the arts, mainly visual arts, are quickly omitted from the regular school curriculum due to issues of time and/or finances. I wanted to learn more about ways in which an educator could get past these issues without jeopardizing any aspect of the curriculum.

I consider myself lucky to have met Dr. Hilary Inwood during my first year at the Master of Teaching program. Dr. Inwood has had extensive experience helping educators around the Greater Toronto Area integrate environmental and visual arts into their curriculum in a naturalistic and authentic way. Thanks to Dr. Inwood, I was given both direction and suggestion in study, and the opportunity to observe teachers who excelled at integrating visual arts.
From my experience researching under Dr. Inwood, I was able to refocus my topic with the help of my research supervisor, Dr. Clare Kosnik. I had originally intended to do my research topic on practical implications of inquiry-based learning in a standardized assessment setting, but chose instead to focus on one that could be implemented in a Primary/Junior setting. From what I had learned through various literature, studies, and observation of various classrooms, I felt I had ample thoughts and questions to help guide me into the theoretical and practical implications of visual arts education.

**Overview of this Study**

This Master of Teaching Research Paper (MTRP) contains five chapters. In chapter one, the topic is introduced, the purpose of the study is discussed, and an explanation as to how I have come to choosing this particular topic. Chapter two is a review of the literature to the reasons why visual arts integration is important, how best it can be implemented, and issues with the integration process. In the third chapter, the procedures, methodologies, and limitations of the study are provided to explain the data collecting process for this research paper. In chapter four, my findings from the one-on-one interviews conducted are presented. This research paper is concluded with the fifth chapter’s implications of the research and interview findings and my own reflections as the researcher.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

According to the 2009 Ontario Ministry of Education Arts Curriculum Document, "The arts provide a natural vehicle through which students can explore and express themselves and through which they can discover and interpret the world around them" (pg. 3). The arts – drama, music, visual arts, and dance – give students the opportunity to express not just creativity, but also their perception of the world and knowledge acquired. Yet we find classrooms more often than not devoid of not only this form of exploration and the heightened, genuine learning experience that is entailed through it. Why, with a class full of diverse, differentiated learners, would teachers choose not to employ the authentic teaching opportunities that art, especially visual art, offers? This does not mean using visual art for the sake of math or literacy to increase test scores, but using art to draw deeper cognition, sense of self, creativity, and critical thinking to the big ideas of a subject, thereby creating a more motivated classroom, challenged students, and quality academic performance.

While there are many political implications and arguments concerning visual arts, especially in the United States and the “No Child Left Behind” policy, I have chosen to avoid such discussion in this paper in the hopes of creating a more practical approach to visual arts integration. The chapter begins with a review of what it means to integrate visual arts into the curriculum, followed by multiple reasons why one should integrate visual arts into the curriculum. Next, a discussion of various strategies and procedures for integrating visual arts, as recommended by
both teachers and academics, is presented. The last section addresses the issues involving visual art integration in the curriculum, as well as potential counter-arguments against certain key point. I conclude this chapter with a final thought on the information gathered.

**Visual Arts and Integration – What and Why?**

What exactly *is* integration? Integration is the breaking down the compartmentalization of subjects, allowing for the natural flow of inquiry-rooted thinking to bridge greater curricular understanding. In other words, integration is natural thought processing. When I am at a grocery store looking at a carton of eggs, I am not just looking at what is in front of me – I am also calculating how many are in that particular carton, estimating how many I will need that week, and brainstorming ways they can be used. Learning is no different. When one is learning about ancient Egypt, one does not just think about historical facts, but also finds him or herself wondering just how big is the Great Pyramid of Khufu? Where exactly did these historical events take place? What was the climate like? How does one read hieroglyphics and what does each symbol mean? What did their music sound like compared to today’s? Integration is the living, breathing learning.

Visual arts integration is the further combining of “diverse fragments into harmonious systems” (Cornett & Smithrin, 2001, p. 33). It is the creative, holistic link between scholarly knowledge and practical experience and expression. It is teaching and learning in which the arts are connected in a way that “the arts learning and the other academic learning are deepened” (April, 2010, p. 7).
Throughout time, the arts have been the foundation of all cultures, offering an increased and real understanding of history, perspective, and diversity. Art is the primary form of communication, giving the observer “neutral ground to learn about varied and multiple communities, symbols, skills, historic values, and beliefs” (Cornett & Smith, 2001, p. 7). Visual art integration enables students to make connections between content and form that art displays and the culture and time in which the art was made. It makes a culture that has long ago disappeared reappear in that the culture in general is understood. It helps one imagine future possibilities, explore ambiguity, and accept multiple perspectives seen through art.

There are three primary approaches to integrating visual arts into the curriculum: with, about/in, and through (Douglas & Daquith, 2006). Teaching with art is teaching students by using artworks as primary sources, for example, using the art from a specific time and area to teach historical events. Teaching about and in art is teaching specific art forms and elements, thereby developing the tools necessary for aesthetics, creativity, and many forms of artistry. Teaching through art is using art to teach a specific subject; for example, using Art seen in the environment, such as butterfly wings, to teach concepts of Mathematics (symmetry) and Science. Used together, learning with, in/about, and through art can create empathetic relationships and real world understandings through comprehensive learning units that extend from the classroom into the community and vice versa.

Structuring visual arts integration these ways offers teachers the opportunity to create authentic differentiated education, especially for ELL learners or students with learning disabilities. It also gives students another form of expressing their
knowledge and thought beyond simple text. On a social level, visual arts integration engages cooperative and collaborative learning at an evolved level of understanding as it helps develop further cognition and creativity. This does not mean a simple turkey hand drawing, or an example of rote learned, base replicas of “sacred and secular beliefs and customs of non-Eurocentric cultures” (Guay, 2002, p. 304). Such examples are limited and do not actively engage creativity or creative thinking. True art integration gives authentic structuring and engagement to lessons as they are largely rooted in the outside world - realistically, emotionally, and metaphorically.

*Case Study*

In the 2002 Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) study, students who had a curriculum using art integration showed an increased willingness to tackle “difficult” lessons, viewing them as a beneficial and positive academic challenge, rather than a unit that revolved around rote learning. Students’ analytic writing was also observed, noting an increase in qualitative differences with more developed answers relating more to the students’ own life and understandings, versus the extrinsic learning prior (DeMoss & Morris, 2002). There were numerous other improvements as well, such as an improved, less inhibited and restrained learning environment, an increase of engaging content, and a broadened learning community that went outside of the classroom.
Visual Arts and Psychology

Art is the education of imagination and the creative process: problem-solving, exploring, applying what is learned, aesthetically designing, and reflecting (Root-Bernstein, 2010). It is from these experiences of the creative process in childhood, allowing one to think via their senses, experiences, and feels, that shape what and how we do in adulthood. Because of the higher-order thinking visual arts integration creates, it is not difficult to apply numerous psychological benefits to visual art integration.

Jean Piaget’s stages of cognitive development (Cornett & Smithrin, 2001) can also be tied to visual art integration, as he believed drawings made by children were essentially a window to general cognitive development. To Piaget, art is natural and sequential in the belief that experiences help children to mentally organize thoughts from non-descript scribbles to recognizable figures. By providing hands-on experiences, having short, focused explanations and shorter assignments with increasing complexity and length, taking field trips, inviting guests to talk to the class, having life-centered curriculum and opportunities to let students explore ideas, and allowing students to form their own meaning, their cognitive awareness develops because of the environment around them. Art integration assists all of these steps and is a natural way to teach children to have their own creative experiences.

Some of the earliest, most primitive forms of communication are seen on the walls of stones as drawings (Bradshaw Foundation, 2011). Pictures, carvings, and sculpture are the earliest form of human expression we have evidence of today.
This concept of communication still holds true today with the importance and relevance of visual literacy in the world around us. This notion of visual communication can be applied to Lev Vygotsky's theory of connection between human thought and speech towards the cognition of verbal thought to express meaning (Brooks, 2009). It can be assumed, using historical evidence, that drawing can convey meaning, and how speech and thought can create verbal thought; thought and drawing can create visual thought. Therefore, using drawings as a means for students to express visual thought to convey meaning is an important asset to teachers, especially for students who may have difficulty expressing themselves verbally.

This concept also ties into Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Cornett & Smithrin, 2001). By using visual cues, suggestions, examples, and modeling via scaffolding, a student is able to internalize what is being learned, and in turn, use these new tools in the world (Cornett & Smithrin, 2001). Visual arts integration offers teachers a way to assist in the development and learning of his or her students.

Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory (Gardner, 1995) believes in no fixed intelligences, but rather eight separate ones: verbal, visual, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, logical, naturalistic and kinesthetic (Gillman, 2001). “Intelligence is the capacity to solve problems and create products” (Cornett & Smithrin, 2001, p. 13), which is precisely what visual art integration aspires to do as well. With all of the eight intelligences paralleling the arts—visual arts, interpersonal and intrapersonal expression, parallels in art and nature, music
expression, logical constrictions as art, and bodily kinesthetic expression through
dance – it is easy to see how art can be synonymous with the intelligences.

However, it is important to remember that “intelligences” and “styles” are two
different concepts, and while one style may work for one instance, even in visual
arts integration, it might not work for all (Gardner, 1995).

**Authentic Instruction and the Community**

The goal of authentic instruction is “real world-learning and connections,
construction of knowledge, and learning in-depth” (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005, p.25). It has specific characteristics: students doing higher levels of cognitive
thinking, genuine conversation and discussions about a topic, a welcome and safe
classroom environment, and integrated learning that goes beyond the class. The
concepts of authentic instruction are synonymous with that found in an arts-based
curriculum. Art curriculum helps foster individual success and global community by
the way it is centered in the students’ lives. It makes real world connections by
allowing students to tell us about their perspectives of life as independent, critical
thinkers. It shows an “active construction of knowledge” in its creativity and
construction, versus a “passive reception of knowledge from authorities” (Anderson
& Milbrandt, 2005, p.7). A visual arts integrated curriculum also develops
intellectual, emotional, skill-based, and expressive knowledge and abilities by way
of procedure, materials, experience, and perseverance necessary to succeed.
In their book, *Engaging Learners Through Artmaking: Choice-Based Art Education in the Classroom* (Douglas & Jaquith, 2006), Katherine Douglas and Diane Jaquith focus on another form of authentic instruction, choice-based education. This refers to student-directed learning, where control is passed from teacher to student in a way that promotes multiple intelligence learning and understanding. It is also an authentic learning process through independent inquiry and self-examination, allowing students to use previously obtained knowledge for a greater understanding of a subject and thereby expressing it through visual arts.

According to Douglas and Jaquith (2006), the key to being able to teach in a choice-based perspective, especially arts integration, would be the “Four Practices”: personal, pedagogical, classroom, and assessment. By focusing on these core aspects, one can better understand the ideas and principles behind a choice-based program, and hopefully adopt them into his or her own teaching curriculum. The personal practice is more of a focus on the student him or herself – meaning that the “students will have control over their subject matter, materials, and approach” (Douglas & Jaquith, 2006, pg. 9). The focus on the students allows them to have an authentic learning experience, giving them a sense of freedom with the subjects as well as learning valuable working habits, such as taking risks, planning, and discussing information.

The assessment in authentic visual arts integration is mainly formative, with ongoing observation, rather than summative (Douglas & Jaquith, 2006). It relies on student self-motivation, reflection and awareness, and focuses on teaching students to judge their own work, take ownership and control of the process to the end
product, as well as communicate effectively with their fellow classmates in a constructive manner that enhances classroom community (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). Therefore, not only is the final product assessed, but the process itself, and its value to the student. One especially vital aspect of assessment is the exhibition of the student artwork: this not only increases the students’ effort on their work through self-evaluation, but helps them understand the concepts of aesthetics and criticism as well as gain a deeper sense of learning through their completed product.

*Visual Arts Integration Strategies*

What exactly is needed to make high quality visual arts integrated instruction? Not only supportive principals and adventurous, risk-taking teachers, but also well-planned assessment, sharing and collaborating among faculty, artists to visit the classroom, and well-defined learning objectives (Catterall & Waldorf, 2011). While this may seem an impossible or overly complex feat to accomplish, it is important to note the key points within what is needed: cross-disciplinary thinking, collaborative and intentional works, written reflections, revisions, documentation, exhibitions, and critiques – all of which being crucial towards holistic and authentic learning instruction in general. What makes it specific to visual art integration is that the educational content is used to catalyze the art making, adding personal connections to what is being learned. Mainly, it is up to the teacher and the student to be risk-takers: to be open to new ideas, do background research in art, be willing to relinquish control, and to be willing to seek deeper meaning in a subject (Catterall & Waldorf, 2011).
The Role of the Teacher

In Doris Guay’s *The Dynamic Project, Contemporary Issues, and Integrative Learning* (Guay, 2002), she speaks of the seven major steps of the integrative process to be done before, during, and after the school year. First and foremost, the classroom teacher recognizes the need for social, emotional, psychological, and political caring within the classroom curriculum. The teacher then searches for, interprets, and researches the foundation and function of art that correlates to the various subjects until he or she reaches a main idea, such as designing integrated learning to bring experiences of community into a social studies or science unit. The teacher should then ideally work collaboratively with other teachers to brainstorm ideas and obtain the “big idea”. This “big idea” is crucial – it stems from the implicit learning goals and the explicit standards from the government with the arts aiding the teaching process. Since this can be a daunting task for a single individual, it is highly recommended that one works and brainstorms alongside his or her peers. During the brainstorming process, it is important that the “what if” and “what else” possibilities are presented to heighten the overall planned learning experience and perhaps pull in ideas from numerous subjects and the community.

After the overall plan of what should be taught is completed, the teacher then turns to his or her students to organize and develop the details of the actual learning. This is directly connected to the need for the teacher to feel comfortable relinquishing power: not only does the teacher open his or her doors to other faculty in the classroom curriculum, but he or she also invites the students to help
form what is learned, resulting in a more authentic learning experience. This should also be done throughout the year, via student surveys, to ensure student engagement and connection to their real life experiences (Cornett & Smithrin, 2001). Once the teacher obtains the preferences of his or her students, he or she can plan alone or with other teachers as a team to follow the planned learning experience. The final step is that of reflection: what worked, what did not, what could be changed.

Throughout the school year, the teacher also needs to adopt several general principles and strategies in both him or herself and the classroom. The teacher needs to infuse the arts into the class itself: have many examples of student and professional art on the walls, play music during art time, hold special exhibitions of student work for the rest of the school to see, and give room for small studio centres (Cornett & Smithrin, 2001). Since one cannot communicate anything in art without the physical skill, it is crucial that the teacher spends time actually teaching art concepts and skills (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). If the teacher does not feel confident or comfortable teaching a specific art technique, he or she should reach out to artists within the community. Not only would the teacher be bringing in an expert, but also heightening the real world connection of what is being taught to the students and increasing school-community relationships. Before starting an art exercise, it is strongly suggested that the teacher allows for a quick 5-minute “artistic” warm-up to engage creative and divergent thinking (Cornett & Smithrin, 2001). For both primary and junior grades, it is important to also have literature
about art in the classroom for students to look at, so be sure to have plenty of art books available for students to read during independent reading times.

It is through these techniques, practices, and strategies that a teacher will create meaningful art integration. The art activities will not be mundane, but “genuinely speak to important areas of the academic curriculum,” and multi-faceted (Catterall & Waldorf, 2011, pg. 12). The content and the art are made equally important. The experience itself is assessed. If correctly done, the students will see and make deeper connections to the big ideas and the curriculum.

Thematic Instruction

Thematic instruction is the key to creating cross-curricular lessons with and through visual arts integration. It is the pedagogy of attaining meaning through ideas to form a natural conclusion. In their book, Art for Life: Authentic Instruction in Art (2005), Tom Anderson and Melody Milbrandt state: “students learn better and more deeply when they take up powerful ideas, with units and lessons organized around key supporting concepts than when they learn merely facts”(pg. 9). This means curriculum taken from personal experience and contemporary techniques and culture, and allow knowledge to grow naturally to include cultural aspects that reflect students’ own interests. Themes are not simple horse, dog, or house, those are topics, but rather personal connections and relationship to a topic. For example, if one starts with a theme, such as ecological balance, the topic could be water. That topic could then be broken down by subject: in chemistry, the teacher could discuss the molecular properties of water; in biology, one could discuss the life found in
water; in environmental studies, the teacher could discuss the value of conserving water; and in art, the teacher could focus on various artists and their portrayal of water. In this, the art becomes authentic and relevant to the other subjects. “Rather than a studio process with a focus on techniques and formal qualities of design, the emphasis shifts to real-world content, initiated or agreed to by the students,” (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005, pg.33)

Thematic instruction can also be applied directly to specific subjects, such as Social Studies. The theme for a unit on early civilizations could be self-expression. This could be done by showing masks of different cultures and civilizations then asking key questions: why do people wear masks? How do they compare? What materials were used? Can you tell why? When were they worn? (Chapman, 1998, pg.80) The students could then construct their own masks. For a more specific art technique lesson, the teacher could present clay sculptures created and used by different civilizations, then show three form types, and teach the students how to manipulate clay to create patterns and texture patterns in clay (Chapman, 1998, pg. 88).

In a study created by the Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE) in 1999, ten artist-teacher pairs worked together to create visual art integrated lessons (Catterall & Waldorf, 2011). One suggested lesson for high school students was to teach the history of textiles and dyes with artists. Through that lesson, historical knowledge of chemistry was linked to the modern principles of chemistry needed for making and coloring contemporary fabrics. A suggested lesson for a fifth grade class was the creation of public access videos related to historical inventions.
It drew connections to the challenges of contemporary video production, and tasked the students to draw conclusions based on the steps of scientific inquiry for solutions to issues with creative lighting, recording, and editing.

The possibilities for visual arts integration within the curriculum is limitless. If one struggles to create such lessons, it is highly encouraged that he or she seek the advice and opinions of an outside source, be it another teacher or a professional artist. Perhaps one of the greatest aspects of visual arts integration is that it pushes the teacher to go outside of his or her own box – to truly engage with the community and “open the classroom door” to new and creative ideas, all to the benefit of his or her students by heightening the learning experience. Learning should not be done behind closed walls or doors, it should be open and flowing, something inherently found in visual arts integration.

Issues Associated with Visual Arts Integration

The main issues with visual arts integration are not due to lack of funding, time, or student motivation, but rather maintaining the integrity of various subjects being made cross-curricular, the value of visual arts itself being lost, and failed authentic instruction.

In A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching Visual Arts (1990), Arthur Efland makes the argument that arts are, “effective and participatory, science is objective, precise, and rational, and humanities are with morals” (Brewer, 2002, pg. 32) To Efland, each subject is itself distinct in its role in
INTEGRATING VISUAL ART

education; therefore the segregation of each individual subject and their value is necessary to avoid cheapening them.

However, I believe that this is not the case as long as the thematic instruction technique is applied – the individual subjects are not jeopardized, but rather focused around a central theme that they connect with. If a teacher is teaching a unit in Mathematics about measurement and volume, and a unit in Social Studies about early civilizations, one could create a problem that would require the students to measure the size of a pyramid, or how many bricks it would take to construct a specific pyramid. It is possible to create cross curricular activities without risking one or the other subject losing its unique validity and purpose.

“Instrumental” arts integration devalues art. In the education system prior to World War II, arts integration in curriculum was expected by teachers and art teachers (Brewer, 2002); however, after World War II, there were significant changes in arts perspective: “specifically art study had become a servant to other subjects rather than being valued in its own right,” (Brewer, 2002, pg. 31). With an increased emphasis on Literacy and Mathematics, as well as shortages in planning time, the quality of arts integration began to change. Visual arts integration does not mean integrating art for the sake of another subject, but integrating art for arts’ sake to heighten the overall learning experience. Art has its own unique contributions to education: there are arts-based outcomes (art for arts’ sake), arts-related outcomes – such as increased observation and aesthetic perspectives of the environment, and ancillary outcomes, such as the transfer of artistic skills like creation, perception, and comprehension (Eisner, 1998). The arts are not a resource
to an end – teaching reading through the arts is still teaching only reading, not art. Art as a means devalues art itself, leaving the arts vulnerable to any teaching practice. As Elliot Eisner explains in his article, *Does Experience in the Arts Boost Academic Achievement* (1998), “…to use the arts primarily to teach what is not truly distinctive about the arts is to undermine…the justifying conditions for the arts in our schools.” (pg. 12) One needs to be careful not to treat visual arts as a means to an end – visual arts is an end onto itself and its own distinct discipline. It is important that when integrating visual arts that this is always remembered.

One unfortunate problem of authentic instruction is teachers failing to set high expectations for their students (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). If the expectations are too low, not only is the process going to be low, but also the product. Therefore, one needs to create lessons that will promote high levels of engagement beyond just acquisition of knowledge. Art helps students do this through creativity and personal self-expression, however, when applied as a “quick fix”, even arts integration will fail. “Quality arts integration requires clear definitions and an extended instruction plan over time,” (April, 2010, pg.7) The Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE) defines art integration as, “…teaching and learning in which arts learning are connected in ways in which the arts learning and other academic learning are deepened,” (April, 2010, pg.7) No “gimmicky” exercises or mundane, cheap lessons are acceptable. To successfully integrate visual arts, or any subject, the teacher must do ample planning, researching, and reflecting. Without this, one ends up with rote “cookie cutter” art that is pretty in its display, but empty in its meaning both to the arts and to any cross curricular study.
Financial limitations do create a strain, however they are manageable as long as a teacher is resourceful. Time constraints is one of the biggest hurdles in the planning process, but that is why it is suggested that the teacher work in collaboration with others and other subjects. The real issues lie in the authenticity of the subjects, the loss of art for arts’ sake, and poor quality planning. All three of these things can result in the detriment of not only a visual arts integrated lesson, but any form of cross-curricular planning or learning. As long as the teacher keeps these issues in mind, he or she can overcome them and successfully integrate visual arts into cross-curricular lessons.

Conclusion

In summary, as illustrated through the various reasons both practical and psychological, visual art integration is a valuable academic tool teachers should utilize towards an authentic, genuine, and holistic curriculum. The majority of these reasons have come from the United States, but several have also been created in Canada within the past ten years. It should be noted, however, that one does need to take into account the cost of a visual art integrated curriculum, especially studio centers. It also is equally important to strongly push an open and accepting classroom community, where students do not feel too afraid of the judgment of their peers to express creative thought and ideas. It is up to the teacher as well to do a great deal of outside research, as well as relinquish power – sometimes not only to the students, but also to a professional artist. However, with the success of such
case studies as the one done by CAPE and the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Project Zero, I do believe that it is possible to integrate visual arts into the curriculum well.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This research study investigated the integration of visual arts into a regular classroom curriculum. The study was conducted by first reviewing the literature, then conducting interviews with exemplary teachers in the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario, Canada. This data was gathered through face-to-face interviews. This study was informed by the courses I have taken in the Masters of Teaching program, as well as the independent study I did under the supervision of Dr. Hilary Inwood. I thank all of my professors for their insight and guidance for helping me focus, and therefore hone in on an interest that I have had for an extensive period of time, especially Clare Kosnik, Clive Beck, Donna Duplak, and Hilary Inwood. Parts of this chapter were co-written with my research group and my supervisor, Dr. Clare Kosnik.

Participants

The participants in this research study were from both publically and privately funded schools, and taught a range of grades: from kindergarten to grade 1 and 2. The schools were all located within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). The data was collected during these interviews – which were recorded on a handheld device and transcribed. The goal of the research was to help me learn about teaching, and I felt that interviewing exemplary practitioners was appropriate. In order to answer my research questions, I interviewed teachers who were currently addressing the needs of integrating visual arts into their curriculum.
Through interviewing the participants, data was gathered regarding teacher practices and outlooks on the topic of visual arts integration in general, and I specifically looked at why they chose to integrate visual arts, and how they did so successfully. I chose to interview exemplary because I felt they could give me information on the “Why”, “What”, “How” of visual art integration. As a future teacher, I felt that by studying what exemplary teachers did, I would develop a firm basis of the practice of art integration into an engaging curriculum. The purpose of interviewing the participants was to find out about their practices, attitudes, motivations, and challenges of visual arts integration. They were selected based upon the following criteria:

1. They were willing to be involved with the research process and to be open about their experiences
2. They were recommended as exemplary practitioners
3. Their use of visual arts integration within the curriculum created a genuine, multiple intelligence-driven learning experiences.

I identified these teachers through references from other practitioners in the field as they had reputations for being knowledgeable in regards to visual arts integration.

Procedure

There is a great deal of research on the topic of visual art integration within the classroom curriculum. I performed an initial review of the literature, and continued to review literature throughout the course of the study. I conducted a
summer graduate study on this subject as an Independent Study with Dr. Hilary Inwood, where I was able to observe classes, gain suggestions, and focus my research. As I conducted my interviews, I was able to obtain references from my interviewees and use their suggestions to focus more on texts via peer review journals and other scholarly publications. From these readings, I created a foundation for my studies, thereby aiding me in focusing on a genuine interest that I felt would be an asset to me in my teaching career. I chose to read certain key figures in the field, such as the works of the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s program, Project Zero, Elliott Eisner, and Howard Gardner. These are all active researchers and practitioners, whose experience in the topic of arts integration helped me to further specify and focus my topic. Given my beginnings teacher’s perspective as well as my own personal experience on this topic, I chose to only deal with one aspect of arts integration - visual art integration research - as I felt it would be the greatest asset to me as a new teacher. I refined and revised my questions as the study progressed due to the literature review and observational time unfolding and evolving. The primary means of data collection were through interviews [see appendix A/B for the interview questions]. I felt that interviews were the most effective way to gather information about teachers’ practices and attitudes. I felt this would meet my research goals and provide me with practical or effective teaching strategies that would help me as a beginning teacher. The interviews included three main sections. I felt it was important to begin the interview finding out about the teacher’s background experiences. From there, I pursued questions regarding specifically the “Why” and “How” of visual art integration. My final/next
section looked at barriers to integration of visual arts. Questions were developed collaboratively with my amazing research group.

Although from different school demographics, both interviewees exemplified the visual arts integration process in their own unique teaching styles. One of my participants was teaching in an upper-middle class elementary school with high parental involvement. The other participant taught at a publically funded and diverse middle class elementary school with varying parental involvement. The interviews were conducted after school hours at the schools, and were arranged at a time convenient for the interviewee. The interviews were approximately 45 – 60 minutes, and were done face-to-face. All twenty questions were asked to all of the participants; however, if a question felt redundant or already answered, it was skipped. As well, if an interviewee did not feel they were qualified to make a statement or response, they were given the option to skip the question and move on to the next. I immediately transcribed the interviews. Although I did not offer my interviewees an opportunity to review the transcript, I feel that I accurately transcribed the recordings without compromising the anonymity of the participant. For this reason as well, pseudonyms for each individual interviewee have been created.

I had the opportunity to observe all of my interviewees in the classroom. The observations took place during the early Summer of 2011 for the entire day. I observed the teachers teaching Literacy, Science, Mathematics, Music, and Visual Arts. I sat at the back of the classroom or off to the side, made field notes, recorded what the teacher was doing and saying, took photographs, and noted the rhythm of
the lesson. I also talked with students one-on-one to gain their perspective. The sole purpose of my observation was to gain an understanding of the context. My focus was not on the children. No notes were made about the students, nor did I make any evaluative statements.

After the interviews had taken place and been transcribed, I began by reading the transcripts numerous times. I was looking for themes, patterns, and interesting statements. I referred to the literature for key concepts and relevant perspectives.

Initially, I identified several different themes, and selected 3 over-arching themes, which will be discussed in chapter 4. In the analysis, I was trying to identify exemplary practices and how these practices integrated visual arts. I was mindful of the work by Project Zero in the analysis, since they emphasized integrating visual arts, I was especially keen to focus on the importance of creativity through visual arts into the normal classroom curriculum. They provided many examples of what teachers can do and were a huge asset in my research. As I wrote my chapter, I continued to refine my themes and chose quotes that supported and illustrated the themes picked. In some cases, I paraphrased the speakers/interviewees/teachers; in other cases, I provided quotes.

**Ethical Review Procedure**

Interview participants who volunteered in this research were all given letters of consent prior to the start of the interview itself. They were required to read and sign these letters before the interview could be conducted (see Appendix B
for a template of the letter of consent form used). Two copies of this form were made: one for the interviewee, and one was retained for this study's records. Face-to-face interviews were arranged at times negotiated between the interviewee and interviewer. Participants were given all necessary information about content, consent, and confidentiality. Every effort was made to ensure their comfort and willingness to participate in the interview and have the data obtained included in this research paper.

Prior to each interview, the topic of research was first communicated and reviewed with each participant. Participants were free to refrain from answering any question they wanted, that they could review or revise their answers, that they could change their mind about the use of their data at any point in the research process, and that they would receive a copy of the research paper once it was completed. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, and recorded to facilitate transcription.

All procedures were conducted as specified to the participants in the consent form they signed. No changes were made to those procedures throughout my research and writing process. All information that could compromise the anonymity of a participant has been adapted using pseudonyms for individuals and institutions. Any individual-specific data has been omitted as is necessary to protect the anonymity of each participant.

Careful review of the data, and adherence to ensuring anonymity, meant that participants were well protected from any kind of harm, whether personal or professional. All information obtained was reviewed by my research supervisor, Dr.
Clare Kosnik, before being finalized; and each participant has been made aware of and consented to that supervisor's role in the reviewing process of the data.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were limitations of this study that were related to issues of a selective literature review, generalizability, interview questions, measurement bias, and researcher interpretation. First, it is acknowledged that the review of the research literature was largely selective. Given the scope and time constraints of this Masters research project, I felt that this was unavoidable and appropriate towards the integrity of the paper. However, it should be noted that the selected literature was mindfully chosen on the basis of its relevance to visual arts integration in the curriculum.

Second, due to a small sample size, the findings of this study are not generalizable to the larger public. Rather, the given goal of this research paper was to examine exemplary practice and improve my practice as a teacher, this seemed appropriate.

In interviewing the members of this small sample, I also recognized that my interview questions themselves were limited. Once again, due to limitations set by my overall goal and time constraints, I chose to focus on primarily twenty core questions in line with my research ambitions. There were many areas of interest not explored, such as other aspects of the arts, however I feel this was necessary for a more qualitative perspective, but I hope that I can further explore this topic in future research. Other researchers may have selected different questions; yet, I feel
that my questions were appropriate based upon my overall goals for this research paper.

While it is unknown whether or not it has occurred, it is important to note the potential bias for participants to give more socially, professionally acceptable answers. This is another possible limitation for this study and must be noted for its measurement bias.

Finally, my own interpretations of the literature and data gathered from interviews can potentially be a limitation. Since the findings presented reflect what was deemed relevant to the research topic, it is important to be mindful of the fact that the position, personal experiences, biases, and assumptions of the researcher can possibly shape how the data and findings are recorded.
Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, the findings from the data collected during my two interviews, which explored visual arts integration into the curriculum by teachers, are analyzed and interpreted. From reviewing the data, the three main themes of why one should integrate visual arts, how one should integrate visual arts, and issues that one may face were addressed and examined. The chapter concludes with an overview of the findings.

Meeting the Participants

Both of the participants are professionals in the field of education in Toronto, Canada. They are both classroom teachers: one at a publically funded Ontario school; the other a private school. They both have a minimum ten years of teaching experience. The participants will remain anonymous through pseudonyms.

Alice

Alice is currently in her fourth year teaching grade 1 in a diverse, predominantly upper-middle class private school in Toronto, Canada. She has been teaching for at least ten years, and is absolutely a “jack of all trades” type of teacher. When asked about her own visual arts background, Alice has never had any formal training, however she took Art throughout high school and has worked at day camps teaching arts and crafts to children. In the past, Alice has had to be the art teacher for her class, and although her current school has an art teacher, she continues to integrate the arts into her lessons.
Bonnie

Bonnie has been a classroom teacher for twenty years. She has been a teacher at her current school for thirteen of those years, a middle-class, predominantly Caucasian, and publically funded school in the Toronto District School Board. At her school, she and a colleague co-teach the Junior/Senior Kindergarten class (JK/SK), which is her eighth year teaching this grade. Bonnie also states that she does not have a background in visual arts; in her own school experience, Bonnie noted that while she always got A’s and B’s as a student, she would only get C’s in art, which convinced her for many years that she “couldn’t do Art”. “I still don’t have a lot of confidence in my own artistic abilities, so I find it very freeing to teach younger children art because we’re just exploring the elements of art. And the process is still much more important to me than the product. I suppose that has been informed by my own personal experience.”

Themes

There are three main themes with several sub-themes that emerged as a result from the findings obtained:

• Why
  o Expressing a deeper understanding
  o Engaging all learners
  o Helping those with special needs
  o Holistic and natural education

• How
  o Initial planning
  o Thematic curriculum and activities
• Issues
  o Student confidence and enthusiasm
  o Time constraints and teacher confidence
  o Content issues

Why

Expressing a Deeper Understanding

It was clear with both participants that a major reason they incorporated visual arts into their curriculum was to help students achieve a deeper, more meaningful understanding beyond the scope of rote regurgitation of facts. For Alice, it was a way for the students to express not just their understanding, but also feeling. And not just feeling, visual arts allowed the students to explain further knowledge that would go unrecognized if the teachers had limited the students to only showing their learning through worksheets or writing. One example of this is explained through a Science-Visual Art integrated lesson for Alice:

They don’t always tell you everything they know. If I said to a child in my class, “write about what you know about butterflies”, because we are hatching butterflies right now, I might not get as much from some children as I would if I said “draw me a picture of a butterfly”. A lot of them would be able to tell me a lot more; and if I said “tell me about your picture,” I would probably get a better idea of what they know than just telling them “write”, so I feel that I can learn more.

Bonnie, too, feels that visual arts integration is necessary to understanding the depth of student knowledge, of how the knowledge is being processed, and if the knowledge is being manipulated so it can be built upon and added to.
If you are talking about owls, and the children make owl puppets, then start acting out role-playing with owl puppets, you will start hearing them talk about the scientific information they've learned about owls! “Oh, let’s get some mice!” They’ve learned what they eat, they know where they live, and it comes out in the role-playing with the puppets. I wouldn’t get that from them if I just listed all the characteristics of an owl.

Visual arts integration allows for that extension and expanse of engagement that cannot otherwise be explicitly expressed. One does not only gain the ability to truly tell how much students have learned and to what extent, but also gains the student’s own perspective on the subject itself.

*Engaging All Learners*

One of the most daunting challenges any teacher faces is the engagement and motivation of all of the different types of learners within a single classroom. Visual arts integration offers educators another learning strategy reaches out to more students due to its natural, intrinsic differentiation. Alice learned this lesson early on through her history with the arts (e.g., personally or as an arts and crafts counselor in the recreational sense). From her early exposure of how students are drawn to the arts, she knew it was an invaluable resource and study. This, coupled with the concepts of play-based learning, encourages student creativity throughout their learning. “I imagine a program where kids were just spending all day long filling out worksheets, you’d have a lot more behavior problems, you’d have a lot more kids who are frustrated.” Alice connected a lot of the behavioral issues that
she witnessed during her own practicum experiences to what could have been overall boredom with the curriculum. Visual arts integration offers more genuine student satisfaction with their own work, resulting in both good will and behavior. Even within visual arts integration, however, it is important to leave it mainly student-centered to avoid making the activity mundane, “I’ve watched students being shown a model by a teacher that’s of boring, and a lot of students will just copy the model. It’s better not to even show the model, because [students] will just do the most interesting and amazing things on their own.”

Bonnie’s perspective on engaging learners in many ways mirrored that of Alice’s. In her opinion, visual arts integration often grabbed the attention of students who would not be as motivated with a pencil-paper task.

You will find that they are motivated and ready to participate if there is an artistic component to the activity. It’s a creative expression of what they know, obviously. In journal writing, again, students can be quite nervous about the writing parts of journal, but they are usually very keen to come and try to draw, or do the drawing part, so I find it is often a ‘hook’ to other learning.

Lessons created under a visual arts lens automatically increase the probably of greater student motivation to learn due to their direct authenticity to the student’s own thinking and expression. It can even be used as a gateway, as the precursor to other subjects or lessons.

I think I more successfully get all students on board with the activity, because the ones that are a little less willing to do writing or reading, or pencil-paper tasks, for them if there’s an artistic
component, they're much more likely to engage in that part first, and then maybe we can pull out the Mathematical or Language or Scientific side of it after they have been hooked by the Artistic side of it.

By gaining the attention of the learner, the learning might therefore be more willing to delve deeper into other subjects, thus reaching more students in the classroom than not incorporating visual arts. However, as Bonnie states, not every student in the class wants to, or has the confidence to do visual arts-based activities, which is why having “more than one trick in the bag” is essential. “Not every kid learns the same way, so the more ways you can introduce a topic; the more likely you are to reach all of them. Just like there are multiple intelligences, it’s important as a teacher to make sure you allow the students different ways to express themselves.”

The Natural Aspect of Learning

Learning through the arts, or the creative process, is crucial to the education of any student which is why it is vital that it needs to be just as present within the classroom as any other subject. That being said, many teachers only focus on the visual arts aspect of the curriculum once a week, once every other week, or sometimes even once a month. Both participants felt strongly about having art as an ever-present entity in the classroom, and stressed the legitimacy of the Arts alongside other subjects, such as Mathematics and Literacy. As Alice succinctly explained,
I think we should be providing children with a whole experience in school which includes reading, writing, listening, speaking, working mathematically, working scientifically, and ALL of the arts, which includes visual arts, dance, and drama, and physical education...it’s part of the whole child! You ignore a whole part of the child at your peril! You're not going to get your best out of a child when you don’t develop all of the different sides; so I think the arts need to be in schools.

Visual arts integration is crucial because it is a part of society, cultural history, and us. It adds humanism to what can otherwise be detached learning. Alice described it as part better understanding human global culture, “It’s just such a human compulsion to show their feelings or to record their experiences through art. I think it’s just part of who we are.” Bonnie as well feels that visual arts is an integral part of her teaching and the learning process. She agrees that it is invaluable to her in terms of engaging her students in what might otherwise be very book-oriented, disembodied lessons in Science, Language Arts, or Mathematics.

The creative process itself allows students to participate in a very natural learning process, and art helps amplify that. Despite her own apprehensions about visual arts due to what she believes is her lack of artistic ability, Bonnie feels free and liberated when teaching visual arts integration to her students, since she views it as an exploration of the elements that they are all doing together. To her, the process itself means more than the end product. Through her open willingness for exploration in creativity, the students’ creative thoughts are allowed to flourish naturally and uninhibited by the pressures of the “perfect product”.
Bonnie also specified another significant aspect of the natural aspect of learning through visual arts integration is the environment of the classroom – through visual arts, it becomes much more student-focused, where students take greater pride in their work and their space of learning. It is important to remember how they feel about the classroom, as it gives them ownership of it. Bonnie explained to me the importance of environment through a Fall activity using pumpkins that her class was had just finished doing and that had recently been put up on the walls,

“We just finished those jack-o-lanterns over there...we were also teaching Math through them by introducing two-dimensional shapes and names for the Jack-o-Lanterns. The shapes they cut all themselves. The pumpkins...I know you won't approve...but some of [the shapes] were pre-cut. The overall visual impact, versus just seeing their own, when they were all hung up...it was just like music! Their chins dropped. To me, it just doesn't get better than that. They were just so thrilled, and all of a sudden, it's their classroom.”

Students with Special Needs

While Alice and Bonnie have had different experiences working with students who have special needs, such as autism spectrum disorder or English language learners, both agree that visual arts integration opens up the curriculum and makes it more universal. Alice describes the arts as being an “equalizer” in the classroom, playing upon student’s varying strengths within certain techniques. Bonnie agrees, stating that children develop at different rates – it is essentially all about accommodating the individual needs to ensure everyone is included and is
given the chance to be successful. One student in Bonnie’s class cuts play-doh instead of paper, a modification of sorts, but that way he is included in the class activity. Both Alice and Bonnie agree that positive, genuine encouragement is vital. Alice introduces the assignment in a gentle and positive way; Bonnie gets student volunteers to come up and model for the class how they would do a particular activity to show that there’s no one right way.

With English language learners (ELL), Bonnie feels that since visual arts are visual, it gets language across to students easier, since they can see the cues as they learn.

I would never just orally talk about what we are going to do in Art, I would be showing them as well, so I make sure those learners are able to participate. And it’s a good chance for them to learn some vocabulary! Once they’re working, one on one I would try to help them learn the vocabulary as we go.

Visual arts allows for students to express themselves in a way outside of regular Literacy skills of writing or reading, but to that of visual literacy. As Bonnie describes one activity where she allows students to show what they learned about a book read, “children are most often asked to write about what they’ve read, but if they can dramatize it, or make a clay sculpture, there are still children who’d rather write about it, but there’s always a portion of the class who gets excited and relieved, ‘Oh thank God I don’t have to WRITE about this!’” Giving students the option, becoming more open to differentiated, authentic learning, and motivating all
kinds of learners in the classroom to promote the idea of a universal curriculum are just some of the advantages of a visual arts integrated program.

**How**

*Initial Planning*

Perhaps one of the greatest issues with visual arts integration is the starting point – where does one begin? How does one plan an authentic visual arts integrated lesson, not only following the Ontario Ministry of Education guidelines, but also without jeopardizing the legitimacy of the art itself, or cheapening the activity to cookie-cutter like hallway art? I asked this to my two participants, who both gave invaluable advice. In Alice’s opinion, it is crucial that one is trying to see connections and is open to trying different things, which may or may not work out. Following that, she also pointed out that it was important, especially for new teachers, to not be too hard on themselves if a lesson doesn’t work out as planned. A huge part of her advice was relinquishing control as a teacher.

Teachers can be notorious control freaks, some teachers go into teaching and they really want things to be a certain way...they’re the ones that give the little parts and everyone’s art ends up looking the same, which is not what you’re writing about here. We can just let kids go with it.

It might not be cookie cutter perfect...but that’s what makes it wonderful!

Teachers just have faith in their students, allow their students the room to learn, and explore on their own. This requires the teacher to give them the freedom to do so. As Alice states, “It’s not all about us. We are just one person, if you give it to them, they will do amazing and interesting things.”
Bonnie’s approach is more that of open collaboration, talking to peers, and reaching out to the community. Her advice is to never be afraid to talk to your colleagues, because most of them love to share their ideas. “Many beginning teachers are afraid to ask because they think their colleagues are going to think they don’t know what they’re doing, but no! Don’t be afraid to ask. Roam around schools! I have gotten so many ideas from just visiting other classrooms!” Bonnie makes sure she shares with her colleagues, as well as her co-teacher, whom she considers herself very lucky to be working with. “[Her] background is with music, so musically she’s very skilled, and she’s a very good artist herself. So I’m really enjoying being with her, because she, even more than I, integrates Art. We’re having a really good time! We’re definitely on the same page.”

Another piece of advice from Bonnie was to start small, to start with a subject one feels they are strong in, and then think of how it might be furthered. To Bonnie, if one allows ideas to form naturally, both you and the kids will come up with amazing and creative ideas. Bonnie also recommends asking the students themselves for their ideas and opinions. “You can ask, “How might we use art to understand erosion?” They might have an idea. The students could lead you.”

Another option is to seek professional advice from artists in the community. Through one such person, Bonnie was influenced to get the artwork of the masters from all over the world and use those as a starting point. For example, from isolating specific shapes such as triangles and circles in an artist’s work, the students would then go out into their own books and independently point out when they had identified a “hidden” triangle. By engaging in the works of professionals,
and consulting with professional artists for ideas and techniques, the visual art becomes more real world and relevant to the students.

Thematic Curriculum and Activities

The philosophy behind incorporating visual arts integration is that allows it to further student growth and understanding, for students to take ownership of their learning and make learning relevant to the students themselves. Both participants offered similar strategies under the umbrella concept of thematic curriculum. Previously, in Chapter 2, I discussed the concept of thematic curriculum and visual arts integration. It is truly wonderful to see two current educators incorporating this principle into their own learning the practical sense. Thematic curriculum is not just theory or study; it is practical and applicable to the everyday classroom. Both participants noted that work was needed on the teacher’s part for it to be effective, however the end results are well worth the efforts.

Last year, I was able to visit Alice’s class and observe her for one day. I watched as she integrated Science, Language Arts, Visual Arts, and Music into a study about local Toronto wildlife. She worked alongside her school’s Art and Music teacher to connect their curriculum to what the students were learning in her class. While I did not get a chance to see the completed results of her effort, I was blown away by how motivated every student in the class was, and the quality of student work I saw being made. There were also other great examples of visual arts integration in her class: last year, they studied phases of the moon for many weeks. Instead of having the students do a simple worksheet, Alice gave the students black
paper and pastels and asked them to draw the different moon phases. Not only were the pictures themselves amazing, but they also showed Alice the extent of their understanding and learning.

Bonnie, too, teaches creative thematic-based lessons. Continuing with her Fall and pumpkin example, she described the direction she intended the lessons to go: they will learn the growing cycle of a pumpkin and put the stages into correct sequence, which is the Science curriculum. Next, they would be counting pumpkin seeds, which corresponds to Math. Bonnie and her teaching partner both felt that using pumpkins as a main theme during Fall was perfect for a real-world connection to the students’ learning, “They all seem to say that they have a pumpkin at home, so yes. It’s on their mind, so we figured, “Ok, if it’s on their mind, you’ve got to maximize the learning.” Because then they’ll want to talk about it, so it’s what we do.”

Bonnie also includes a strong emphasis on environmental studies in her curriculum and visual arts. Aside from studying pumpkins, she also had her students do stenciling of leaves they found in the school’s garden to make Fall collages incorporating items found from nature. She admits her school is lucky since it has what she calls an “outside studio” in the school’s large garden space. One of her goals for this past year was to create a sensory garden, which would include a tasting garden, a smelling garden, artwork all along the fences done by her students, and painted birdhouses. She hopes at its completion that not only the kindergarten class, but also grades 1, 2, and 3 will use it as a way to incorporate environmental education, Science, and visual arts.
A key word of advice from Bonnie was to offer options even in visual arts. Since not all students necessarily want to draw, Bonnie recommends always having stacks of old magazines, which can be easily obtained through parent donation. By “changing it up a bit”, the lesson stays more open-ended and genuine to each student.

Issues

Student Confidence and Enthusiasm

“A disadvantage [to visual arts integration] is that not all children like to draw,” says Alice. This is why it is important to still give students options – if they want to draw, great; if they’d rather write, let them. The point of visual arts integration is to give the students options, giving them greater ownership of their learning and how they express their learning. What might be effective for one student is not always so for another. However, Alice points out that there could be various reasons for the student to not like visual arts (not just drawing). It could be related to lack of exposure, so they do not yet have the confidence to feel like they can do something. If you do expose them, they will gradually hopefully become more comfortable. Alice points out that it is also important that the students realize that you’re not looking for absolute perfection or realism, that “whatever they do is fine”. Accepting student work is important to Alice, especially if they have an aversion to visual arts. “I think if we can respect children’s efforts and accept them, then maybe next time they’ll give us a bit more. It’s not my art, so I’m not going to be telling them what’s enough or not. I would encourage them and let them know that I
wanted them to try and that whatever they produce is fine.” It is equally important to avoid fake, empty praise. Alice reminds teachers that if the student doesn’t think something is really worthy of a lot of praise, then the praise of a teacher isn’t really going to change that opinion. To Alice, it is much more important to encourage them and recognize them for their effort. “I think as a teacher we have to be careful that it’s not about us. And that we realize that it’s the children’s work.”

Bonnie agrees that students should not be pushed, and will oftentimes use herself as a way to help students become more confident. “I am quick to say, ‘I’m not sure I know how to draw a pumpkin...gee, let me try...oh dear! That didn’t work, oh well I’ll try again...’ Sometimes, if they see an adult make mistakes or have to try something more than once, they’ll find it funny and it will hopefully relax them.”

Some activities can be rather frustrating for many students, so Bonnie advises that teachers should just give students short spurts of time to do something, but then praising their effort. She finds that this strategy works well, and that after six weeks of school, many exhibit signs of increased confidence and are excited when they have even the smallest of successes. “I guess I try and read them, and know when it is time to let them back away from the activity that they’ve found difficult.”

*Time Constraints and Teacher Confidence*

Time constraints are an issue that many teachers face and struggle with day-to-day. Unfortunately, this is also one of the main reasons why visual arts and visual arts integration does not occur. Many teachers believe that they do not have the time to dedicate to modeling, instructing, preparing material, and cleanup. Many
INTEGRATING VISUAL ART

teachers also feel pressure to cover mainly Mathematics and Literacy, and do not have the time to properly teach visual arts. Alice also suggests that some teachers choose not to teach visual arts or do visual arts integrated activities because they themselves feel that they are not artistic enough to do so. Alice’s advice to those teachers is to think of small ways in which they could integrate visual arts into their class. She particularly recommends that teachers take a “research approach” to their own work – that they find a professional artist to come in and talk to the class, speak to colleagues in the school who do art and get ideas from them, or visit other classrooms and observe what they do. “Just note how the children respond, what kind of benefits you see, and just try small things and see how they work! Nobody is going to come and tell you not to do that, and no one is telling you that you have to do all of your teaching through worksheets and textbooks.”

Bonnie agrees that time is a constraint for teachers, which is why the integrated approach works. Doing an integrated approach, versus teaching visual arts specifically on Friday once a week, helps one use their time efficiently and constructively. Art integration makes time in the curriculum in a more authentic way.

Bonnie, like Alice, also addresses the issue of lack of confidence with the arts as a factor in why teachers sometimes omit it from their everyday curriculum. Bonnie recommends bringing in professional artists or art consultants, using online resources such as YouTube and other teacher blogs, and reaching out to parents to come in and share any artistic talent they have. Bonnie points out that it is also important to realize that the process itself is as important as the product, if not
more. By doing so herself, she became much more open to ways she could integrate the arts.

Content Issues

Art can be controversial. From Picasso’s painting depicting the Spanish Civil War, to Frida Kahlo’s surreal and expressive self-portraits, the work of artists can be deeply political and emotional. Culturally relevant art can be viewed as strange or grotesque if one has never viewed it or anything like it before. Sometimes, integrating visual arts into the curriculum can be just as controversial, since it is largely open to the interpretation of those viewing it. I asked both Bonnie and Alice if they had ever encountered any issues with integrating visual arts, and while normally neither one had anything but positive feedback from peers, administration, and parents, there was one instance in which Bonnie had to confront opposition to her visual arts integration. The Ministry of Ontario has made significant holiday studies part of the curriculum in its attempt at increasing cultural awareness. While Bonnie is always open to comments from parents, especially if they do not feel comfortable with their child attending that particular lesson, she stresses that it cannot be eliminated. “We make sure we include ALL cultures, so the parent sometimes has to choose – if it’s something they find offensive, or if its something they don’t want their child exposed to, then they need to decide it they are going to take them out.” However, even with the one instance of resistance, Bonnie said that once she talked with the parent and explained that it was not sermonizing or proselytizing, but presenting the art from another culture that is
also found in Toronto, that is celebrating a significant holiday which she (and the Ministry) felt should be learned about for the benefit of cultural awareness, the parent was much more understanding and open to the lesson. Bonnie stresses that communication with parents is key, to not only increase parent participation, but also ensure that the parents understand what it is their child is learning and why.

**Overview**

It is clear that visual arts integration is no simple task, yet it can be done and is being done in classrooms by teachers who are willing to put forth the extra work necessary. I have gained a tremendous deal of insight from my two participants, both of whom have had years of experience and are clearly excellent teachers. While they do have a few differences, overall their teaching ideologies in regards to visual arts integration are very similar. What was also very interesting to me was how their teaching practices mirrored that of what was read in the literature review. Seeing theory put into practice is always a huge motivator to keep studying, keep learning, and keep researching various theories of pedagogy, especially those involving integration of the Arts. From what has been seen in practice by these two educators, I am confident that visual arts integration can be done in a genuine, student-centered manner that will heighten the learning experience of any student at any age.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The information gathered throughout this qualitative research study has both reinforced prior opinion and knowledge, as well as taught new theories, ideologies, and strategies. The objective of this final chapter is to essentially share my reflections from the study gathered from both the literature review and the interviews, and the implications they have in a teaching profession. I conclude by discussing any final thoughts and questions.

Reflection and Implication

From Theory to Practice

What was most surprising from my experience with researching this topic was how well the information gained in the literature review mirrored that of the information obtained through the interviews. Granted, many could assume that much of the ideas expressed in the literature review were highly theoretical and without practical implication, this was in many ways countered by what was learned through my interview process: these ideas were not just theory without practice – they could and have been implemented into classrooms with a great deal of success. I found this surprising, especially since I myself somewhat doubted the literature review’s practical implications. Perhaps this is due to a bias coming from a philosophy background, but I think as a researcher, I underestimated the depth to which the groups such as Project Zero, Elliott Eisner, and Howard Gardner have researched and thought about the constraints of their study. I have learned an
invaluable lesson to never assume that something is not really feasible due to its roots in academic, cerebral study and status.

Another point I wish to address was how the responses from the interviews were so similar to those of the literature review. To my knowledge, neither of my participants had ever done a great deal of research on visual arts integration. From what I learned through the interview, what drove them primarily to integrate visual arts was their recognition to its inherent natural value in the classroom curriculum, not a study released or a professional development course. Granted, Bonnie had received some initial assistance and suggestions from an art specialist, and Alice teaches at a school well known for its emphasis on inquiry-based learning; the key points that both teachers hit upon seemed completely naturally occurring.

Why Integrate

Both participants’ opinions of why visual arts integration was important and should be incorporated in the classroom were almost identical, and in many ways matched what I had learned and used as key reasons in the literature review. At the same time, both participants stressed the importance of art for art’s sake, despite it’s integration into other teaching areas, which had also been stressed in the literature review. Both participants specified the value of the process over the product, another point also expressed in the literature review. Another important detail to remember was how neither participant had any professional background or formal education outside of grade school in the arts. Both were driven to integrate visual arts into their curriculum by an appreciation and understanding of what it had to
offer their students’ learning, despite, as in Bonnie’s case, personal apprehensions due to terrible art teachers.

*How to Integrate*

What is also significant is how both participants in the study use the concept of thematic curriculum when they integrate visual arts, or create any cross-curricular activities. As expressed in the literature review as well, thematic curriculum makes the learning more cohesive, more genuine, and more connected to the real work due to its cross connections. It is also a more practical use of time and energy for both the class and the teacher, and demands more formative forms of assessment. Both Alice and Bonnie have shown examples of thematic curriculum in their teaching: from Alice’s unit on Toronto wildlife to Bonnie’s Fall pumpkins, both subjects have been expanded and spread over Science, Language Arts, Mathematics, to some extent Music and Drama, and visual arts.

Alice and Bonnie also both gave wonderful words of advice for beginning teachers. As one myself, I found their advice as professionals who have been teaching for at least ten years and who excel at what they do to be invaluable. Both stressed the importance of pre-planning, of the teacher being a researcher him or herself and seeking out people in the community, in the school, or other information to enhance the learning experience. Both participants brought up the notion of “not beating yourself up,” if something doesn’t work, that’s ok! Change it for next time. But, as Bonnie pointed out, make sure to try it out yourself first to see how it will work. We oftentimes forget the developmental stage for many students, and need to
think of that while we try something out. Both pointed out the idea to start small when trying to create visual arts integration – it is easy to get overwhelmed with everything that can be included in a unit, all of the information available, and all of the other units and what is required of them as well. Alice and Bonnie both stated that one needs to start small, play with their strengths, and go from there. Both also strongly suggested seeking advice from fellow teachers, to explore the hallways and other classes, and to open your doors to parents or people in the community to come in and share their wealth of knowledge with the class. No one can expect a teacher to know everything about everything, and by opening the doors of the classroom, the dynamic itself becomes more inclusive and welcome.

List of Recommended Practices

I have compiled a list of some key recommended practices towards integrating visual arts into the curriculum that have been obtained through both the literature review and the interview data gained.

• Teaching with art is teaching students using art as a primary source
• Teaching about art is teaching the artistic elements and forms
• Teaching through art is using art to teach a specific subject
• Start small, work with your strengths
• Do not be afraid of visual arts even if you yourself are not a strong artist
• Start with the “big idea” (powerful ideas, implicit learning goals, and explicit standards) and plan backwards to create thematic instruction
• Work with colleagues to plan, or seek advice from colleagues, professional artists, and other people in the community
• Establish classroom management strategies and expectations with artistic behavior and supplies
• Relinquish power to others and to your students
• Have faith in your students’ abilities
• Create studio centers to add to the diversity and authenticity of student work
• Modify the visual arts for students with special needs, but do not omit them from the activity, or omit the activity all together
• Emphasis is on the process, not necessarily the product
• Give genuine, constructive encouragement, not false praise
• Encourage the Creative Process, risk-taking, and perseverance, but do not force students to do more than they want to their work
• Reflect on successes and challenges, make adjustments, but do not dwell on failures
• Continue research and professional development

Areas of Further Study

A limitation of this study was with that of the practical application of thematic curriculum in specifically a primary/junior setting, especially for mixed grades. One of the most significant studies was that done by Ellen Winner and Lois Hetland of Project Zero’s project REAP (Reviewing Education and the Arts Project) which questioned the instrumental use of arts integration (Winner & Hetland,
2000). However, in that study, the arts were being viewed and tested as a means of academic improvement, specifically under the lens of standardized testing. What this research paper hopes to do is not use visual arts integration as a means to improve Mathematics or Literacy scores, but rather make the learning process more authentic and connected to the student through the use of art. It is the emotional, political, critical pedagogy. My desire for more research on thematic curriculum stems from just that – definitive “how-to” procedures for incorporating and creating thematic curriculum for the junior grades, to promote this critical pedagogy and real-world learning, especially for grades such as ¾ splits, where the curriculum seems to jump in advancement very quickly.

Another limit of this study was the socio-economic heterogeneous school backgrounds of the participants. In both cases, the students were predominantly from middle to upper-middle families, the schools had strong family support, and both schools were not financially limited for materials. Both participants had very few, if any, English language learners in their class, and only had a few students with Individual Education Plans. Further suggestions for accommodating those students, creating a universal curriculum for large-sized classes, and managing school budget limitations in visual arts integration are needed. If I were to extend this research, I would seek out more interview participants with more experience in those particular situations.

Lastly, I am interested in ways to incorporate not just visual arts integration, but the arts in general. I was limited in this study to primarily just visual arts due to my own personal background with it, as well as issues of time; however, I strongly
feel that to only incorporate one into the curriculum is a crime. Music, drama, and
dance are all just as invaluable as visual arts, and would only go to further reach a
multitude of student interests into the curriculum. As a beginning teacher, I hope to
meet others who integrate varying forms of the arts into their own curriculum,
research more on aspects of music, drama, and dance integration, and hopefully
weave it into my own teaching curriculum over time.

**Conclusion**

To me, one cannot have life without art. What would life be like without the
arts? The fact that the arts, especially visual arts, are the first to get cut due to
budget crises or time limitations I find appalling on a humanistic scale. Throughout
time, we have expressed ourselves through the arts, we communicate with one
another through the arts, we convey abstract and complex emotion and turmoil
through the arts. To not embrace such a significant aspect of our very existence in
our education system is to the very demise of our society. This research paper is not
just about visual arts integration – it is also about opening the classroom door to the
new and exciting, and allowing students to express themselves creatively and
emotionally, something that gets pushed aside for close-minded concepts of “logic”.
But the irony is that one cannot have logical thought, one cannot question or
adventure beyond the common knowledge if one does not have the creative
inclinations and confidence to do so. Teachers are the critical link between what is
and is not taught in the classroom. It is up to the teacher to overcome his or her
own apprehensions or inhibitions, and allow the students to truly grow and learn.
References


Date: ______________

Dear ______________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying visual art integration in the curriculum for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Jackie Eldridge. My research supervisor is Dr. Clare Kosnik. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40-minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,
Susannah Harris

647 – 208- 8059, harris.susannah@gmail.com

Instructor’s Name: Dr. Jackie Eldridge  email address: Jackie.eldridge@utoronto.ca
Phone number: 519 – 265 - 6962

Research Supervisor’s Name: Dr. Clare Kosnik

Phone number: 416 – 978 - 0227

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by __________(name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ________________________________

Name (printed): __________________________

Date: ______________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Section One: Background Information

1. What grade do you teach?
2. What is the demographic of the student body at your school?
3. How many years have you been teaching this grade?
4. How many years have you been teaching?
5. How long have you been at this school?
6. Do you have a background in visual arts?

Section Two: Teacher Practices (What/How/Why)

1. Tell me how you integrate visual arts. Why?
2. What are some of the benefits and disadvantages of visual art integration?
3. How do you address issues with a student who believes he or she is “bad at art”?
4. How do you structure an integrated visual art lesson to ensure inclusion for all students, especially ELL students or students with IEPs or in HSP?
5. What improvements and/or differences have you noticed since you began integrating visual arts into your curriculum?
6. How do you assess student work?
7. What is your teaching philosophy in regards to integrating visual arts?
8. What attracted you to integrating visual arts into the curriculum? What about visual art integration was appealing to you?
9. Why do you think visual art integration is important? Do you believe it is necessary? Why?
10. Why do you think some teachers may be hesitant to integrate visual arts in their lessons? What words of advice would you have to give them?

11. In your experience integrating visual arts into your lessons, why were some lessons more successful than others? In retrospect, how might you have improved them?

Section Three: Advice

1. Have you experienced any challenges or obstacles in your attempts to integrate visual arts in your curriculum?

2. As a beginning teacher, what advice can you give in regards to creating curriculum with visual arts?

3. What are your goals for the future in terms of teaching, building curriculum, promoting inclusive education, and using visual arts?