ARTS INTEGRATION IN CROSS-CURRICULAR INSTRUCTION

Finding a Place for the Arts in Education:
Exploring Arts Integration Practices in Cross-Curricular Instruction in Elementary Years

By
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Abstract

The aim for this qualitative research study was to learn how elementary school teachers integrate the arts in cross-curricular instruction and what outcomes they observe in students’ learning. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with three teachers with ample experience in arts integration. The findings on this research suggest that arts integration offers many benefits to lifelong learning and to the holistic development of the child. Engaging in reflexive and responsive pedagogy has also been identified as pivotal to arts integration practices. Examples and possible guidelines are offered in regards to overcoming the challenges found in arts integration, some of these are: seeking support from administrators, engaging in constant professional development, and nurturing a proactive disposition to look for what is needed in the implementation of this type of pedagogy. This study provides research-based evidence that contributes to raising awareness of the importance of arts education in the current educational context.

Key Words: Arts Integration, Arts Education, Cross-curricular Instruction, Arts Advocacy
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract........................................................................................................................................ii

## Chapter 1: Introduction ...........................................................................................................1
1.0 Research Context ....................................................................................................................1
1.1 Purpose of the Study ..............................................................................................................4
1.2 Research Questions ...............................................................................................................5
1.3 Reflexive Positioning Statement ............................................................................................5
1.4 Overview of the Research Project ..........................................................................................7

## Chapter 2: Literature Review ..................................................................................................9
2.0 Introduction ............................................................................................................................9
2.1 Conceptualizations about Arts Integration ...........................................................................9
2.2 Importance of Arts Integration ............................................................................................16
   2.2.1 Benefits .....................................................................................................................17
   2.2.2 Outcomes ..................................................................................................................19
2.3 Implications for Arts Integration Practices ........................................................................21
   2.3.1 Challenges ...............................................................................................................25
2.4 Conclusion ...........................................................................................................................29

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology ........................................................................................31
3.0 Introduction ..........................................................................................................................31
3.1 Research Approach and Procedures ..................................................................................31
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection .........................................................................................32
3.3 Participants .........................................................................................................................34
   3.3.1 Sampling criteria ......................................................................................................34
   3.3.2 Sampling procedures ...............................................................................................35
   3.3.3 Participant biographies .............................................................................................36
3.4 Data Analysis .......................................................................................................................39
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures .................................................................................................40
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths .......................................................................42
Chapter 4: Research Findings ........................................................................................................45

4.0 Introduction ............................................................................................................................45

4.1 Educators Define Arts Integration as an Ongoing Commitment to Personal and Academic Growth .........................................................................................................................46
   4.1.1 Educators define arts integration as a personal commitment to lifelong learning ..........46
   4.1.2 Educators define arts integration as a specific approach to the curriculum .................48

4.2 Educators Indicate that Integrating the Arts Across the Curriculum Provides Personal and Academic Benefits ..............................................................................................................................51
   4.2.1 Educators indicate that integrating the arts across the curriculum fosters the development of the whole-child ................................................................................................................51
   4.2.2 Educators indicate that integrating the arts across the curriculum fosters positive teacher-student relations in the classroom .................................................................53
   4.2.3 Educators indicate that integrating the arts across the curriculum can enrich the teaching in different subjects .................................................................54

4.3 Educators Integrate the Arts Across the Curriculum by Developing Responsive and Reflective Pedagogy that Fosters Students’ Personal and Academic Growth ..............................................57
   4.3.1 Educators integrate the arts across the curriculum by creating a safe learning environment through responsive teaching .................................................................57
   4.3.2 Educators integrate the arts across the curriculum by developing students’ agency as creators of knowledge .............................................................................................................60
   4.3.3 Educators integrate the arts across the curriculum by developing a reflexive professional knowledge across all subjects ........................................................61

4.4 Educators Stress the Need for a Holistic Approach to Support Arts Integration When Confronting the Challenges Emerging from Characteristics of the Education System, the Teachers, and the Students ........................................................................................................64
   4.4.1 Educators confront the lack of support the education system has towards arts integration by seeking administrative support, ongoing professional development, and being proactive ............................................................................................................................64
   4.4.2 Educators confront the possibility of low quality of arts instruction in the teaching practice by developing an open-minded, reflexive, and collaborative pedagogy centered in the arts ..............................................................................................................................................66
   4.4.3 Educators confront students’ reluctance to engage in the arts by practicing a responsive pedagogy while building a safe learning community in the classroom ........................................................................68

4.5 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................................70
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction to the Chapter

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

5.2 Implications

  5.2.1 The educational research community

  5.2.2 My professional identity and practice

5.3 Recommendations

  5.3.1 Faculties of education

  5.3.2 School communities

  5.3.3 Teachers

5.4 Areas for Further Research

5.5 Concluding Comments

References

Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Appendix B: Interview Protocol
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

For many years, the arts have been experiencing a dichotomy within the educational context. On one hand, research on the arts in education states that there is substantial evidence that addresses different ways in which they contribute to students’ learning and development as a whole (Caterall, 1998; Eisner, 1998; Gardner, 1999; Lorimer, 2009). However, on the other hand, the arts are still struggling to find a place within the broader curriculum and the classroom.

In 1999, the Director-General of UNESCO issued an international appeal for the promotion of arts education and creativity at schools. This endorsed the emerging understanding of the importance that encounters and engagement with the arts have on the growing minds of children, as they widen the powers of understanding and ability to grasp meaning of experience. Therefore, their neglect or omission in education will narrow the cognitive potential of tomorrow’s adults (2005). Aligned with this appeal, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) argued that experiences in the arts play a valuable role in helping students to achieve their potential as learners, and to participate fully in their community and society as a whole. Therefore, students’ intellectual and emotional development is enhanced through the study of arts. Abiding to these believes, the arts curriculum in Ontario adopted an arts integration framework, where various aspects of the arts are believed to be useful to illuminate other aspects of the school curriculum or to help develop students’ skills in other subjects.

Furthermore, there is a substantive amount of research that recognize the important role that arts play in the construction of knowledge (Eisner, 1998; Efland, 2002), as they actively involve students in the construction of meaning in forms of critical thinking (Hamblen, 1997).
Therefore, arts builds the capacity for learning and motivation (Hanna, 1992; Hartle, 2015) because arts classrooms have the potential to activate a type of pedagogy that diverges from the traditional methods of educating, where students are passive recipients of knowledge. (Freire, 1994). It is through the opportunities for employing multi-modalities of teaching and learning via experimentation and engagement with a variety of materials and experiences that arts create venues for collaboration, networking, play and stimulation (Dewey, 1934; Doherty, 2009).

Because of this multi-modalities of teaching and learning that arts offer, some authors argue that there is no reason to believe that learning in the arts does not in some way transfer to enhance learning from other subject disciplines, as “capacities usually identified as ‘engendered in arts learning’ such as creativity, imagination and divergent thinking, are also dimensions that are widely held to characterize thinking in other subject domains” (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 2000, p. 228). Such claims, are the foundation for arts integration in the curriculum, where the arts and non-arts content and skills are best taught in tandem, with the content and methods of the disciplines intertwined for mutual reinforcement (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). Reif and Grant (2010) believe that integrating arts into teaching and learning can result in more engaging classrooms for students of all backgrounds because of its capacity to increase cultural understandings, better self-esteem, and healthier cultural identity. The value of arts integration resides in its potential to help learners experience learning in a holistic way by connecting their personal feelings with intellectual and physical skills development, helping them anticipate learning challenges with joy (Brown, 2007).

However, despite of the many benefits identified for arts education, researchers state that in reality, the arts are being marginalized as “frills” in many school districts, and few students have access to an arts curriculum in schools (Thomas, 2007). Moreover, disciplines most closely
associated with national economic benefit are becoming the primary aims for the goals of K-12 educational institutions (Maguire, Donovan, Mishook, De Gaillande, & Garcia, 2012). As a result of the marginalization, although arts are seen as an important part of human experience, in terms of school curricula the arts are most often on the outside looking for ways to get it (Davis, 1999).

This is even more salient in the context of accountability, where schools feel pressure to divert instructional time and resources toward tested areas of the curriculum (Eisner, 2000). Therefore, teachers are more pressured to show results on such tests (Donahue & Stuart, 2008). In this setting where the focus turns to core subjects because of high-stakes testing and accountability, schools face cuts in their arts programs and teachers are expected to invest all their efforts on preparing students to pass this kind of assessments. It is here that knowledge about how and when the arts affects learning can be useful (Mason & Steedly, 2006). As a result, many schools resort to arts integration as many studies have established the relationship between the arts and students’ academic achievement in other disciplines. However, research in this area also offers an incomplete picture of what these effects are, how they occur, and the circumstances within schools that influence them, making it difficult to know the basis upon which the claims were made because of the simplistic quality of analysis (Burton, et al., 2000; Eisner, 1998; Gullatt, 2008).

In the context of public schools across Canada, various models have been developed with the purpose of increasing students’ level of arts literacy (Vagianos, 1999). However, there is a scarce amount of empirical research assessing such models (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). Part of the reasons why these models lack empirical assessment is due to the challenges that many schools and teachers have to face when integrating the arts in the curriculum. Not all arts-based
programs include the time, physical materials, and in-depth professional preparation of teachers required to provide effective instruction (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004). Also, there seems to be a lack of agreement regarding the requisites needed to implement an arts integration approach, “there is neither a consensus on the knowledge and instructional skills required of practitioners to effectively implement arts lessons, nor the agreement on approaches to teaching the arts in teacher education and professional development programs” (Andrews, 2004, p. 76). Therefore, teachers lack comfort and confidence to teach arts as they feel they do not possess the knowledge nor the abilities to do so, based on their beliefs and past experiences with the arts (Bae, 2013; Andrews, 2004). Consequently, school boards are hesitant regarding the feasibility to offer arts instruction when they face difficulties finding teachers with enough expertise in the arts, and when financial restraints reduce the number of resource staff (Andrews, 2004).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

In view of this problem, the purpose of my research is to learn how teachers integrate arts in the elementary years’ curriculum and what outcomes they observe in students’ overall learning. This as a way to elucidate more understanding of the dilemma posted by Donahue and Stuart (2008) regarding the possibility to integrate the arts in the broader curriculum: weighing the benefits and challenges in arts integration practice, “does arts integration prepare teachers to challenge schools dominated by standards and standardization or does it leave them frustrated because they find no place for the arts in their own teaching?” (p. 344).

My intention is to share these findings with the broader education community, and to engage the significance of the findings for my own teaching practice.
1.2 Research Questions

The main question guiding my study is: How do a sample of elementary years teachers integrate the arts in cross-curricular instruction and what outcomes do they observe for learning? To further the research regarding this issue, I propose the following subsidiary questions:

- What does arts integration mean to these teachers?
- Why do teachers believe it is important to integrate the arts across the curriculum?
- In what areas of the curriculum do teachers integrate arts and why?
- What challenges do teachers face when integrating arts in the curriculum and how do they confront these challenges?

This research project also aims to raise awareness of the state of the arts in the current educational context, and hopefully inspire teachers to engage in reflexivity regarding their own beliefs, pre-conceived boundaries, and strengths in their practice of arts teaching, and teaching as whole.

1.3 Reflexive Positioning Statement

As someone who has experienced feeling disengaged from several classes at school because of the difficulties and lack of interest towards the formal structure and content delivery format of the lessons, I developed a strong interest in learning about different ways in which I can use innovative tools to foster my future students’ learning and engagement in my practices.

Growing up and studying in a school setting with an International Baccalaureate program has always made me wonder if the ideas of interdisciplinary or cross-curricular learning could be achieved in reality. Although the different subjects were often connected to each other by common themes, the content delivery format of the classes I had as a student were still very
passive where the models of “sage on stage” and “learning through inquiry” coexisted. As a student, I was always expected to listen to the lessons being delivered and from time to time I would engage in tasks and assignments that required an inquiry mind-set for their completion. I naturally became disengaged from the lessons in which I had to sit quietly, but oddly enjoy the tasks and assignments where I struggled to find the answers, as I was required to use an inquisitive mind-set to construct the knowledge around a certain topic. I always felt that in those tasks I had a better chance to structure my own learning process regardless of the grade I received. The most common subjects that presented this dichotomy between listening quietly to the lecture and seldom using the inquiry model on specific occasions were math, biology and world history. However, my arts classes were the only ones that solely required a learning through inquiry model, they barely had long lecture times and were mostly about exploration and self-discovery. These classes were the ones I enjoyed the most. In my last two years of high school I was given the chance to choose between arts and technology and information. I chose arts because I had always enjoyed engaging in arts experiences even though I had no abilities for it. However, my homeroom teacher questioned my decision by saying that I was a student with good enough scores to choose a subject that would benefit me the most, so she asked me to reconsider. I felt confused and angered at that time as I could not understand why the arts classes were always disregarded compared to the core subjects in terms of the academic benefits I would get for my preparation to get into college.

Later on in college, I pursued a degree in Social Psychology and had the chance to further my knowledge and beliefs regarding the importance of the arts, especially after I took a class about Arts Therapy. There I learned about the power arts have to address social issues and to contribute to general well-being in a person. After that, I had the chance to work in the school I
studied in as a child and worked first as a teacher assistant and then as a teacher. There I experienced what it was to be on the other side of the classroom. I struggled with the pressures of covering all the contents of the curriculum as I tried to find ways to engage my students in the lessons. I often tried to offer my students opportunities to have activities involving the arts, and realized that those were the ones they enjoyed the most as they had the freedom to express themselves and work through the content of the lessons as they pleased. However, I always had to face the pressures of time restraints and standardized curriculums.

I believe this is an important issue to consider given the context in which children are growing up nowadays. They are constantly over-stimulated by technology, which shapes their social interactions and the way they process information and learn. Also, children in the classrooms not only come from different backgrounds but have different abilities and needs. In order to meet children’s needs, interests and expectations, I believe that changes need to be made in the classrooms, and the arts can serve as a vehicle to attain that. However, it is equally important to address the implications and possible challenges that incorporating the arts in the curriculum entails. This in order to attain better understandings of what effective teaching using the arts means.

1.4 Overview of the Research Project

To respond to the research questions, I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview three teachers about the strategies teachers use to integrate arts in the curriculum as a way to foster students’ learning. In Chapter two, I review the literature in the areas of conceptualizations about arts integration, the importance of integrating the arts, and the implications for arts integration practices. Next, in Chapter three I elaborate on the research design. In Chapter four, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of
the existing research literature, and in Chapter five I identify the implications of the research findings for my own identity and practice, and for the broader educational research community. I also articulate a series of questions raised by the research findings, and address areas for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature in the areas regarding the conceptualization of arts integration, its importance in an educational context, and the implications for practice. More specifically, I review the varying definitions of arts integration in order to consider the different conversations around its meaning and the models for integration. Next, I review research on the importance of arts integration by exploring the known benefits and possible outcomes of its practice. Finally, I overview the implications for arts integration practices by recognizing some of the considerations and challenges found by different researchers on the subject.

2.1 Conceptualizations About Arts Integration

Berghoff (1998) suggests that students are naturally inclined to depend on the arts as a way to construct meaning of the world around them. Expanding on that notion, Hartle (2015) asserts that “using the arts as multiple modes of meaning making expands children’s potential for creative engagement and diverse ways of thinking, feeling, knowing, interacting, and communicating about themselves, others and their world” (p. 294). However, despite the impact of this notion in children’s education, Gullatt (2008) stresses that some educators have some misinterpretations about the integration of the arts in the curriculum as they conceive it as simple activities that may be used as extras or time fillers. According to this author, this overly simplistic view of the arts tends to undervalue the importance of the process. Therefore, it seems relevant to discuss the meaning of arts integration. Nevertheless, finding a definition can be challenging because arts integration, as Mishook and Kornhaber (2006) point out, is a contested and confusing term. These authors explain the reason for that being that “educators do not have
any shared agreement on what arts integration should look like or even whether arts integration should be a goal of arts education” (p. 4)

The rationale behind the contention regarding the concept of arts integration lies in the qualities of arts. According to Hartle (2015), the framework behind arts integration relies on four key concepts that arts possess: universality, embodiment, language, and advancing development. These key concepts function as guiding principles that enable an arts integrated perspective (see Table 1).

Table 1. Key concepts and guiding principles for ArtsIN framework (Hartle, 2015, p.291)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key concepts</th>
<th>Guiding principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARTS are UNIVERSAL</td>
<td>The arts afford opportunities to experience the universality of human emotions and human endeavors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTS are EMBODIED</td>
<td>The arts begin in the body and engage the entire physiology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The arts exemplify the connection between body and mind, thoughts and feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTS are a LANGUAGE</td>
<td>The arts consist of multiple ways to communicate ideas, thoughts, feelings, and imagination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like our verbal language, each of the arts is a symbol system that involves specific structural, functional, and aesthetic aspects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTS advance DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>The arts engage children in a constructive learning process engaging both creative and critical thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The arts have the power to transform an experience, self, and others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is because of these qualities the arts possess that many authors have conceived arts as a tool for an extended range of frameworks (as cited by Donahue & Stuart, 2008, p. 345):

- “Transferring” learning from artistic endeavor to achievement in other disciplines including the most tested (Caterall, 1998)
- Educating students about the skills and imagination needed to produce high quality art (Smith, 2000)
• Understanding society’s values and ideas as they are expressed in fine art and popular culture (Chalmers, 1981)
• Developing creative problem solving (Foshay, 1998)
• Providing positive outlets for creative impulses (Lowenfeld, 1947; Read, 1958)
• Nurturing cognitive abilities (Arnheim, 1969; Gardner, 1993; Jensen, 2001; Perkins, 1994)
• Promoting multicultural understanding (Heck, 2001)
• Fostering social justice (Bains & Mesa-Bains, 2002)

Because of the universality of arts, they naturally provide a synthesis and inclusivity of disciplines (Davis, 1999) that encompasses wide, unique and vital opportunities to find and make meaning of the world, as seen in the many uses that different authors have described above. Following the different uses and frameworks for the arts, authors have found many possible meanings for arts integration, an example of these are (as cited by Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006, p. 4):

• The use of project based learning to address community problems or issues (Wolk, 1994)
• Thematic instruction (Ackerman & Perkins, 1989)
• Multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993)
• Transfer of knowledge across artistic and non-artistic disciplines (Darby & Caterall, 1994; Fiske, 1999)
• Interdisciplinarity among different art forms (Roucher & Lovano-Kerr, 1995)
A general definition shared by different authors (Aprill, 2010; Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, & McLaughlin, 2007; Donahue & Stuart, 2008; Fowler, 1996; Getty Education Institute for the Arts, 1996; Martin et al., 2013) views arts integration as teaching and learning in a context where the arts are integrated throughout the different subjects of the curriculum, connecting arts learning and academic learning in ways in which they are both deepened, enhancing content learning and expanding awareness and comprehension. Some of the ways in which this integration/connection happens is through creative, imaginative, experimental, purposive and collaborative interaction, and focusing on the integrity of the arts forms in life-centered issues (Krug & Cohen-Evron, 2000; Roucher & Lovano-Kerr, 1995 as cited by Brown, 2007, p. 172).

The arguments supporting the integration of the arts rely on the possibilities of linkages and transfer that art knowledge provides without diminishing art learning. Hamblen (1997) believes that “art knowledge provides a scaffolding; cognitive processes are explored that may provide occasions for linkages to and elaborations upon learning in the other subject areas” (p. 30). Some of the cognitive processes implicated in the arts that are conceived transferable to other subjects are higher order thinking skills, such as: “imagination, the ability to think critically, focus perception, and engagement in divergent thinking” (Sahasrabudhe, 2006, p. 82). Moreover, Caine and Caine (1997) assert that according to brain research, everything that is learned becomes linked to the learners’ current experiences, past knowledge and future behavior, and critical thinking cannot be taught in isolation (Strauss, 2008). Thus, arts and non-arts content and skills should be best taught in tandem, so that mutual reinforcement can take place (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005) as a way to provide opportunities for students “to practice and experience skills that become engrained and transferred to other situations” (Melnick, Witmer,
& Strickland, 2011, p. 156). As such, integration helps students prepare for life beyond school, where multi-disciplinarity is required and rigid fragmentation of disciplines does not reflect the problems encountered in the workplace (Davis, 1999).

However, these arguments do not lack contention as various authors remain skeptical of the quality of the arts learning through integration and the feasibility of transferability. For example, Hamblem (1997) states that many art educators believe that in arts integration the arts are not being valued in their own right, but in the way they appear to benefit other subjects. The acquisition of disciplinary knowledge of arts is not being dealt with (Clark, Day & Greer, 1987; Greer, 1984). Therefore, some authors fear for the poor quality of arts learning that is offered in some arts integration programs (Day, Eisner, Stake, Wilson, & Wilson, 1994), and how this appear of little value in learning authentic arts goals (Stake, Bresler, & Mabry, 1992). Moreover, Winner and Cooper (2000) argue that justifying the importance of arts by their power to affect learning in an academic area makes the arts vulnerable, which means that as soon as improvement in academic areas is not seen, the value of the arts becomes vulnerable to judgement.

Also, many authors question the possibility of transfer of learning in arts integration. Some researchers claim that learning or cognition is situated and that its utility is limited, so the different thinking skills and competencies cannot be generalized beyond the context within which they are learned (Burton, 2000; Eisner, 1998; Lave & Wegner, 1991). If some transfer occurs, this ought to be taught or addressed by teachers, as they encourage students to use certain thinking skills and competencies in other domains by establishing and anticipating the connections for them (Davis, 1999; Perkins, 1994; Sahasrabudhe, 2006). Nevertheless, Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles (2000) state an important standpoint in the contention regarding
transferability and the value of arts integration. These authors believe that the arts offer learning that is continuous yet distinctive from other subjects, many of the competencies and dispositions nurtured by the arts are also implicated in other subject domains. Therefore, they argue that “what is critical is not that capacities and dispositions transfer, but that they are exercised broadly across different knowledge domains and that no subject has prior rights over any other subjects. To diminish one is to diminish the possibility and promise of them all” (p.255).

Although the latter argument offers an optimistic take on the importance of arts in education, in reality, due to accountability movements in the educational system, the arts are still struggling to uphold their position next to subject areas under high-stakes testing (Eisner, 2000). This problem will be further discussed in the latter section regarding challenges for arts integration, however, it influences some of the different styles of arts integration encountered in schools.

Due to the many different ways arts integration have been conceptualized, a plethora of styles and models can be found as guidelines to integrate arts in the curriculum. Many of these vary according to the framework used, and the background of the authors. Krug and Cohen-Evron (2000) suggest that there are different approaches to organize knowledge according to the contribution the arts make toward fostering students’ understanding of meaningful ideas, issues, and problems. Therefore, the authors have identified a continuum of four art education curricular practices. Moreover, the position of the approaches within the continuum depends on the body of knowledge or disciplinary ideas placed at the center of a curriculum. That is to say, whether the arts have a major focus or play a supporting role. However, the authors indicate that the distinction between the four approaches can be subtle, and at times they can overlap, change, and diverse.
The four approaches of art integration practices within Krug and Cohen-Evron’s (2000) continuum are:

- **Using the arts as resources for other disciplines.** – In this approach the arts are used as resources to showcase different forms of knowledge, to clarify a particular subject manner, and/or enhance some skills. Therefore, through this perspective, educators include the arts to teach and learn about other disciplines, stimulating students’ multisensory perceptions.

- **Enlarging organizing centers through the arts.** – This is a cross-curricular approach where a school staff works together in order to build connections between different subjects through a common denominator. Individual subjects are used in combination with content from other disciplines as a way to increase relevance for students. Therefore, inquiry practices involve comparative processes where opportunities are offered to students to establish connections between events, facts, and content that were otherwise studied in isolated subjects. Thus, art educators are able to expand a central theme by adding relevant knowledge. However, knowledge can also be identified and studied as particular to each discipline.

- **Interpreting subject, ideas, or themes through the arts.** – This is a transdisciplinary curricular approach that is developed around themes, community events, and/or students’ interests. The course content is not necessarily predetermined because educators are able to collaborate and brainstorm with students in order to develop thematic units of study. This approach fosters investigation of ideas, concepts and content by combining different ways to perceive and think through several lenses provided by various disciplines. This curricular design focuses on the belief that
students make better and longer lasting connections between subjects by examining real life situations.

- **Understanding life-centered issues.** This is a life-centered curricular approach where arts are infused with other subject areas to conduct inquiry about personal and socially relevant ideas, issues or problems. A success design depends initially on the teacher’s ability to make connections between formal knowledge and everyday life. These practices can create opportunities for students to explore local and global issues across various subject areas. This through the interaction among curriculum content, subject knowledge, classroom culture, and students’ lives.

### 2.2 Importance of Arts Integration

After exploring the various conceptualizations regarding arts integration and the many implications researchers identified in the use of arts within the classrooms, it is relevant to detail an overview of the benefits and outcomes of arts integration in order to address its importance in the current educational context.

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) has recognized the importance of the arts as a way of knowing that provides students with different avenues to perceive, interpret, organize, and question various aspects of our world through exploration and experimentation. They describe learning through the arts as capable of enabling students to integrate their sensory, cognitive, emotional, and motor capacities. The Ontario Ministry of Education believes that the knowledge and skills developed through the arts can be applied in many other endeavours. This because, although every arts discipline possess its own body of knowledge, concepts, forms, styles, convention, techniques, and modes of inquiry, they are also linked in various ways where they enrich and are enriched by each other and by other subjects. Thus, the Ontario Ministry of
Education adopted an integrated learning in the arts framework, where links between the arts and other areas of the curriculum are established so students learn how arts can increase understanding or can give them alternative modes to express themselves and their ideas. To further understand the value that the Ontario Ministry of Education and many researchers around the world have placed in the arts, and arts integration specifically, a revision of the benefits and outcomes of arts in students’ learning is necessary.

2.2.1 Benefits

Many authors have argued that learning through the arts contributes to the education of the whole-child, thus providing students with lifelong learning as they function as positive catalysts for personal, social and academic growth (Caterall, 1998; Eisner, 1998; Gardner, 1999; Lorimer, 2009). Gardner (1999) suggests that no intelligences exists alone, and these intelligences are rooted in the arts, as arts study involves multiple systems and forms of knowing and being (Anderson, 1981; Perkins & Leander, 1977). Therefore, arts integration enact multi-modalities of teaching and learning via experimentation and engagement that give students the freedom to choose the sign system that makes more sense to them while constructing meaning from new and previous information (Berghoff, 1998; Hamblen, 1993; Maguire, Donovan, Mishook, De Gaillande, & Garcia, 2012). This notion of multi-modalities is important because it helps educators to recognize that students have different strengths and abilities. Therefore, it becomes necessary to provide activities to accommodate and meet the needs of children with differing experiences, preferences and skills. The multiple entry points that arts provide help teachers and students engage in diversified instruction by immersing in meaningful and powerful learning experiences for students of all ages, backgrounds and capabilities (Gullatt, 2008; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005; Strand, 2006).
Learning through the arts enhances instruction by allowing students to ask questions, explore for answers, and generate new questions from recent learning experiences. Through these lenses, arts function as tools for discovery, reasoning, critical and analytical thinking, and problem solving (Gullatt, 2006, Lorimer, 2009). Eisner (1998) argues that this is possible because the arts develops a set of dispositions that result in “a willingness to imagine possibilities that are not now, but which might become. A desire to explore ambiguity, to be willing to forestall premature closure in pursuing resolutions. The ability to recognize and accept the multiple perspectives and resolutions that work in the art celebrates” (pp.14-15). By engaging in this, students push the boundaries of their learning (Sweet, 2005) and development to higher and deeper levels by immersing themselves in a “methodology of becoming – in which individuals shape and reshape their relationship to themselves, each other and to the material and psychological tools and objects of their world” (Holzman, 2010, p.31).

Taking into consideration all the contributions and implications that arts have for the educational profession, Gullatt (2008, pp.23-24) provides a list of the most salient benefits of arts programs based on the research review he conducted regarding this subject:

- Promotes the concept that teachers are facilitators of learning and not dispensers of knowledge;
- Allows students to more deeply understand by doing and becoming more involved in the learning process;
- Enhances higher order thinking and learning;
- Provides additional entry points for content discussion and discovery;
- Expands curriculum to other cultures of the world;
- Reinforces aesthetic qualities of students;
Promotes visualization of the content and promotes imagination;

- Encourages multi-sensory approaches to teaching and learning;
- Engages intrapersonal and interpersonal communication;
- Encourages collaborative work by students (and, at times, teachers);
- Infusion of the arts into the curriculum may be accomplished in a variety of ways;
- Improves spatial and logical mathematical reasoning;
- Encourages risk-taking by students expressing creativity;
- Enhances communication skills of students;
- Is adaptable to all areas of the curriculum;
- Provides an avenue to encourage diversity/multiculturalism.

### 2.2.2 Outcomes

Given the myriad of benefits found in the literature regarding arts integration, it seems relevant to explore the way in which these assets translate into positive outcomes for teachers and students in the classroom, and even the wider community.

The most common set of outcomes related to arts integration can be found in the areas of academic achievement and cognitive effects. These are given special attention by researchers, teachers, parents, school authorities, education boards, and policy makers, as the arts struggle to find a rightful and valuable place within the curriculum and school time. Several researchers have found that arts integration programs appear to help increase test scores in other subject areas and academic achievement compared to students who were not involved in the arts (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Deasy, 2002; Eisner, 1998; Fowler, 1996; Hamblen, 1997; Hetland, 2000), and have a more powerful effect on the achievement of struggling students than the more
advanced students (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004). Caterall Dumais, and Hampden-Thompson (2012) found similar outcomes regarding the use of arts integrated instruction for at-risk students accessing and learning information in English language arts and mathematics. Ruppert (2006) asserts that the six more common benefits found in her review of numerous studies regarding the integration of arts involved: better reading and language skills, mathematical skills, thinking skills, social skills, motivation to learn, and a positive school environment.

A number of researchers have found that participation in an arts integrated curriculum increased reading abilities and reading scores (Dalke, 1984; Hal, 1979; McGuire, 1984; Silver, 1975, 1978; Silver & Lavin, 1977; Jansson & Schillereff, 1980). Some even found that children that were years behind were able to catch up to the reading level of their grades through participation in arts curriculum that integrated reading in the program (Lidstone, 1979; McGuire, 1994). Further, Hardiman (2014) provides evidence where many students, particularly struggling readers, were able to retain academic content better when instruction was integrated with the arts.

However, Aprill (2001) warns about the danger of inflated claims regarding the contribution of the arts to academic achievement. In their efforts to establish the value of the arts, many researchers over-inflate or state causal relationship to improvement in academic achievement where only a correlation was indicated, leaping beyond the evidence with not enough solid grounds for the claims (Winner & Cooper, 2000). Gullatt (2007) also notes that studies showing the relationship between the arts and student achievement within academic disciplines have been typically more theoretical than empirical. Therefore, Aprill cautions that arts should not be adopted simply for the gains of academic success because they are prone to be disposed of as soon as the signs of increased test scores are not visible. Thus, the arts should be taught for their own merit (Aprill, 2001; Eisner, 1998).
Arts integration programs seem to also foster social and affective outcomes such as motivation and social adjustment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Hanna, 1992), engagement (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005), positive risk taking and perseverance (Horowitz, 2005), promotion of self-awareness, self-image, span of interest and social relations, as well as, lower absenteeism (Carter & Miller, 1971; Catterall, 1998; Dalke, 1984; Hamblen, 1997), lower drop-out rates (Catterall, 1998; Luftig, 1995), improvement in school climate and culture (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999), enhancement of understanding among diverse groups (Mandell & Wolf, 2003), increased cultural understandings and healthier cultural identities (Purnell, Ali, Begum, & Carter, 2007; Graham, 2009).

In the particular case of Elementary level students, Brown (2007) have found that students that had active participation in arts learning were able to engage in “elaborate and creative thinking and problem solving, verbal and non-verbal expressive abilities (as applied in different contexts), applied learning in new contexts, increased skills in collaboration, increased self-confidence, and higher motivation” (p. 174).

From outcomes that have a positive impact in students and the school environment and culture, it is understandable that teachers might be positively affected too. As students became more engaged and motivated through arts integration, studies also indicate they experience more joy in the classroom, which impacts teachers’ motivation and morale (Lorimer, 2009; Rabkin & Redmond, 2006).

2.3 Implications for Arts Integration Practices

As seen in the literature, arts integration provides many benefits and positive outcomes in students’ learning and development. However, because of the challenges and pressures that
teachers and schools face regarding the state of the arts in education, it is important to examine some basic requirements and conditions researchers have found regarding effective arts integration in the curriculum, as well as ways in which these have been practiced, and the challenges practitioners face in their implementation.

Teachers who integrate arts into their curriculum find that they are better able to comprehend and meet the different needs of all of their students (Hartle, 2015). Hartle (2015) found that teachers who practiced arts integration on a daily basis in their classrooms and documented student learning and decision-making, utilized a wider range of teacher reflectivity. This meant that they engaged in more collaborative relationships with artists who worked in the classroom and demonstrated more technical reflectivity about arts disciplines for themselves and the students. This dialogical reflectivity between the arts experiences for both teachers and children situated learning in a cyclical context that required learners to look for different possibilities while engaging in arts experiences.

In order to engage in the kind of creative teaching required for arts integration, educators must be mindful of their existing beliefs and preconceived boundaries for them to be able to openly explore the possibilities that exist first in themselves, then in the relationship with children, families, the design of the environment, and learning experiences in the classroom or within the larger community. These boundaries and possibilities are more fully explored when teachers are willing to collaborate with an art partner, an art educator, a community artist, museum, or arts organization (Hartle, 2015). This becomes particularly important as Andrews (2004) found that:

Elementary teachers need a level of comfort with the arts to teach them. They require the expertise to apply generic instructional skills in the arts, a desire to play and experiment
with artistic processes, an appreciation of the importance of the arts, and an understanding of basic arts concepts (p. 76).

Without a careful examination of the possibilities and boundaries, teachers will not be able to address and act upon the strengths, weaknesses, resources, or gaps affecting the practice or arts integration. As Andrews (2004) states, developing teachers’ confidence to teach arts in schools is essential because if teachers value the arts and are provided with the necessary tools, the arts will happen.

However, in order for teachers to develop the level of comfort necessary, they require support from different areas. Gibson (2003) and Grauer (1998) stress the importance of arts methods courses in developing elementary grade student teachers’ positive attitudes towards arts by increasing their confidence in their own abilities so they are able to adapt their own personal art learning to elementary students. Also, schools need to facilitate professional development programs for teachers, where the focus is on collaboration. Regular classroom teachers and arts teachers or arts education specialists at schools should be able to work in collaboration by establishing a set of standards or education goals, or themes or related concepts that lead the way in curriculum decisions and planning across all subject areas (Brown, 2007; Melnick, et al., 2011). When planning an arts integrated unit of study, educators do not restrain themselves with a narrow subject of study; instead, many areas can be combined into a cohesive whole (Brown, 2007).

Furthermore, Strand (2006) found in her research that four themes were consequential to the process of collaboration and affected the nature of arts integration in schools. The first and most important theme was the philosophical mission of each school. Second, the personal characteristics and students learning goals of the teachers determined the level of collaborative
success. Third, the administrations’ relationships with the teachers supported the partnerships and protected the curricula. Fourth, the content and approach to instruction focused on the process over the product, stressing higher order thinking skills, including improvisation and reflection.

These four themes represented the core of the model of collaborative arts integration curriculum development. The schools that showed an effective arts integration followed this model and displayed the following characteristics:

- The organization’s philosophy and goals did not change, but rather formed the heart of the curricular development and instructional content, the teacher characteristics, relationships and instructional content were each affected by each other. The curriculum changed with dynamic shifts in any other categories, the balance of teacher characteristics were affected by both relationships and the instructional content, and student engagement with the instruction could alter the teacher characteristics and the relationships (Strand, 2006, p. 38).

This model represents the idea that arts integration entails a holistic approach where the educators cannot stand by themselves, they form part of a wider system that affects, interacts with and responds to the other parts.

Therefore, the characteristics of the schools, the teachers, and other contextual factors impact the nature of arts integration. Burton et al. (2000) found similar contributing factors to those of Strand. They came to the understanding that the beneficial effects of arts integration appeared to be intensified by the following mediating variables: the central role of the administrative support – school principals who make possible adequate and flexible arts programming; teachers who are professionally informed and confident and innovative in their
approaches to learning and who have strong professional interest, and enjoy collaborating with other arts and classroom teachers; and the provision of sufficient opportunities to study the arts in various forms, including integrated study within the daily flow of the classroom learning. It is safe to say that principals are also key components in arts integration because as they need to adopt a proactive approach towards developing an implementation plan and marshalling the resources to support the arts throughout the school community (Lorimer, 2009).

Taking into consideration all the mediating variables mentioned previously, in order to carry out a well-designed and comprehensive arts integration program with significant district and foundation support, the following is needed according to Catterall and Waldorf (1999, p. 58):

1. Students should see connections and walk away with bigger ideas.
2. Students should take their work seriously.
3. The expressions and activities in the arts should genuinely speak to important areas of the academic curriculum. This also means that the content is seen through more than one form, for example, beyond the traditional written and spoken word.
4. The content lesson and the artistic lesson should be of equal importance.
5. The experience should have a planned assessment with rubrics and scoring guides.
6. The lesson plan should grow from state curriculum standards in both content areas and the arts.

2.3.1 Challenges

Across Canada the arts disciplines have been recognized as fundamental to children’s educational experience. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) has claimed that the arts are essential to students’ intellectual, social, physical and emotional growth and well-being, putting
an emphasis on arts integration within their curriculum. However, in spite of the
acknowledgement of the benefits that arts can provide to children’s learning and development,
Andrews (2004) argues that “the overall situation in arts education is diffuse and lacks cohesion
across the educational spectrum” (p. 76). The implementation of arts education programs face
many challenges. Researchers have found empirical evidence that instruction in the arts is being
reduced under high-stakes testing policies, as well as the time allotted for it in the classrooms
(Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006). Given the context of accountability in education, teachers feel an
increased pressure to cover the content subjected to testing and worry about asking students to
make art rather than read or write (Donahue & Stuart, 2008). This kind of educational setting
becomes the source of decisions around budget constraints around the arts programs in schools
(Maguire, et al., 2012), which become more salient in schools serving schools with students with
less privileged backgrounds (Carey, Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002) raising important equity
concerns. As a result, many schools rely on arts integration into other subject areas (Carey,

However, Mishook and Kornhaber (2006) stress that besides the decreases in the actual
amount of arts instruction, what might be equally, if not more important, is the nature of arts
instruction that is provided and the ways in which high-stakes testing may modify that
instruction, even when resources such time and money have not been significantly altered. This
is particularly important since not all arts-based education programs include the time, physical
materials, and in-depth professional preparation of teachers required to provide strong, powerful
and transformative experiences (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004). Many non-arts teachers, particularly
those just out of college, have little or no education, background knowledge, or experience in the
arts to guide them and are required to teach in fields for which they are not trained or to utilize instructional methods unknown to them (Gullatt, 2008; Powell, 2001).

Therefore, teacher preparation and expertise in the arts becomes one of the main challenges in arts integration. In many cases, elementary teachers arrive in their first classroom with perhaps an hour or two of preparation regarding arts education, and are expected to deliver rich lessons incorporating arts disciplines (Pitman, 1998). As a result, many teachers avoid teaching arts if they do not feel they have the requisite expertise or arts consultants are not available to assist them (Cobert, 1984; Upitis, Smithrim & Soren, 1999; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001). This is because prior knowledge, experience, and beliefs that teachers have regarding their abilities, affect their confidence and shape their practices including arts integration (Andrews, 2004; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Hollingsworth, 1989).

Furthermore, there is no consensus on the knowledge and instructional skills that practitioners require in order to effectively implement arts lessons. Also, there is no agreement regarding the approaches to teaching the arts in teacher education and professional development programs (Andrews, 2004). Generalist teachers prefer multi-arts, integrated or inter-disciplinary arts approaches, whereas arts specialists rather engage in comprehensive, discipline-based or competency-based approaches (Green & Vogan, 1991; Lehman & Sinatra, 1988). The time allocated to the arts in faculties of education is very limited, and arts expertise is not always required by those supervising teacher-candidates in the practicum (Wilkinson et al., 1992). Moreover, there are very few partnerships in the arts between faculties of education and school boards, although such partnerships improve learning and create effective programs (Andrews, 1995, 1999; Gregory, 1995; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001; Tambling, 1999; Wing, 1993). Therefore,
without appropriate arts programs in faculties of education and adequate funding for arts specialists in schools, teachers will continue fearing to teach arts or doing it without the requisite expertise, thus hindering the possible benefits of engaging in arts learning (Andrews, 2004). Bae (2013) came across this kind of scenario in her research, where the participants, despite being supportive of the notion that arts integration was useful for teaching other subjects, delivered lesson plans that revealed that arts were incorporated in simple learning activities without substantive art instruction and in superficial manners.

Another challenge resides in the lack of cooperation among educators. In order to develop a balanced approach towards arts integration, most teachers need to work in collaboration and partnership with arts educators or specialists. However, very little contact and collaboration exists between teachers and arts specialists, and there is even less indication of mutual support (Gullatt, 2008; Pitman, 1998). Arts specialists do not often participate in curriculum development (Baker, 1985; Stake, 1993). This also happens because arts teachers and classroom teachers are not usually given the appropriate amount of time to collaborate. Therefore, it is important that principals support collaboration by providing release time, prep time, or cultural planning days (Lorimer, 2009). As seen in the previous section, mediating variables such as the philosophy, culture and environment of the school, principals’ advocacy for the arts and teachers characteristics, affect arts integration greatly as it involves a holistic approach of the school community. Therefore, Gullatt (2008) recognizes that having a holistic approach is important for arts integration because, “without this type of integration, students may view school as a place where they learn isolated, unrelated content facts and miss the opportunity for infusion of the arts into the learning process” (p.15).
Finally, although many principals are in favour of arts integration and would like to infuse the arts into classroom instruction, most are limited by the lack of time or knowledge regarding this area, as well as their primary concerns about meeting mandated curriculum standards (Lorimer, 2009). Furthermore, some school boards might question the feasibility of offering arts instruction when they have difficulties finding teachers with the requisite arts expertise, and when financial restraints reduce the number of resource staff (Andrews, 1997; Arts Curriculum Centre, 1989; Reid, 2001).

2.4 Conclusion

In this literature review I looked at research on the different conceptualizations regarding arts education and arts integration into different subjects within the curriculum, the different benefits and outcomes that arts learning provide within the process of teaching and learning in the broader curriculum, as well as the many implications and challenges encountered in the practice. This review elucidates the extent that attention has been paid to the benefits and outcomes that arts integration contributes to the development of the whole-child and lifelong learning. However, I have found that there is a heavy emphasis on addressing the contribution arts make to students’ academic achievement due to the contextual pressures of high-stake tests, funding and accountability. This raises questions about the importance of teaching the arts for their own value and not as resources to other ends, especially if one takes into account the many challenges arts integration faces in practice. This points to the need for further research in the area of the quality of arts instruction provided in an arts integration context within the curriculum.

In light of this, the purpose of my research is to learn how teachers within the elementary level integrate the arts in cross-curricular instruction and what outcomes do they observe for
learning. Given the context where teachers feel pressured by standardization and accountability, it is important to explore teaching practices where educators cope with the challenges of finding a place for the arts within the curriculum. The way this research proposes to approach this issue is by using semi-structured interviews in order to elicit the experiences and perceptions teachers of an elementary level in Canada have regarding the ways in which they integrate the arts within the curriculum. By doing this, I hope to provide a better understanding of the importance of the arts within the educational context, and to inform further about the many challenges educators face in their daily practice.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on explaining the methodological decisions made in order to conduct this study. I begin by reviewing the general approach, procedures, and instruments used for data collection. I then provide information about the participants by detailing the criteria and procedures used for sampling and recruitment. Furthermore, I explain the data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations pertinent to my study. In like manner, I identify a range of methodological limitations, but also address the strengths of the methodology. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief explanation of the key methodological decisions I made, and the rationale behind these choices taking into account the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

The purpose of my study was to learn how teachers integrate arts in the elementary years’ curriculum and what outcomes they observe in students’ overall learning. Thus, I decided to use an interpretive approach for my research as I aimed to understand the meaning behind the participants’ actions “from [their] own point of view”, given their lived experiences and the social and cultural context they were immersed in (Bernstein, 1976, p. 138). For this reason, the use of qualitative research was seen appropriate since it is “a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live” (Holloway, 1997, p. 1). Hence, it became relevant to use a qualitative approach for my research because it did not rely on statistical representativeness or a tight cause-and-effect relationship among factors, such considerations did not fit my research purpose. Instead, I aimed to have the possibility to develop a complex picture of the issue under study that involved
“reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many situations involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges” through the uniqueness of the participants in my study (Brinkman, 2013; Creswell, 2007, p. 39).

This research was conducted using a qualitative research approach where the focused of literature review was to provide a context for the study, a justification for the appropriateness of the research approach, and to direct and argue for the relevance and significance of the research questions (Wilson, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to empower elementary school teachers committed to integrating the arts in cross-curricular instructions, to share their stories about their teaching practices, beliefs and perceptions, while understanding the contexts in which the participants are immersed (Creswell, 2007). However, drawing on the individual accounts of the participants “does not imply that interpretations are bound to single cases. Indeed, meaningful interpretations (or generalizations) can be, and often are, constructed across cases” (Moss, 1996, p. 22). Thus, gaining a deeper understanding of the topic at hand. For this reason, the use of a qualitative approach in this study seemed the most appropriate facing the question of how do a sample of elementary school teachers integrate the arts in their daily instruction across subjects, and what outcomes do they observe in students’ learning.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

According to Creswell (2014), data collection involves “setting the boundaries of the study, collecting information through unstructured or semi-structured observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording information” (p. 239).
The primary instrument for data collection used in this study is the semi-structured interview protocol. Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to hear about participants’ lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). The semi-structured format allows for the interviewer to design and plan an interview according to what it is considered suitable for their research focus and questions, while leaving room for participants to elaborate and even re-direct attention to areas previously unforeseen by the interviewer.

The relevance of the use of semi-structured interviews in my study lies in their flexible nature. Although some questions or prompts might be previously designed by the researcher as a way to cover a specific set of topics, it also allows the development of the participant’s own ideas without major restrictions (Greig, Taylor & MacKay, 2007). Corbin and Morse (2003) believe that, when qualitative interviews are unstructured, it may provide participants with a considerable control over the interview process. Therefore, it can help empower the participants’ voice and acknowledge their lived experiences. However, in the context of this MTRP study, a semi-structured method was considered necessary given the lack of experience we students have as researchers to be able to navigate the exploration of a studied phenomenon without any kind of structure, so a set of predetermined, yet flexible and open ended questions were designed.

Semi-structured interviews are meant to gather “descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 3). Thus, they seemed a suitable method to pursue the purpose of my study. By using semi-structured interviews, I gained a deeper understanding of how a sample of elementary school teachers shared their own experiences and gave meaning to their daily professional practice integrating the arts in their instruction across subjects, and what outcomes they observed in their students’ learning. In order to have access to these accounts, I have designed an interview
protocol (see Appendix B) comprised by five different sections where I focused on the participants’ professional background and experience, their perspectives or beliefs about arts integration, the instructional practices and strategies used to integrate the arts, the supports and challenges encountered during their practice regarding this subject, their professional goals in the area of study, and any advice they might have for beginning teachers who are committed to the topic at hand.

3.3 Participants

As part of the qualitative research approach adopted for this study, I review in this section the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment, and I examine a range of possible avenues for teacher recruitment. I have also included a section wherein I introduced each of the participants. As the concept of purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research, I focused on individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experiences, in hopes to contribute to a deeper understanding of the problem and research question of my study (Creswell, 2007). The methodological decisions made to determine who should be sampled, what form the sampling will take, and how many people will need to be sampled, will be detailed in the subsections below.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The sampling criteria for teacher participants was as follow:

1. Teachers with a minimum of five years of teaching experience in elementary schools
2. Teachers that have taught across different elementary grades
3. Teachers that consistently integrate the arts in their instruction across different subject areas
4. Teachers that are advocates of or show commitment to the arts (this can be demonstrated through having a background in arts, having received professional development training in arts, being involved in art related activities in the community, etc.)

As a way to address the main research question, the participants that I interviewed had consistently integrated the arts in the different subjects they teach on a daily basis. Additionally, they possessed a minimum of five years of teaching experience in elementary schools. This is a way to ensure that the participants have enough lived experiences that can help them identify effective teaching approaches. In order to explore and establish comparisons within a broader range of experiences, the teachers had experience teaching different grades throughout their career. Lastly, the participants of the study demonstrated a commitment to or advocacy of the arts, as a way to explore contributing factors to effective teaching in arts integration.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures

Because of the in-depth nature of qualitative studies, the sample of participants in this research “is not a probability sample that will enable a researcher to determine statistical inferences of a population; rather, it is a purposeful sample that will intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination” (Creswell, 2007, p. 118). Therefore, the selection of the participants was based on the sampling criteria specified in the previous section. This, in order to gather information regarding teachers’ experiences with arts integration in their professional practice. However, given the small-scale nature of which this research is framed, and the methodological parameters established, a convenience sampling will also be used where the individuals participating in the study will be the ones that the researcher can have access to and easily collect data from (Creswell, 2007). I
relied on my existing contacts and networks to recruit participants, as I am immersed in a community of teacher colleagues and mentor teachers that facilitated access to individuals that might fulfill the sampling criteria.

I also contacted teacher associations and/or school boards from my past practicums and provided them with an overview of my research study. I provided the participant criteria and asked that these individuals/organizations distribute my information to teachers they believe may fulfill the criteria. This last consideration helped ensure that teachers are volunteering to participate rather than feeling pressure or obligation to do so. By doing so, I tried to avoid potential ethical issues that might arise as coercion or imposed participation, related to the influence of power imbalance dynamics between teachers and the institutions they work for. In addition, having a voluntary participation of the individuals in the study might help establish the better rapport, which according to Creswell (2007), might contribute to participants providing good data.

3.3.3 Participant biographies

The three participants in this study are professionals in the field of education in Ontario, Canada, and active members of the Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators (CODE). Each of them have a minimum of ten years of teaching experience in the elementary years. For the purpose of this study, each participant was assigned with a pseudonym as an anonymity measure.

Julie

Julie is currently a professor in a university in Ontario where she teaches literacy and drama education to pre-service teachers. She has been an educator for 28 years and an
elementary teacher for 20 of those years. As an elementary teacher, she had the opportunity to be a classroom teacher, as well as a music and drama teacher for children from Kindergarten to Grade 8. Additionally, she supported all the extra-curricular art programs in the two schools that she worked at. The first school that she worked at was a predominantly French and First Nations community in northern Ontario. The second school was located in a very arts focused community in southern Ontario.

When asked about her arts background, Julie stated that she has always been connected to the arts. Julie explained that she grew up in a family with a strong music background, and that she studied in a school with a strong music program. Additionally, in order to further her own arts education, she took a course in children’s theater in a Canadian university, as well as teacher training in the arts in a prestigious arts center in the United States, where she has remained actively involved in the past 10 years. Julie stated that she always had continuous professional development in the arts through post-graduate education, courses, conferences, workshops, etc. She emphasized that she is constantly interested in finding ways to connect with other people that are excited about and committed to the arts.

*Brenda*

Brenda has been a classroom and an arts rotary teacher for 12 years with experience teaching students from Kindergarten to Grade 8. She has worked in four publicly funded schools in Toronto. Additionally, she has taken part of the Success Planning team in one of the schools she worked at. She has also been head of the arts department in another school, and coordinated dance clubs, school musicals, and schools plays in different schools. She is currently a Grade 1 to 5 music, dance, and drama teacher. All of the schools that Brenda has worked at have been very culturally and socioeconomically diverse.
In regards of Brenda’s background in arts, she stated that she has always been involved in the arts. She was a trained dancer as a child and was very involved in theater and music. She has a major in theater, however, when she started her career as an elementary teacher she realized that she needed to learn how to embed her technical knowledge of theater and dance in a classroom setting. Therefore, she took the additional qualifications in drama and dance in order to further her professional development.

Samantha

Samantha has 11 years of experience being a classroom teacher of the grades from Kindergarten to Grade 8, in a publicly funded and culturally diverse school in Toronto. Additionally, she was a resource teacher providing English as a Second Language (ESL) support, a partnering arts teacher, a rotary French teacher, and a coordinator and support for dance and drama clubs. She has also taught Grades 3, 4 and 5 for two years in another city in Ontario. Samantha has worked for the past two years as a teaching and learning coach for the Toronto District School Board’s model schools for inner cities.

When asked about her arts background, Samantha stated that she has always loved the arts. She started being involved with drama and dance since high school, and completed a university degree in Concurrent Education in theater. Later on in her career, Samantha took an additional qualification in dance and several workshops to further her professional development. However, she emphasized that joining CODE was a big part of her professional learning because it provided her with access to multiple resources and conferences. She also completed a master’s in education where she chose to conduct a research about drama and urban education.
3.4 Data Analysis

After conducting the semi-structured interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings. Before analyzing the data, Agar (1980) suggests that every researcher should “…read the transcripts in their entirety several times. Immerse yourself in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts” (p.103). Once finished this process, it is important to make sense of the data. In order to do so, the information gathered in every transcript was coded using the research questions as an interpretive tool. Every transcript was coded individually, classifying the qualitative information by taking the text apart and looking for categories of data, themes within categories, or dimensions of information (Creswell, 2007). The coding process was done through a constant comparative method, where patterns, similarities, and differences between the interviews were taken into account (Thomas, 2009), as categories were created and assigned by analyzing different connections in order to place them under an integrated idea (Dey, 1999). Therefore, as a second level, the categories and themes that emerged were read beside one another, synthesizing themes where appropriate. However, it is important to note that the codes assigned during the analysis were not fixed because as the process went on, they changed and became more refined (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Urquhart, 2001). As Opie (2004) asserts, analyzing qualitative data is much more open to the subjectivity of the researcher, hence, an iterative and recursive process was used to go back and forth the content of the data.

In the stage of analysis where the process of interpretation of the data was done, I had to step back from the data to form a larger meaning of what was being unveiled (Creswell, 2007), in order to be able to address what matters about the themes that were found, given what existing research has already discovered as detailed in the literature review. Also, null data was taken into
account in order to address what participating teachers have not spoken about, and why is it important to analyse it. Therefore, I had to decide which part of the data to focus on, so that an answer to the research question was provided through the findings of the analysis. I aimed to present appropriate and sufficient evidence to the reader, so that a relationship between the evidence and the conclusions could be clearly established (Seale, 1999).

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Because of the value of gaining access to the individual accounts of the participants’ lived experiences, beliefs, and perceptions through qualitative research, ensuring the participants’ general welfare and privacy is deemed pivotal to every study. Creswell (2014) emphasizes the researcher’s obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of every informant. Therefore, he believes that in order to gain support from the participants, a qualitative researcher should take into account various ethical considerations such as: conveying to the informant that they are participating in a study, explaining the purpose of the study, and not engaging in deception about the nature of the study (Creswell, 2007).

As a way to safeguard the participants’ rights and welfare, various ethical considerations were taken into account following the considerations appointed by Creswell (2007). A consent form was designed (see Appendix A) containing all the elements that Creswell (2007, p. 123) believes are required:

- The right of participants to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time
- The central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in data collection
- Comments about protecting confidentiality of the respondents through the use of pseudonyms
- A statement about benefits to accrue to the participants in the study
- The signature of the participant as well as the researcher

Therefore, the participants were asked to sign a consent letter giving their authorization to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded, ensuring that no coercion took place. In order to avoid deception to the informants, the consent letter provided an overview of the study, addressed ethical implications, and specified the expectations of participation. Also, the informants’ were notified of their rights to withdraw from participation at any point in the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. All participants were assigned a pseudonym, and any identifying markers related to their schools or students were excluded in order to guarantee confidentiality. Furthermore, the participants had the opportunity to review the interviews, and to clarify or retract any statements before I conducted the data analysis. This provided the study with more validity and reliability because the process of verification enhanced the trustworthiness of the research, which is an important criteria to judge the quality of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2014). In addition, all data (audio recordings) was stored on my password protected computer/laptop/phone and will be destroyed after five years. Different authors also assert the importance of reflecting about the relationship that exists between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale, 2006; Nunkoosing, 2005; Weis & Fine, 200). However, given that I am a student in a teacher education program, interviewing teachers who already hold a stable position in their careers, there was minimal chance that the interview process was affected by any power dynamic that might have been present. Finally, there are no known risks to participation in this study, so that the welfare of the individuals was not compromised.
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Given the scope of the research, the study design presented some limitations. One of them was the number and type of participants. Given the approved ethical parameters, this research project could only interview teachers, and consequently it was not possible to interview students or parents, or to conduct surveys or classroom observations. Adding different types of participants would have provided a broader range of different, experiences, perspectives and realities related to the studied phenomenon, and employing other methods of data collection such as observation, could have provided a deeper understanding of the behaviours in a natural setting. It would have also incorporated more strategies for validity by providing different sources of data to compare the information (Creswell, 2014).

Another limitation was the number of teachers that could be interviewed. Although the findings can inform the topic at hand, they cannot generalize the experience of teachers more broadly speaking. It would have been desirable to apply saturation of number of participants, where you stop collecting data when the categories or themes are saturated, and new data does not provide new insights or reveals new properties (Charmaz, 2006). However, as Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) state, the intent of qualitative research is not to generalize the information, but to collect extensive information that will help elucidate the particular, the specific. In that sense, this study has provided a deeper understanding of the participants’ meanings of arts integration practices in cross-curricular instruction. Moreover, these new understandings (although limited) were achieved through internal validity by presenting “evidence of a persuasive connection between the conclusions made in the outcome of the study and the procedures and methodology used in collecting and analyzing the data” (Evans, 2009, p. 118). In like manner, this research considered issues of reliability by adopting various strategies and processes that attributed rigor
and trustworthiness to the study (Evans, 2009). Therefore, it can be said that despite these limitations, the methodological procedures adopted in this study were conducted in appropriate ways, giving strength to the findings.

The significance of interviewing teachers was that it allowed me to understand in a more in-depth manner, the multiple realities of how things occur in the teaching practice through the own participants’ point of view (Creswell, 2014). In this way, interviews validated and empowered teachers’ voices and experiences, providing them with an opportunity to make meaning from their lived experiences, in regards of what matters the most to them when it comes to the topic at hand. This could also be conducive to providing an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their own practices as they articulated how they conceptualize particular topics in theory and in practice. This can only happen because in qualitative research, the primary instrument of data collection is the researcher (Creswell, 2014). And although it can deal with subjectivities, the significance lies in how meanings and interpretations are negotiated in a dialogue between the researcher and the interviewee, because it is the participants’ realities that the researcher is trying to reconstruct (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). This however, cannot be achieved without the researcher’s reflexivity as well, where biases, past experiences, values, and personal background have to be examined in order to analyze the way in which these variables shape interpretations (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, it can be said that the main methodological strength of this study is the possibility for the participants and the researcher to engage in a mutual reflexive positioning around the subject at hand.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I explained the research methodology used in my study. I first provided a discussion of the research approach and procedure, where I analysed the meaning and
significance of qualitative research. Then, I described the instruments of data collection, highlighting interviews as the primary source of data and the benefits of semi-structured interviews. In addition, I explained the use of purposive and convenience sampling that followed the criteria I developed to recruit the participants in my study. Furthermore, I described the recruitment procedures that were framed by the scope of this research. Then, I proceeded to describe the data analysis process, where I examined the individual interviews in order to find common patterns, themes and categories across the data. Ethical considerations such as consent, participation risk, member-checks, right to withdraw, and data storage were also reviewed as procedures to safeguard the participants’ general welfare and privacy. Lastly, the methodological limitations and strengths of the study were discussed as a way to reflect on the overall process of conducting this research. In the next chapter, I report on the findings of the research.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse and discuss the findings emerging from the data collected through semi-structured interviews with three Ontario educators who are advocate for the arts, and are committed to the regular practice of arts integration. The purpose of this research is to learn how teachers integrate the arts in the elementary years curriculum and what outcomes they observe in students’ overall learning. In order to attain this goal, the information gathered in the interviews regarding the participants’ beliefs, perspectives, and experiences with arts integration is organized into four main themes:

1. Educators define arts integration as an ongoing commitment to personal and academic growth

2. Educators indicate that integrating the arts across the curriculum provides personal and academic benefits

3. Educators integrate the arts across the curriculum by developing responsive and reflective pedagogy that fosters students’ personal and academic growth

4. Participants stress the need for a holistic approach to support arts integration when confronting challenges emerging from the characteristics of the education system, the teachers, and the students

The analysis of each theme consists of the discussion about the connection between the reported data and the significance of each theme within the context of the existing literature. Finally, a conclusion is made summarizing key findings and introducing the next chapter.
4.1 Educators Define Arts Integration as an Ongoing Commitment to Personal and Academic Growth

All the participants in this study have identified themselves as passionate advocates for the arts and strong believers of the positive outcomes of arts integration in cross-curricular instruction. However, their conceptualizations about the meaning of this phenomenon entail a variety of perspectives and models or styles of arts integration within the teaching practice. In this section, I first explain how Julie defined arts integration within her personal position as a type of learning that is ongoing in life. Then, I address how all of the participants also described arts integration as an approach to the curriculum. However, each participant offered shared, as well as divergent perspectives of what those approaches to the curriculum look like in the practice of arts integration. Given this context, it is important to learn how teachers conceptualize arts integration within their regular professional practice.

4.1.1 Educators define arts integration as a personal commitment to lifelong learning

Most of the definitions found in the literature about arts integration in cross-curricular instruction are centered on the linkage or connection that can be established between learning in, through, and about the arts with learning in other subjects of the curriculum. However, the notion of arts integration as a commitment to lifelong learning is not as salient or directly stated in the literature. With this knowledge, Julie’s personal position about arts integration offers a valuable perspective where the phenomenon is conceived as a framework or a lens, not only for the ongoing teaching practice but for life as well. She stated, “[... the arts continuum is a lifetime.” This conceptualization of arts integration as an ongoing commitment to lifelong learning encompasses the development of a set of dispositions that contributes to children’s continual holistic growth inside and outside the classroom. More specifically, one of the dispositions that
Julie emphasized that arts integration fosters can be conceived as a “disruption”, or shaking up of preconceived ideas that have been in place for a long time in people’s lives. Consequently, this disruption enables the development of flexibility as another disposition. The reason for this is because the arts can elicit different perspective taking and avenues to approach and understand a certain subject or object. Additionally, Julie explained that a core practice or capacity that frames her work with arts integration and her life is living in ambiguity. She shared, “My favourite one is living in ambiguity and living in uncertainty, and looking for those moments when we are, when our thinking is disrupted. And those are really healthy things to act on.” This notion of living in ambiguity can be linked to the idea of developing flexibility and a risk taking mindset as conditions for the practice of arts integration. This is a perspective that the other participants shared and will be further discussed in the following sections of the findings. Therefore, arts integration can be conceptualized as an ongoing commitment to lifelong learning because it fosters the development of disruption, flexibility, and ambiguity as important dispositions that enhances children’s holistic growth throughout their lives.

Many authors (Caterall, 1998; Eisner, 1998; Gardner, 1999; Lorimer, 2009) support Julie’s conceptualization of arts integration as a commitment to lifelong learning. They argue that learning through the arts provides students with lifelong learning because it contributes to the education of the whole-child as it enables personal, social, and academic growth. Moreover, Julie’s framework for arts integration as living in ambiguity and being flexible is also supported by Eisner’s (1998) assertion that learning through the arts develops a set of dispositions that allows people to acquire the ability to recognize and accept multiple perspectives, possibilities and resolutions within the willingness and desire to explore ambiguity. Therefore, it can be said
that a distinctive conceptualization of arts integration in this study was one that supports lifelong learning through a disposition that welcomes ambiguity and disruption, and develops flexibility.

4.1.2 Educators define arts integration as a specific approach to the curriculum

All of the participants in the study conceptualized arts integration as a specific approach to the curriculum framed within the possibilities of linkages and transfer of skills between arts learning and academic learning. This means that the participants suggested that the skills developed when integrating the arts can support learning other subjects, and the skills developed in different subjects can enhance learning in the arts as well. Teachers also noted arts integration not only as a pedagogical model but a lens that frames their work and their lives. Samantha stated, “For me, that [integrating the arts] is how I teach, that is the lens through which I see the world.” Julie also explained her own philosophical and pedagogical stance by advocating for the central role of the arts, “The spine of everything we do in schools can be the arts and that everything else grows on it.” However, Brenda and Samantha recognized that arts integration can be done in different ways in the teaching practice. The different ways addressed by the two participants can be understood within an integration continuum that Krug and Cohen-Evron (2000) identified for curricular practices in arts education. This arts integration continuum provides different approaches to organizing knowledge based on the contribution the arts make in teaching students to meaningfully comprehend ideas, issues, and problems.

Both Brenda and Samantha noted that there is a basic level of arts integration where numerous teachers use the arts to support other subjects. Samantha provided an example, “Let’s say conflict and change or interrelationships [in grade 3 social studies], and then we would build a process drama around that content area.” This approach reflects the type of integration that
Krug and Cohen-Evron (2000) describe as using the arts as resources for other disciplines, and having them play a supporting role.

A second level of arts integration identified by Brenda and Samantha is one that they practice and ascribe to. According to the participants, arts integration can be conceived as an approach to cross-curricular teaching where educators teach, assess, and cover the curriculum expectations for all integrated subjects. Brenda referred to this approach as a “true kind of integrated planning.” Moreover, she highlighted, “I’m explicitly teaching the content piece and the research and the questioning from the social studies document, and I’m teaching them both [drama and social studies], they are integrated together and I’m going to assess them both.” This approach relates to the type of integration that Krug and Cohen-Evron (2000) describe as enlarging organizing centers through the arts. The authors assert that through this approach, individual subjects are used in combination with content from other disciplines to provide students with opportunities to establish connections between events, facts and content. Therefore, these connections can expand a theme by adding relevant knowledge from different subjects. This supports Stevenson and Deasy’s (2005) argument that arts and non-arts content and skills should be taught in tandem in order to enable mutual reinforcement.

Furthermore, Brenda addressed another level of arts integration that she aspires to reach all the time. She indicated, “I call it transdisciplinary, where you’re looking at a big idea or an essential question” to organize the learning instead of just focusing on the subjects that are being taught. Moreover, Brenda exemplified:

The idea of ethics, you are using both your science…and your arts content, and again you are explicitly teaching and explicitly assessing, but you are looking at the core topic
[ethics]. So, it is not using science to explore drama or drama to explore science, both
kind of simultaneously explore this much bigger idea.

The aforementioned approach speaks to Krug and Cohen-Evron’s (2000) interdisciplinary
type of practice where learning focuses more around themes from real life situations that are
significant for students, rather than individual subjects. This fosters the investigation and
interpretation of ideas, concepts, and content by combining multiple perspectives from various
subjects. It also relates to Ackerman and Perkins’ (1989) conceptualization of arts integration as
thematic instruction where students acquire the curriculum content through a set of skills and
strategies that develop their capacity to think and learn independently. Therefore, as seen in
Brenda’s example, arts integration can be conceived as an interdisciplinary approach that places
thematic exploration as the major focus that organizes teaching and learning in multiple subjects.
Additionally, it fosters students’ ability to establish meaningful connections between subjects
and real life situations. In this regard, Brenda emphasized, “I think that’s what’s going to get the
best learning out of them, when they can see connection between ideas, and they can see the
connections between what’s happening in their lives and what’s happening in the school.”

As seen in the interviews, each participant ascribed to or supported one definition of arts
integration more than others. However, they recognized that there are various conceptualizations
of the phenomenon within the teaching practice. This reflects Andrews’ (2004) assertion about
the lack of consensus regarding the approaches to teaching the arts within schools. In like
manner, it supports Mishook and Kornhaber’s (2006) argument about arts integration being a
confusing and contested term due to the lack of shared agreement that educators have in terms of
what arts integration should look like. As Krug and Cohen-Evron (2000) argue, it all depends on
the kind of knowledge or disciplinary idea placed at the center of the curriculum, and whether the arts have a major focus or play a supporting role.

4.2 Educators Indicate that Integrating the Arts Across the Curriculum Provides Personal and Academic Benefits

In the previous theme, the participants expressed a positive attitude and advocacy towards arts integration through the description of their conceptualizations about the phenomenon. All of these educators believe that when integrating the arts across the curriculum all art forms are equally beneficial for students. Therefore, it is important to understand the relevance of integrating the arts in cross-curricular instruction due to the many benefits it provides to teaching and learning. More specifically, the participants emphasized that arts integration across the curriculum contributes to the development of the whole-child, fosters positive relationships between teachers and students, and enriches the overall teaching practice in different subjects.

4.2.1 Educators indicate that integrating the arts across the curriculum fosters the development of the whole-child

The three teachers interviewed in this study highlighted the numerous benefits arts integration provides to the holistic development of students. In this regard, Julie noted, “In order to reach the whole child I believe that the arts are absolutely essential.” Similarly to this assertion, Samantha indicated, “I do think it accesses different parts of our brain.” Many authors support the idea that arts integration contributes to the education of the whole-child (Caterall, 1998; Eisner, 1998; Gardner, 1999; Lorimer, 2009). This is because learning through the arts provides students with the possibility to integrate their sensory, cognitive, emotional, and motor capacities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).
Furthermore, the participants recognized that integrating the arts across the curriculum fosters the development of multiple skills in students, such as critical thinking skills, creative thinking, sense of wonder, divergent thinking, and access to different learning styles. Brenda noted, “You have the ability to have the learning in the subject and also the learning of, maybe what’s even more important, skills.” In concordance with the participants’ statement, Brown (2007) argues that students in elementary years who learn through the participation in the arts are able to engage in “elaborate and creative thinking and problem solving, verbal and non-verbal expressive abilities (as applied in different contexts), applied learning in new contexts, increased skills in collaboration, increased self-confidence, and higher motivation” (p. 174).

Moreover, the teachers suggested that arts integration develops students’ awareness of their self-worth and identity. Participants also noted that the positive relationships between students and their awareness of others and the world around them is enhanced through arts integration. This is because, according to these teachers, arts integration connects to students’ lived experiences in a way that fosters students’ voice, collaboration, inclusion, and equity. A clear depiction of these benefits was described by Samantha, “I think the arts provide opportunities for confidence building, for self-esteem, for creativity, for critical thinking, for equity and social justice, for questioning the world around, and for everything in relationship building.” The assertions given by the participants reflect Reif and Grant’s (2010) findings which state that integrating the arts into teaching and learning has the potential to increase students’ cultural understandings, self-esteem, and healthier cultural identity. Therefore, the literature sustains the participants’ perspectives about arts integration as an avenue to foster the development of the child in a holistic way.
4.2.2 Educators indicate that integrating the arts across the curriculum fosters positive teacher-student relations in the classroom

Participants recognized that arts integration contributes to the development of a positive environment for teaching and learning within the classroom. The teachers claimed that the integration of the arts across the curriculum has allowed them to build positive relationships with students. Julie emphasized the connection with students that can be fostered by having the opportunities to learn about who they are through the arts. She explained:

I always feel that I learn much more about the learner through the arts...I need to know the learners whom I am teaching in ways that move them and empathy or emotion, or what do they love about something. I know that comes through in the arts.

Furthermore, the participants identified that teachers who engage in arts integration have a more positive attitude and are more committed to the profession because of the meaningful connection they can establish with students. Julie exemplified, “I think they [teachers who integrate the arts] are more committed to the profession. I think they know students intimately in ways that inform practice.” Some studies (Lorimer, 2009; Rabkin & Redmond, 2006) support this idea indicating that students experience more joy in the classroom as they become more engaged and motivated through arts integration, which generates a positive impact in teachers’ motivation and morale.

In addition, Brenda noted that integrating the arts in cross-curricular instruction also provides an element of engagement for students in their learning process. She offered an example of a Geography lesson she taught integrating Drama:
The kids were on this test and I see this little boy and he is doing all these motions in his chair, he is giggling…I went over and said, “What are you doing?” and he was, “I’m being the earthquake. It is helping me remember”…I was like, “Okay, good. This is helping, this ability to make connections because you lived it, you had it in your body.”

This example portrays the different ways arts integration can not only foster students’ engagement and understanding of the content, but it can also enhance teachers’ deeper knowledge of their students. In this regard, research has found that arts integration programs allow students to engage in deep understanding by doing and becoming more involved in the learning process (Gullatt, 2008). This is because arts integration seems to foster social and affective outcomes such as motivation and social adjustment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Brown, 2007; Hanna, 1992; Hartle, 2015), engagement (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005), and improvement in school climate and culture (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999). The connection and positive relationship-building with students described by the participants in this study suggests that the social and affective outcomes of arts integration have a beneficial impact in both students and teachers.

4.2.3 Educators indicate that integrating the arts across the curriculum can enrich the teaching in different subjects

Teachers indicated that arts integration in cross-curricular instruction is important because it has the capability to enrich teaching and learning while supporting other subjects as well. Furthermore, these arts processes help students develop a set of skills that are beneficial beyond the classroom setting, such as: confidence building, collaboration, self-esteem, creativity, critical thinking, questioning, relationship building, problem solving, etc. Therefore, the participants argued that integrating the arts across the curriculum can foster a powerful
pedagogical setting due to the multiple avenues the arts provide to construct and convey knowledge. As such, arts integration should be a regular practice in the teaching profession and not a one-off experience. Julie emphasized, “I see nothing but wonderful opportunities to explore, and enrich what is asked to be taught by teachers through the arts.” Similarly, Brenda agreed, “I think when we integrate the arts, and again, that explicit teaching of the arts can open that type of creative thinking into other subjects as well.” Moreover, Samantha offered an example of how arts can enhance students’ learning by providing different ways to show their understanding:

I’ve seen that many times. And then finally having a young person in my class, in a Grade 3 class who really struggled with pencil paper tasks but she could dance. So, if I needed her to explain a social studies or science concept to me, we usually asked her to create a dance and then she could tell me what something meant.

The participants’ ideas about overall curriculum enrichment through arts integration is also supported by many authors (Aprill, 2010; Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, & McLaughlin, 2007; Donahue & Stuart, 2008; Fowler, 1996; Getty Education Institute for the Arts, 1996; Martin et al., 2013). Research has found that arts integration connects art learning and academic learning in ways in which they are both deepened. This because it enhances content learning while broadening students’ awareness and comprehension. In like manner, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) asserts that all art forms are linked, enrich, and are enriched by each other and by other subjects.

However, the participants also argued that although integrating the arts across the curriculum is important, it is equally beneficial to provide students with the opportunity to learn all subjects independently as well. This is because teachers noted that basic content knowledge in
different subjects should be taught before integrating the arts. More importantly, the participants emphasized the significance of learning the arts in their own right as well. Brenda explained:

I do think for those multiple intelligences the arts can help. In some of those core subjects, you know, help with the students’ understanding. But I think we also need to be very careful. We also need arts for arts’ sake, right? We also need the arts because the arts are important, because it is important to create art. It is important to learn about artists and dancers and musician and actors and dramatists, playwrights and all of that.

Similarly, other authors (Clark, Day, & Greer, 1987; Greer, 1984; Hamblen, 1997) stressed the importance of teaching arts independently as well. They have found that many educators believe that arts integration does not honour the value of the arts in their own right, but rather focuses on the way the arts benefit other subjects. Therefore, the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge of the arts may be neglected. In that regard, Winner and Cooper (2000) stress that the arts will continue to hold a vulnerable position in the curriculum if they are only justified and valued through their power to affect learning in an academic area.

The possible tension illustrated by the participants between acknowledging the importance of arts integration in cross-curricular instruction and allowing students to learn the arts in their own, reflects a similar contention within the literature. Nonetheless, teachers in this study demonstrated an awareness and understanding of the importance of facilitating teaching and learning experiences integrating the arts with other subjects, as well as teaching about the arts on their own in order to face the existing contention with arts integration.
4.3 Educators Integrate the Arts Across the Curriculum by Developing Responsive and Reflective Pedagogy that Fosters Students’ Personal and Academic Growth

Teachers indicated that they integrate the arts in every subject and whenever possible. However, they also expressed that the arts should be integrated where they naturally fit while covering the curricular expectations of all the subjects involved. Therefore, according to teachers, arts integration should not be done in a forceful and meaningless way. For this reason, it is important to learn how teachers integrate the arts on a regular basis and in ways that enhances the teaching and learning of the overall curriculum. Thus, this section discusses the ways educators integrate the arts by creating a safe learning environment through responsive teaching. Also, it analyses how educators develop students’ agency as creators of knowledge. Finally, it addresses the way educators acquire a reflexive professional knowledge across all subjects in order to integrate the arts across the curriculum.

4.3.1 Educators integrate the arts across the curriculum by creating a safe learning environment through responsive teaching

Teachers emphasized that the most important aspect of arts integration is putting students’ needs at the forefront of their practice. Therefore, developing a responsive pedagogy is deemed necessary. Moreover, when engaging in the arts, students establish connections with who they are and their lived experiences. The personal investment and exploration that engaging in the arts requires, can face students with their own vulnerabilities. For this reason, all participants agreed that building a safe learning environment through community building in the classroom is the first condition for arts integration. Samantha explained, “I think building trust, so spending a lot of time at the beginning of the year building trust. I think being explicit, so teaching kids how to give descriptive feedback and honour each other it’s really important.”
In addition to the development of trust and respect is set in the classroom, teachers recognized the importance of using the arts to meet students’ needs and acknowledge who they are. In order to attain this goal, the participants highlighted inclusion as a significant frame for their pedagogy. Because the arts provide multiple avenues to construct and convey meaning using a wide range of skills and abilities, all of the participants argued that the arts are inclusive by nature. Julie noted that the arts can help reach a variety of students in the classroom, “We really need to be aware of our goals as teachers because we have tremendous power in the classroom, and how are we then including the voices of kids who may not be as vocal.”

In that regard, educators mentioned that their teaching practice that fosters inclusion in arts integration consists of offering choices for the creation and expression of knowledge, considering students interests, characteristics and backgrounds, working on issues connected to students’ lived experiences, reflecting on what kind of teaching and learning can be meaningful for students and planning accordingly, differentiating instruction, and establishing different goals for different students based on where they want to go and where they are at. This is important because, as previously stated by the participants, arts integration can promote disruption of preconceived ideas as one reaches new understandings through the encounters of other perspectives and ideas, and connections to other people’s lived experiences. However, teachers stated that this disruption of ideas can elicit different responses in every student, and they have to learn how to be flexible and accepting of each students’ readiness to engage. Samantha explained, “Not every kid is going to want to use their body or use their voice yet, and we have to be comfortable with that.” Therefore, the participants argued that developing a flexible and responsive pedagogy is crucial for arts integration. This idea is exemplified by Julie:
There is no cookie cutter strategy for anything that I do. It’s incredibly flexible. I’m always convinced that if it’s worth doing, it’s going to be successful, and so we tweak it so that it meets the needs of the learners in the room. It really is a co-creating thing. I think teachers need to make room for that.

The literature supports the idea that arts integration equips teachers with better ways to understand and meet the needs of all their students (Hartle, 2015). This is because, as participants highlighted the need to provide choices for students, the arts provide multiple entry points for teachers and students to engage in diversified and responsive instruction for students of all ages, backgrounds and capabilities (Gullatt, 2008; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005; Strand, 2006).

Moreover, Julie offered an example of how the arts can change the learning community in the classroom by disrupting preconceived ideas and fostering reflection and an awareness of others:

That is one of the greatest accomplishments of the arts, it’s to notice the world around us, and to notice what is missing, and who is missing, and where we are missing, whose voices are missing, and whose perspectives we are not seeing because of our own world…we can create [through the arts] a monologue that we feel gives voice to someone who is struggling with gender identity.

Therefore, arts integration fosters a responsive pedagogy for both teachers and students through a “methodology of becoming - in which individuals shape and reshape their relationship to themselves, each other and to the material and psychological tools and objects of their world” (Holzman, 2010, p. 31).
4.3.2 Educators integrate the arts across the curriculum by developing students’ agency as creators of knowledge

Teachers who integrate the arts across the curriculum conceive students as the bringers of knowledge in the classroom. Julie mentioned, “There are 24 learners in our midst and they are incredible teachers for us and I think we need to back off a lot more.” Therefore, the participants defined their roles as facilitators of students’ learning. For this to take place, teachers emphasized using inquiry to develop students’ critical thinking and agency as creators of knowledge. In this regard, Samantha advocated, “That’s where the kids are building real knowledge, that’s where you’re going to see the most powerful arts integration...It’s to build the habits of mind, of critical thinkers and creative thinkers.”

Furthermore, the participants shared the conditions set up in their classrooms in order to facilitate students’ learning through inquiry in arts integration. Teachers advocated the need to provide students with multiple stimulus, activities, and tools that spark their interest and sense of wonder. For example, Julie shared that teaching needs to be full of surprises so she brings to her classes things that would make her students wonder, “I’ll talk about a story or an incident that happened, or I’ll bring a YouTube clip from something that has happened in the world. I’ll put a shoe on somebody’s table and invite them to wonder about it.” This, to foster students’ willingness and ability to explore, research, experiment, take risks, and be flexible. In addition, teachers emphasized the need to unpack content knowledge in order to foster students’ exploration, listen to students’ voices in order to co-create the success criteria of each task, use students’ background knowledge, create engaging tasks according to students’ zone of proximal development, and provide students with enough tools and choices to articulate their learning through their own voices. To exemplify this kind of practice, Julie stated, “It’s just overloading
with opportunities and invitations to extend the learning through the arts.” To support that, Samantha described one example where she adopted the role of a guide on the side while prompting her Grade 3 classroom to explore the concepts of conflict, change, and interrelationships in Social Studies:

> The kids would co-create their questions and co-create a story around that. And we would go dig in and out of research and inquiry, and looking at what was, and looking at the multiple points of view and perspectives missing in present voices...of course all of this is dipping into critical literacy and literacy because we’re using multiple literacy sources, be they textbooks, picture books, film, clips, photographs, all of that.

Freire (1994) argues that arts classrooms have the potential to activate a pedagogy where students are no longer viewed as passive recipients of knowledge. This is because, as demonstrated by the participants, arts integration programs promote the concept of teachers as facilitators of learning and not dispensers of knowledge. Therefore, students’ higher order thinking and learning may be enhanced as arts integration provides additional entry points for content discussion and discovery (Gullatt, 2008).

### 4.3.3 Educators integrate the arts across the curriculum by developing a reflexive professional knowledge across all subjects

Teachers who engage in arts integration explained that they are constantly reflecting and monitoring their teaching in order be responsive to their students’ needs, interests, and particular situations. Julie addressed the importance of being aware of the impact of her role as an educator in order to analyze the way she is being responsive to students:
I think a big piece is looking at who is in the class visibly and what is missing in the class. Who and what is missing....I think we need to always say, ‘Why am I doing what I’m doing, and who is it reaching, and who is it not reaching?’...Making sure that everybody in the room is thinking beyond their own little world too.

In addition, Brenda mentioned the importance of keeping constant track of where the students are at, “You do your little check-ins and you see, ‘Okay, the kids are not getting this, this is not working, they are not engaged.’ I need to take a step back and I’m okay.” This step is part of being flexible in the teaching practice. Participants also stressed the importance of taking risks and having confidence to be flexible and abandon lesson that do not work, not being afraid to make mistakes and fail. However, teachers noted that confidence is built through examining and reflecting about how much professional knowledge they have, what they have learned over time, and what further knowledge they need to keep growing as professionals.

Participants also mentioned that in their professional practice, they have gathered strategies from experiences, resources available, mentors in specific fields, teacher training or professional development programs, and collaboration with colleagues. Moreover, teachers highlighted the importance of having a good knowledge of the curriculum in order to ensure they covered expectations for every integrated subject, as well as to know what kind of background knowledge to provide students with. Also, teachers indicated that knowledge of curriculum helps them determine strategies to adapt cross-curricular art instruction to the students in their classroom through differentiation. Therefore, participants stressed the importance of developing expertise and subject knowledge constantly in order to engage in arts integration. Brenda suggested, “I think teachers have to be really skilled in the subjects that they are trying to integrate, and really knowledgeable of their curriculum, and be willing to take risks.”
Furthermore, teachers stated the significance of analyzing the way they are equipping students with the knowledge and skills in every integrated subject. To achieve this, participants emphasized the importance of explicitly teaching content for each integrated subject. Additionally, teachers argued the importance of establishing and communicating to students clear learning goals, success criteria, and assessment equally for all integrated subjects, where the focus is on the learning process rather than just the product. Brenda explained:

I think if you’re doing any sort of cross-curricular, truly integrated or transdisciplinary programing then your assessment has to include both [the content from science and visual arts]. You have to have taught both...So, when you’re assessing students you want to look at three things: you want to look at students’ product, you want to look at conversation, and you want to look at observations of students’ learning.

Some of the arts integration practices the participants described they engaged at, are: monitoring the effectiveness of a lesson through the achievement of the success criteria, utilising rubrics designed by learners to analyse their own development, giving feedback to students while assessing them on key process pieces, teaching students to use the creative process to create and convey meaning, documenting students’ learning, working in collaboration with other teachers, connecting the learning goals and success criteria with assessment and evaluation. The aforementioned examples and the reflexive practices mentioned by the participants in regards of examining their own professional knowledge and performance, speak to Hartle’s (2015) findings. The author states that educators who integrate the arts on a daily basis engage in a wider range of reflexive practice. As a result, teachers can become more mindful of their existing beliefs and preconceived boundaries, which allows them to explore multiple possibilities within
the context of their teaching practice. However, these boundaries and possibilities are better explored when teachers possess the willingness to collaborate with other professionals.

4.4 Educators Stress the Need for a Holistic Approach to Support Arts Integration When Confronting the Challenges Emerging from Characteristics of the Education System, the Teachers, and the Students

Even though the participants in this study are strong advocates of arts integration and practice it on a regular basis, they recognized many challenges engaging in this pedagogical approach. However, in spite of the difficulties, educators have encountered different ways to overcome the demands that arts integration entails in the current teaching context. Therefore, it is important to learn about different dispositions, strategies, resources, or tools that teachers use in order to meaningfully integrate the arts across the curriculum. In this section I discuss the way teachers confront challenges regarding the lack of support the education system has towards arts integration, the poor nature of arts instruction in the teaching practice, and the students’ reluctance to engage in the arts.

4.4.1 Educators confront the lack of support the education system has towards arts integration by seeking administrative support, ongoing professional development, and being proactive

Research suggests teachers feel pressured to invest most of the instructional time and resources toward areas of the curriculum that are tested (Eisner, 2000). Similarly, the participants noted a hierarchy within subjects where the arts occupy the lowest priority. Even within their advocacy towards arts integration, teachers stated possible tensions trying to balance teaching the skills and content knowledge for each subject on its own and when integrating the arts to other
subjects. Educators also mentioned facing lack of resources and funding, lack of suitable spaces to teach the arts, restricted time to plan for integration and to collaborate with colleagues. In like manner, participants mentioned that many teachers feel inadequate and reluctant to integrate the arts due to the lack of training, professional knowledge, or exposure to the arts.

In order to cope with these challenges, teachers emphasized the importance of finding a balance in the teaching practice. Samantha explained that there is no need to cover everything in the curriculum, one should rather cover the overall expectations deeply. A way to achieve this according to the participants, is by developing a sound professional judgement to balance the choices one makes in order to cope with the overwhelming profession. However, educators state that professional judgment is developed through experience and engagement in professional development that can further one’s own practice. The latter argument is even more relevant for teachers who feel they lack training or knowledge in the instruction of a specific subject.

Also, teachers mentioned that arts advocacy helps develop a proactive attitude. One that teachers employ to face the challenges due to lack of resources. Participants argued that teachers should be able to ask administrators for what they need, as well as find alternative ways to access it. In regards of proactivity, Julie stated, “I would argue that I can turn any space into an arts friendly space, I can do it. You can make it happen if you really believe that it’s worth doing. You can act on it and make it work, even in the most hideous, absolute fouls spaces.” In like manner, teachers mentioned utilizing the resources available that support practice such as, resources from subject associations, network of colleagues, websites, mentors in specific fields, connection with art galleries, etc.

Additionally, participants emphasized the pivotal role of administrative support in order to overcome limitations for arts integration within the education system. Brenda highlighted, “I
think [teachers need] really good principals that are willing to spend time developing their teachers and giving them, like putting money behind, giving them release time to do cross-curricular stuff or integrated planning.” Samantha broadened this idea by explaining that it is really important to have leaders in the central education system who value and understand how to build capacity in the arts and support teachers in doing so. Many authors (Burton et al, 2000; Lorimer, 2009) support the argument that administrative support plays a central role endorsing arts integration. This is because principals function as mediating variables when developing an implementation plan and distributing resources to support arts integration.

**4.4.2 Educators confront the possibility of low quality of arts instruction in the teaching practice by developing an open-minded, reflexive, and collaborative pedagogy centered in the arts**

Participants identified that there can be a low quality of arts instruction within the teaching practice due to misconceptions about what teaching integrating the arts entails and the value supporting this kind of pedagogy. There is a possibility that this can be translated into a teaching practice that utilizes the arts without a proper setting. Consequently, participants stated that some teachers end up not teaching the arts components explicitly nor meeting the curriculum expectations, these teachers also might not possess the knowledge to assess the arts nor teach students how to give constructive feedback. Given the misconceptions and lack of preparation that some educators have in regards of arts integration, they end up engaging in teaching practices that do not utilize the arts in meaningful ways. Gullatt (2008) supports this idea by stating that some educators conceive arts integration in overly simplistic ways that tend to disesteem the importance of the process of engaging with the arts.
Julie noted that nowadays teachers are far too concerned about assessments that they become less reflective about the ways in which they can meaningfully integrate the arts within their lessons. She explained that some teachers do not practice arts integration because of accountability issues and the fear of feeling vulnerable:

They [teachers] don’t know how to mark a painting, they don’t know what kind of grade to put on a monologue…that cannot be a reason to not do arts, just because we don’t know how to assess it… [teachers have to provide art] experiences that enrich the learning in some way and it cannot be just a one-off thing.

Therefore, she proposed, “We could do well to step back and see where the arts are possible and what we are doing to do about it.” Thus, the participants pointed that arts integration practice can be beneficial and meaningful when teachers engage in reflectivity when setting up their lessons. This is because, when teachers engage in reflective practice about their performance and the professional decisions they make, their ability to discern how and where arts integration can take place might be enhanced. Consequently, teachers emphasized the importance of using strategies from past experiences and professional development that have proven to work. They also mentioned addressing curriculum objectives when planning for lessons, focusing on the creative and learning process, modelling for students, using inquiry based teaching, choosing appropriate resources, and finding where the arts are possible within their practice. Brenda stressed that in order to get passed the misconceptions about arts integration, a shift in understanding has to happen where teachers comprehend that one does not need to be an expert in any art form to integrate the arts. According to the participant, what is important is having a sound knowledge of the expectations in the arts curriculum:
To get that shift in understanding that it’s not about being a good dancer or a good artist, but it’s about achievement of the curriculum expectations. I think that’s a huge piece of learning that still has to be done with teachers, and maybe that will move them past some of their trepidation.

Furthermore, teachers highlighted the need to have an open disposition in the teaching practice of arts integration in order to take risks, try things out, and not being afraid to fail. Samantha supported, “I think having an open and growth mindset to work through things.” This to reflect and act upon opportunities that can further teachers’ practice and understanding of the value within arts integration.

Participants also found it is important to be able to have time and space to work collaboratively with colleagues, as well as being part of a community that enables building a network of professionals who are interested in working with the arts. This is relevant given the insecurities that some teachers might have regarding their own knowledge about the arts. Therefore, working in collaboration can provide teachers with a sense of support and confidence when integrating the arts. In this regard, Gibson (2003) and Grauer (1998) argue that in order to increase teachers’ confidence and positive attitude towards arts, schools need to provide educators with professional development programs with a focus on collaboration.

4.4.3 Educators confront students’ reluctance to engage in the arts by practicing a responsive pedagogy while building a safe learning community in the classroom

Teachers noted that in their regular practice they have encountered students who are not willing to engage in the arts. They suggested that this can happen due to teachers having a lack
of empathy towards students’ feelings and their readiness to engage in an exploration of their lived experiences as part of learning process within the arts. Julie explained:

Whenever somebody says, ‘I can’t draw’, ‘I can’t dance’, ‘My teacher told me not to sing because I can’t sing’, the space has been one of humiliation and competition that hasn’t been healthy to anybody taking a risk. Nobody learns in a climate of fear…I don’t understand teachers that do that, clearly not walking in the shoes of the kid who is recipient of that kind of comment. But we have to nurture the just try...we have to be more patient as teachers to have the creative journey bloom in ways that are supportive and lasting.

Samantha also mentioned that students’ participation can be different according to the community they are part of. Additionally, she indicated that there can be tension when trying to honour students’ voices without misrepresenting them during social justice work in the classroom.

In order to cope with these challenges, teachers advocated being responsive to students by building a safe learning community in the classroom. Brenda shared:

Before even doing any integration, there’s building the classroom community and then it comes the actual integration...It really depends on the students and what their hesitation is. Are they shy? Do they have body issues? Is it a case of not understanding? It really depends on the issues, but I think you have to start where they are at.

Additionally, participants emphasized valuable teaching practices such as: listening to students, creating a learning environment with no humiliation or competition, thinking of different ways to provide students with what they need, being understanding and supportive of
students’ development and creative journey, and keeping a constant track of where the students are at. Julie recognized the importance of being patient and supportive in the practice of arts integration, “We have to nurture the ‘Just try’ stuff, and I think that is all part of it. We have to be more patient as teachers to have that creative journey bloom in ways that are supportive and lasting.”

These findings are very valuable within the context of the literature because most of the research about arts integration revolves around the teaching practice from the educator’s standpoint. Research is scarce on students’ position regarding arts integration. Most of the literature addresses the beneficial impact of arts integration on students but does not reflect students’ voices within the subject. Therefore, the findings regarding some students’ reluctance to engage in the arts can open up the discussion for further research about considering students’ perspectives about their lived experiences from arts integration and the impact of the phenomenon in their lives.

4.5 Conclusion

This study found that teachers who integrate the arts across the curriculum on a regular basis emphasized the many benefits arts provide to teaching and learning. In addition, they noticed that arts integration fosters students’ personal and academic growth. However, educators also acknowledged the many challenges facing arts integration in the current context of standardization and accountability in the teaching practice. Nonetheless, the participants provided valuable strategies on ways to engage in effective and meaningful arts integration in spite of the challenging context. The most important strategies shared by teachers stress the significance of engaging constantly in responsive and reflective practice with a focus students’ overall well-being and growth. These findings are relevant given the context of arts integration
where it is not only a diffuse and contested concept, but it also lacks consensus in regards of the knowledge and instructional skills teachers are required to have in order to teach. This can result in misconceptions about what teaching within arts integration entails, and possibly generate teachers’ reluctance to utilize this pedagogic approach. Therefore, these findings can function as possible guidelines that elucidate good, meaningful, and effective practice in arts integration within a challenging educational context for the arts.

Additionally, this study explored students’ reluctance to engage in the arts, which highlighted the importance of considering students’ perspectives in regards of the contribution that arts integration can have in teaching and learning. This is a new contribution to the existing literature, as research is scarce on including students’ voice in the appraisal in arts integration.

Next in Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of the research findings for my own teaching practice and for the broader educational research community. I also identify recommendations and articulate a series of questions raised by the findings that can be addressed for future research.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter, I discuss the overall findings and implications of this research study. I begin by providing an overview of the key findings on how educators integrate the arts in cross-curricular instruction in their teaching practice. Then, I discuss the broad implications of the findings for the educational community as well as the implications for me as a beginning teacher and researcher. Furthermore, I describe recommendations implicated in the practice of arts-integrated pedagogy for various stakeholders in the educational community. Next, I address considerations for further research on this topic. Finally, I provide concluding comments summarizing my findings and discussing the significance of this study.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

This research project addresses the different beliefs, perspectives, and experiences of teachers regarding arts integration in their regular professional practice. The participants revealed that there are various conceptualizations regarding arts integration within the teaching practice. One of the definitions shared by the participants conceived arts integration as a personal commitment to lifelong learning through a disposition that welcomes ambiguity, flexibility, and re-shaping of preconceived ideas. This notion is valuable as it is one that is not as salient or directly stated in the literature regarding arts integration. Additionally, the teachers framed arts integration as a specific approach to the curriculum where possibilities of linkages and skills’ transfer between learning in different subjects can occur within the arts integration continuum proposed by Krug and Cohen-Evron (2000).
The educators also reported that integrating the arts across the curriculum provides personal and academic benefits. More specifically, the participants emphasized the relevance of arts integration due to its contribution to the development of the whole-child. They also stated that arts integration fosters positive relationships between students, and between teachers and students as well. Furthermore, the participants indicated that teaching by integrating the arts provides an element of engagement for students in their learning process. Moreover, teachers indicated that integrating the arts across the curriculum has the capability to enrich teaching and learning in different subjects. However, the participants stated that it is equally important and beneficial to provide students with the opportunity to learn all subjects independently as well. Therefore, this finding supports the argument of many researchers (Clark, Day, & Greer, 1987; Greer, 1984; Hamblen, 1997) about the significance and value of learning the arts in their own right as well. Thus, these findings reveal the ongoing tension between acknowledging the importance of arts integration in cross-curricular instruction and providing students with opportunities to learn the arts in their own right as well.

The participants in this study are professionals, each with more than 10 years of teaching experience integrating the arts within schools in different areas of Ontario that encompass student populations with a wide range of cultural, socio economic, and religious backgrounds. Therefore, the examples that they provide of possible ways to integrate the arts within the curriculum are valuable because they showcase effective practices regarding the topic. While most of the literature focuses on the importance of arts integration, the findings in this study contribute to providing practical guidelines for the implementation of such approach. In regards of arts integration, the participants indicated that a fundamental strategy to implement is building a safe learning environment for students through the development of responsive pedagogy. This
is important because by engaging with the arts, students are provided with opportunities to establish connections between their learning, their lived experiences, the wider classroom community, and the world around them. Therefore, a safe and responsive climate needs to be created in order to support students’ exploration and engagement with the arts. Moreover, teachers asserted that another important strategy for arts integration is fostering students’ agency as creators of knowledge through their experiences with the arts as they take ownership and responsibility of their learning through the engagement in the creative process. Furthermore, the participants highlighted the necessity of developing a reflexive professional knowledge across all subjects and the general teaching practice in order to best respond to the needs and characteristics of students.

Even though the participants identified many challenges in regards of the implementation of arts integration, they offered valuable examples of how to cope with said challenges in order to engage in effective practices. The participants stated that they confront the lack of support the education system has towards arts integration by seeking administrative support, ongoing professional development, and being proactive in order to get what they need to teach integrating the arts. In like manner, educators recognized that there are misconceptions about what arts integration entails and the value supporting this kind of pedagogy that hinder the implementation of this teaching framework. However, the participants explained they confront this challenge by developing an open-minded, reflexive, and collaborative pedagogy centered in the arts that allows them to integrate the arts in meaningful ways. Teachers also stated they confront students’ reluctance to engage in the arts by practicing a responsive pedagogy that also aims to build a safe learning community within the classroom. This latter finding is valuable because it can open up
the discussion about considering students’ perspectives about their lived experiences regarding the arts, as most of the literature focuses on the educator’s standpoint.

The findings from this study support the continued relevance of existing research in arts integration. However, they also provide elucidating bodies of knowledge around the topic.

5.2 Implications

In this section, I outline the implications that my research findings have, both for the broad educational research community—including faculties of education, administrators, and educational professionals—and for myself as a future teacher and researcher.

5.2.1 The educational research community

There is a wealth of literature regarding the value of teaching and learning using arts integration across the curriculum. The participants in this study recognized that all art forms are equally beneficial for students because they contribute to the holistic development of a child. Skills such as critical thinking, creative thinking, sense of wonder, and divergent thinking are fostered through arts integration. In like manner, students’ awareness of their self-worth, agency, and identity, and the awareness of others and the world around them are also enhanced through arts integration. Therefore, the type of learning the students engage in when integrating the arts offers a scope that goes beyond the school setting. It fosters students’ lifelong learning through the development of skills needed in every realm of a child’s life. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) also recognizes the central role the arts have in promoting students’ holistic development. For these reasons, the broader educational community can benefit from the acknowledgement, promotion, and relevant placement of the arts in schools.
This study has shown that meaningful and purposeful arts integration requires teachers to engage in reflexive and responsive pedagogy. The reason for this is because arts integration provides students with opportunities to connect their learning with issues related to their lived experiences. In like manner, arts integration allows students to build positive connections with peers, teachers, and the world around them. Therefore, arts integration can be a vehicle to foster students’ voice, collaboration, inclusion, and equity. For this reason, teachers who decide to implement arts integration tend to constantly reflect on and monitor their teaching practice in order to be respectful of and responsive to the students’ needs, learning styles, interests, and particular situations and characteristics. Participants argued that by engaging in this type of pedagogy, students find elements of engagement in their learning process and teachers develop a more positive attitude and commitment to the profession. By understanding the value arts integration have for the teaching practice, educators aim to put the students’ needs at the forefront of their practice, and are constantly mindful of having a good comprehension of the curriculum and subject knowledge. This is to ensure that the curricular expectations are being covered for every integrated subject, and that the appropriate background knowledge is provided to students according to their needs.

In order for educators to engage in meaningful and purposeful arts integration, a set of conditions have been identified as possible ways to foster teacher’s confidence and competence to teach core subjects integrating the arts in spite of the many challenges found in the implementation of this type of pedagogy. These conditions involve a shift in the inner workings of the school communities, and both pre and in-service teacher training.

The participants in this study identified a hierarchy within subjects where the arts occupy the lowest priority. In this regard, this research suggests that administrators can be important
agents of change within the education system in terms of enabling arts integration in schools. The educators in this study indicated that there is lack of resources and funding for the arts, lack of suitable spaces to teach the arts, and restricted time to plan for integration and to collaborate with colleagues. However, teachers suggested that school administrators have a pivotal role in supporting educators to overcome these limitations.

In like manner, the participants indicated that many teachers feel inadequate and reluctant to integrate the arts because of the lack of training, professional knowledge, exposure to the arts, and misconceptions about what arts integration entails. Educators in this study expressed that in order to overcome these challenges, pre and in-service teachers have the urge to seek professional development in order to further one’s own practice. Therefore, future and current educators look forward to have access to courses within faculties of education and other institutions in the field, that directly address instruction using the arts for teacher training and professional development focused in developing the students’ confidence and competence to teach the arts. Furthermore, participants mentioned relying on resources available to support their practice such as, websites, resources from subject associations, building a supportive network with colleagues, reaching out to mentors in specific fields, and establishing connections with art galleries and other art institutions. Therefore, this research suggests that teachers could benefit from developing a proactive approach when exploring resources available to complement and support their practice while building their understanding regarding the arts. This is significantly important in cases where teachers have not had direct instruction and/or experiences in the arts. However, the outcomes of this proactive search for resources is connected to how certain institutions related to the arts make their available resources visible and accessible to teachers.
5.2.2 My professional identity and practice

Through this research, I have gained a better understanding of what effective arts integration in cross-curricular instruction entails. This study helped inform my personal teaching philosophy about the importance of the arts not only in education but in people’s lives as well. Through research based evidence, I have acquired further knowledge of the benefits of arts integration for teaching and learning, and have clarified misconceptions I had about the implementation of this pedagogy in terms of assessment and integrated planning. I have come to understand the power arts integration has as a pedagogical tool to meet and respond to students’ needs, interests, characteristics, and backgrounds in meaningful ways that foster positive relationship within the classroom community. In like manner, I have learned that even though the implementation of arts integration faces many challenges, there are many ways in which the limitations can be overcome if one truly believes in the importance of meaningful and purposeful infusion of the arts in education. I came to understand that arts integration can be done effectively through the development of a risk taking and flexible mindset, the drive to seek continual professional development and peer collaboration, the development of a responsive pedagogy, and the engagement in constant reflection regarding my teaching practices. Therefore, it can be said that conducting this research project has increased my advocacy for the arts as a future teacher who aims to integrate the arts in cross-curricular instruction, as a researcher who seeks to gain further knowledge about effective strategies to implement this pedagogy, and as person who engages in the arts on a regular basis.

5.3 Recommendations

In order to implement arts integration in a meaningful and purposeful way, several changes and considerations need to be taken into account. A general shift needs to take place at
all lower levels regarding the way the arts are being perceived and valued in schools. Therefore, based on the present research, I suggest recommendations that can contribute to fostering the effective practice of arts integration within the educational system. For this purpose, I have organized my recommendations into three areas: faculties of education, school communities, and teachers.

5.3.1 Faculties of education

- Pre-service teacher training needs to develop student teachers’ confidence, comfort, and competence to teach arts. Therefore, it needs to equip students with the expertise to employ generic instructional skills in the arts, the experience of engaging with, understanding, and analysing creative processes, the understanding of basic arts concepts, and the appreciation of the importance of the arts. Additionally, lessons about how to understand children’s artworks, and how to support their creative process should also be taken into account.

- Pre-service teacher training programs need to establish and maintain connections with different subject associations regarding the arts (such as Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators, Ontario Music Educators’ Association, Ontario Art Education Association). The reason for this is to make student teachers aware of the different support, resources, and professional development opportunities these associations provide to pre and in-service teachers in regards of arts education.

5.3.2 School communities

- School administrators hold a pivotal role in facilitating the development of effective arts integration practice. Schools need leaders who value the importance of the arts and understand how to build the capacity to teach using the arts. Therefore, schools
administrators should: allow teachers to have release time for cross-curricular planning with colleagues, provide teachers with opportunities to go on demonstration and exploration classrooms in order to learn effective arts integration practices from other teachers, facilitate professional development programs for teachers where the focus is on collaboration, allocate funding for arts specialists of all art forms in schools, allocate funding for all art forms equally, enable an environment for collaboration among teachers.

- Schools should build partnerships with art galleries, museums, local and community artists, and subject associations in order to infuse the arts in students learning through connections with the world around them.

- The infusion of the arts should take place not only in specific classrooms but throughout the school community. Therefore, resources should be provided to support the arts within a whole-school approach.

- There is a need to change the physical spaces in the classrooms in order to set them up for collaborative work while teaching and learning through different art forms.

5.3.3 Teachers

- Engaging in the arts can involve a great deal of personal exploration and students’ vulnerabilities can be set off by certain activities. Therefore, educators should constantly reflect on their teaching practice in order to assess their successes and challenges, and make the revisions and adjustments necessary to respond to students’ needs, interests, cultures, and backgrounds. Therefore, it is advisable that teachers additionally take the time and interest to learn about students’ identities, cultures, families, and experiences in order to use this knowledge to inform their professional practice.
• Teachers should provide students with sufficient opportunities to study arts in different forms, and explore diverse art materials and media. This is relevant in order to expand students’ learning by providing them with opportunities to use, manipulate, and transform the materials as a way to make sense of their own understandings and purposes.

• Constant professional development should be sought by teachers who would like to build their understanding and competence in arts integration.

• Teachers need to develop a disposition to work in collaboration to plan or seek advice from colleagues, arts educators, professional artists, and other people in the community.

• Teachers should constantly support their practice by checking for resources available locally, internationally, online, and from subject associations, schools boards. As teachers become more confident in their practice of arts integration they can build their own set of tools, strategies, and resources to teach using the arts.

• When engaging in arts integration, teachers should see themselves as learners in the classroom as well. Therefore, educators should change the power dynamics in the classroom and relinquish their power to the students in order to develop students’ agency as co-creators of knowledge. This is to empower students while acknowledging and valuing their voice, lived experiences, interests, and needs as meaningful funds of knowledge.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

This section discusses the areas for further research identified based on the findings and the new understandings I have gained through this study about arts integration. Most of the current literature about arts integration focuses on discussing the benefits of the arts in students’ holistic development, and the many challenges and contention revolving the implementation of
such pedagogy. However, there is scarce literature that explicitly explores effective teaching practices of arts integration. Therefore, it is important to conduct studies that involve observation and analysis of educators implementing arts integration in their classrooms. This may shed some light on practical guidelines for the professional practice on this topic.

Literature about arts integration has been commonly written from the standpoint and perspective of educators or arts professionals. However, most of the benefits of integrating the arts speak to the impact on students’ development and learning, but students’ voices and perspectives are rarely found in the literature about arts integration. Therefore, the findings from this study regarding some students’ reluctance to engage in the arts point to the need of exploring students’ perspectives and experiences engaging with the arts, and their beliefs about the impact of arts integration in their lives. Since the relevance of studying arts integration relies on its significance to contribute to students’ learning and holistic development, it is important to conduct research studies that focus on how the students are experiencing, perceiving, and understanding said impact in their lives.

The participants in this study mentioned the pivotal role administrators have on enabling arts integration within schools. Therefore, it would be valuable to conduct studies that explore administrators’ perceptions about the relevance of arts integration in school settings. It would also be important to inquire about the different ways in which administrators have fostered the implementation of arts integrations in schools, and what challenges they have encountered in the process and how they have confronted said obstacles.

The relevance of considering the above mentioned areas for further research rely on the value of analysing arts integration through the lenses of different stakeholders involved in the
implementation of this kind of pedagogy. By approaching and exploring these different perspectives, a broader scope could be reached in the study of the importance of arts integration.

### 5.5 Concluding Comments

In an educational context where teachers feel pressured by standardization and accountability, this research study elucidates information about different ways in which arts integration are being meaningfully implemented in order to foster students’ holistic development and learning in spite of the many challenges educators face in their teaching practice. The findings on this research suggest that teachers engage in arts integration across the curriculum because they identify a variety of benefits to lifelong learning and to the holistic development of the child. The participants also identified that a reflexive and responsive pedagogy is needed in arts integration in order to connect with students in ways that meaningful learning is fostered through the empowerment of students’ agency. Because arts integration is a contested practice, educators indicated facing many challenges implementing this pedagogy in the classroom.

However, this research study has shown that the limitations of arts integration can be overcome by seeking support from administrators, engaging in constant professional development and growth through a reflective practice, and nurturing a proactive disposition to look for what is needed in the implementation of arts integration.

Finally, this study provides research-based evidence that contributes to raising awareness of the importance of arts education in the current educational context. It also offers teachers examples and possible guidelines of meaningful practice of arts integration. With this, I hope to inspire teachers to integrate the arts in their cross-curricular instruction while reflecting on their own beliefs, pre-conceived boundaries, and strengths regarding their practice of teaching arts, and teaching as a whole.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

Date:

Dear __________________________

My Name is Violeta Chonn Ching and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how elementary school teachers integrate the arts within cross-curricular instruction, and what outcomes they identify in students’ learning. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have a minimum of five years of experience teaching different grades of Elementary years, are committed to integrating the arts consistently in their instructions across subjects, and have a background in arts, are art advocates in the community or have received preparation to teach art as part of their professional development. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my
password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Angela MacDonald-Vemic. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Violeta Chonn Ching

Phone Number: [phone number]

Email: [email]

Course Instructor’s Name: Angela MacDonald-Vemic

Contact Info: [email]

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 from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Violeta Chonn Ching and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: __________________________________________

Name: (printed) _____________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introductory Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn how a sample of elementary school teachers are integrating the arts within cross-curricular instruction, and what outcomes they identify in students’ learning. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your professional background and experience, your perspectives or beliefs about arts integration, the instructional practices and strategies you use to integrate the arts, the supports and challenges you have encountered in your practice regarding this subject, your professional goals in this area, and what advices you may have for beginning teachers who are committed to the topic at hand. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Background Information**

1. How many years have you been working as a teacher?
2. What grades do you currently teach? How many years have you been teaching this grade?
3. Which grades you previously taught? For how many years?
4. In addition to your role as a teacher, do you fulfill any other roles in the school (e.g. coach, advisor, resource teacher, advisor to student clubs focused on the arts, etc.)?
5. How long have you been working at this school?
6. Can you describe the community in which your school is situated (i.e. diversity, socioeconomic status)?
7. Can you describe the demographics and program priorities of your school? (size, teacher-student ratio, clubs)
8. Can you tell me about the personal, professional, and educational experiences that have led to you developing an interest in, and commitment to, arts integration?

9. How comfortable/confident do you feel about integrating the arts in your lessons? Why?

**Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs**

10. What do you understand by the term arts integration? What does it mean to you?

11. Why do you think it is important to integrate the arts across the curriculum?
   - Why do you integrate the arts in your instructional practices across the subjects?
   - What improvements and/or differences have you noticed in students’ learning since you began integrating the arts into your curriculum?

12. What do you think are the benefits of integrating the arts across different subjects?

13. Do you think that all art forms are equally beneficial?
   - If yes, why?
   - If no, which art form do you think brings the most benefits? Why?

14. Do you think there are any disadvantages of integrating the arts across different subjects?
   - If yes, which ones are they?
   - If no, why do you think there are no disadvantages regarding arts integration?

15. Why do you think some teachers may be hesitant to integrate the arts in their lessons?

16. In your experience, what are some of the common characteristics of teachers who integrate the arts across the curriculum?
   - What personal and professional experiences and/or institutional factors seem to facilitate this commitment?

**Teacher Practices**

17. In what areas of the curriculum do you integrate the arts? Why?

18. If I were to walk into your classroom, what indicators would I see that you integrate the arts in your everyday teaching practice?

19. What strategies and/or resources do you use to integrate the arts in your teaching, generally speaking? *listen and probe re: specific approaches, books, websites, tools, guests
   - How do you know when a strategy is effective?
• What indicators of effectiveness did you have?

20. More specifically, how do you integrate the arts within your lessons? Can you provide me with some examples of specific lessons that you have taught that integrated the arts?
   • What subject areas were you teaching?
   • What were the learning goals you set up for students when you integrated the arts in your lesson?
   • What opportunities for learning did you create when you integrated the arts in your lessons?
   • How did your students respond? What outcomes of learning did you observe?

21. How do you address issues with students who believe they are “bad at art”?
22. How do you structure an integrated art lesson to ensure inclusion for all students?
23. Can you tell me more about how you assess students’ work when using arts integration?
   • How, if at all, do you assess creativity?

Supports and Challenges
24. What factors and resources support you in integrating the arts in your lessons?
25. What challenges or obstacles have you encountered in your attempts to integrate the arts in your curriculum?
   • How do you respond to the challenges?
26. How do you think the education system might further support you in meeting these challenges?
   What do you think is needed?

Next Steps
27. What are your professional goals for the future in terms of integrating the arts across the classroom and school curriculum?
28. What advice do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to integrating the arts across the elementary curriculum?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.