

# Arts Integration: What is Really Happening in the Elementary Classroom?

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## Abstract

Researching how Arts Integration is practiced in a primary school, this article explores how elementary teachers understand, implement, and experience Arts Integration. Weaving together personal experiences, teacher interviews, focus group sessions, classroom observations, and written texts, I investigate how the arts are often devalued in Arts Integration. Not only are the arts used for decorative purposes, but the arts component in Arts Integration is greatly diluted as well. Addressing what can be done to attend to the problem of devaluing the arts in the classroom, this essay holds implications for teacher education, Arts Integration and curriculum development.

As a former elementary art teacher who taught in a specialized arts integrated U.S. public school, I am quite familiar with the potential (and also the challenges) of integrating the arts into teaching/learning. But having also taught in a more traditional elementary school, i.e., a school not specifically focused on the arts, I personally experienced that general classroom teachers lack a general knowledge about the arts and an understanding of the relationship between art and learning, in particular, Arts Integration. Years later, as I was working toward my doctorate, I was given the opportunity to teach an arts education course for undergraduate elementary education pre-service teachers. The university offered an *Arts and Literacy Block*, a relatively new program within elementary education that attempted to address the interdisciplinary needs of future teachers. Although it embraced Arts Integration in “theory” and “policy,” each subject area continued to be taught separately, isolated from the general elementary pre-service program.

Since it was a few years since I had taught in the elementary schools, and given that my perspective of Arts Integration was coming from an art educator, I decided to explore how the arts are integrated into a more traditional elementary school, where students spend much of their school day in one classroom and are assigned a homeroom general teacher who teaches most of the academic subjects, except for “special” classes such as art, taught by an art specialist.<sup>1</sup> By understanding the thoughts and feelings of general classroom teachers in this traditional setting I was attempting to reveal current realities of Arts Integration. Although most published studies conducted on Arts Integration incorporate large-scale programs with funding opportunities and artists-in-residencies to promote their success, I wanted to see how the arts, visual arts in particular, were being integrated in a typical elementary school that did not necessarily have much financial or administrative support of the arts, especially since local school art programs were being downsized due to reduced funding. It is important to note here that I do not believe Arts Integration should take the place of art class, but that both should be working simultaneously; Arts Integration should be another access point for the arts in schooling. Furthermore, I was not attempting to label what Arts Integration is, but focus on how teachers understood and experienced it.

Aware that many critics, with the bias that art should remain its own discipline and be taught only by art specialists, would prefer to ignore the existence of the arts in the general classroom the fact is that teachers continue to integrate the arts into their teaching. Although many believe that there is a clear distinction between classrooms that use arts as a resource and those that fully integrate art in the planning and implementation of curriculum, I believe this distinction

is messy and blurred. The arts have and will continue to be integrated into the classroom. In order to treat art with integrity, we need to rupture the space of static arts teaching/learning (e.g., coloring in worksheets) to promote dynamic pathways of interdisciplinary teaching/learning that not only connects the arts to other academic subjects, but also explores the arts as a way to make meaning of students'/teachers' lives and the world in general.

In this article, I explore Arts Integration and how the arts in the elementary classroom are trivialized and devalued, and demonstrate that there is a need for teachers to understand the possibilities of Arts Integration through the integration of the arts in teaching/learning. I argue that it is necessary to reevaluate the position of art in teacher education (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004) so that a deeper knowledge of the arts can be developed, and also to challenge teachers in assessing why they hold onto familiar instructional practices. Furthermore, I believe adopting a more *felt* approach to teacher education can encourage pre-service teachers to work through emotions and feelings such as their uncertainty about the arts, often overlooked in education but central to teaching/learning practices including risk-taking and experimentation.

### **Exploring Arts Integration**

Throughout the past decade, the arts have been placed at the center of new ideas pertaining to the restructuring of school curriculum (Chappell, 2005; Krug & Cohen-Evron, 2000; Gude, 2004, Walker, 2001). Research exposing the benefits of the arts on student learning has gained the attention of educational reformers, and the arts have undergone a slow transformation from being the fun free-time coloring activity to an essential subject with significant benefits. The arts have shown to promote active participation (Goldberg, 2005), help effectively teach toward varying learning styles (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004), and foster creativity and self-expression (Boyd, 1980). Additionally, the arts can stimulate critical thinking, help form knowledgeable citizens, and positively affect child development and learning (Stokrocki, 2005).

Because the arts encompass so many disciplines, advocates believe they are a natural fit into the curriculum, and in order to promote high levels of student learning, school officials and researchers have suggested Arts Integration (Bickley-Green, 1995; Luftig, 2000). Arts Integration, generally defined as an arts focused approach to teaching and learning, has recently been implemented in various schools throughout North America (Luftig, 2000). Large-scale programs, such as *Arts for Academic Achievement*, *Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE)*, *North Carolina A+ Schools Program*, *Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge (TETAC)*, and *Project Zero*, have shown positive effects on education (Appendix A), and many smaller-scale initiatives have also been put into practice in particular schools at the local district level, such as the *San Diego Teaching Artist Project*. In hopes of revitalizing community and quality education, Arts Integration has been implemented in particular schools in geographic areas of poverty (Burnaford, Aprill & Weiss, 2001; Rabkin & Redmond, 2004), and as interests rise, exploring Arts Integration may prove to be beneficial for all involved in education.

Arts Integration is a complicated term with no one universal meaning. I explore Arts Integration<sup>ii</sup> as a dynamic process of merging art with (an)other discipline(s) in an attempt to open up a space of inclusiveness in teaching, learning, and experiencing. For example, students can create and/or discuss works of art that not only teach about art, but also about science, mathematics, and/or other subjects. Arts Integration recognizes the educational curriculum as a whole; it does not divide the curriculum into distinct parts (e.g. science, art, etc.), but celebrates the rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) overlapping qualities between subjects and content. It concentrates on the ability of the arts to teach across/through the curriculum and transcend the school subject boundaries.

In my experience researching and working with traditional elementary classroom teachers (and reviewing district-level non-arts curriculum documents), I have found the emphasis on teaching/learning through the reading of textbooks and completion of worksheets. Although there have been innovative developments with learning/teaching, e.g., collaborative and digital learning, over the past many years as these ideas are slowly permeating U.S. schools, many school districts' curricula continue to rely on textbooks and supplemental workbooks for subjects such as mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies. Although the content of textbook-based lessons is important, the lessons often become mundane. Arts Integration best practices help teach the academic content in innovative and exciting ways. Unlike busy--and safe--art-related classroom work, such as coloring in a worksheet, which may not provoke or demonstrate critical thinking or learned arts knowledge, Arts Integration aims to support the curriculum and student learning. It does not serve the purpose of filling in empty time throughout the school day, but consists of carefully planned lessons that incorporate the components of lesson planning: objectives, academic standards, procedures, and assessment (Burnaford et al., 2001). Arts Integration helps to engage students in experiential learning—the process for making meaning directly from the learning experience, in contrast to academic learning, or the study of a subject.

Arts Integration is complex as it encompasses different forms of implementation. There is no one correct way to integrate the arts into the classroom, and how Arts Integration is planned and performed can be an artistic process in itself (Burnaford et al., 2001). There are different degrees at which the arts can be incorporated into the curriculum (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004); it can be done on a daily to monthly basis, with the discussion of a historical work of art, or done more complexly by incorporating a hands-on art project to enhance the student process of active learning (Muir, 2005; Yokley, 2002). Furthermore, Arts Integration tends to be initiated in the elementary grades, as teachers traditionally have more flexible time with their students to incorporate the at varying degrees in their classrooms.

This understanding of Arts Integration highlights the intentions and potential of this approach, but the reality of how and why the arts are incorporated into the general classroom is anything but ideal. Arts Integration can provide a quality unifying teaching/learning experience, yet it often gets interpreted and implemented in flawed ways. Teachers may have good intentions when attempting to incorporate the arts into the classroom, but it becomes problematic when the arts are not sufficiently connected to student learning or treated less seriously than other subjects. Arts Integration is often treated as “doing,” rather than a way of thinking through and knowing, and focus is often placed on the finished static product, in effect dismissing what was learned through its planning and creation. Constraints regarding time, space, materials, expectations, and knowledge and comfort levels with art present challenges in Arts Integration. For example, many elementary teachers explain that asking students to read a textbook passage and complete a page from their workbook demands less planning and in-class instructional time than creating, preparing, and teaching an arts integrated lesson. The overall compartmentalized structure of the school day into separate subjects and time slots provides challenges that are not conducive for Arts Integration.

Much of a teacher's understanding of Arts Integration is formed through formal and informal education and experiences (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004). Because each teacher's schooling and life experiences are different, understandings of Arts Integration widely differ. Many teachers lack knowledge of Arts Integration, since it was not part of their own education. Since they were not taught about and/or through the arts in their own schooling, feelings of uncertainty about teaching with the arts can arise, thus making Arts Integration a scary place for teachers. When the arts are poorly incorporated into the general classroom, it results in its inferior status in the arts position in education.

These challenges and misuses of Arts Integration hinder the possibilities and promises of Arts Integration. Arts Integration explored as a complex educational curriculum—a live(d) curriculum (Pinar, 2004)—highlights the possibilities of *subjects-in-the-making*. Addressing curriculum theory, Pinar states, “We have reconstructed the curriculum; no longer is it a noun. It is instead a verb: *currere*” (2004, p. 19). He reaffirms the notion of the live(d) curriculum as an active living body. Curriculum is multi-dimensional, highlighting human interactions and experiences in and out of the classroom. It highlights the making of subjectivities. Thus, as a site of overlapping boundaries, I argue that Arts Integration becomes a dynamic interface among bodies, subjects, and worlds. Arts Integration when done successfully promotes an exploration of curriculum as a body of knowledge, experiences, and participants, constantly changing in shape and form while continually engaged in a process of becoming. As the academic subject’s identity(ies) overlap, the teacher and student continually shift between them and dwell in an integrated space. The separate parts of the written prescribed curriculum and school day (i.e., the class periods) blur together to create a meaningful whole experience. Arts Integration facilitates new ways of thinking in and through curriculum and encourages educators (and students) to make meaningful connection between themselves and the rest of the world and travel on their own unique journey, thus embodying curriculum. Although it aims to reconnect compartmentalized knowledge, unless a teacher (or student) is able to link the content for him/herself, integration is not achieved; true Arts Integration happens within the teacher, student, and subject(s).

### **Research Design**

The main research question of this study was: How do teachers understand, implement, and experience Arts Integration? Although the arts can encompass many branches of learning, for this research purpose, the arts refer to the visual arts since “art” teachers, or specialists, in K-12 U.S. schools primarily teach the visual arts. A poststructuralist approach to qualitative research intersected (Lather, 1993; Peters & Burbules, 2004) with understandings of case studies (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) informed my research methodology. The research study was composed of three main parts: (a) a case study involving unstructured interviews and focus group sessions with teachers regarding beliefs, practices, and training associated with Arts Integration; (b) classroom observations of teachers employing Arts Integration lessons; and (c) written policy and research on Arts Integration at a national, state, and local level.

The study was performed in a school district located in a middle-class suburb of southwestern Pennsylvania. Although once a rural area, it was now primarily residential with some commercial and industrial areas. The public primary school housed approximately 750 students, with grades ranging from kindergarten through grade two. The school was composed of various ethnicities: approximately 87% Caucasian, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% African American, and 1% Hispanic (SchoolDigger website<sup>iii</sup>).

The participants included two kindergarten teachers, one first-grade teacher, two second-grade teachers, and one art teacher. Of these six teachers, five female veteran classroom elementary teachers self-selected to be interviewed one time individually and five teachers participated in two focus group sessions, (The art teacher was not interviewed individually since she was a late addition to the research group). None of the grade-level teachers self-identified as Arts Integration instructors, rather, they were general classroom teachers who were interested in participating in the study, enjoyed using the visual arts in their classroom, and/or hoped to learn more about Arts Integration. During the one-hour semi-structured interview, the teachers were asked questions that facilitated discussion regarding their experiences and understanding of Arts Integration (Appendix B). The interviews were conducted in their classrooms before or after

school and were video recorded so their responses could be accurately documented. Notes were also written during the interviews to help detail the conversations and guide the path of questioning. The two one-hour semi-structured focus group sessions facilitated discussion regarding their experiences and understanding of Arts Integration and were also video recorded. Questions from the first sessions addressed how teachers understand Arts Integration (Appendix C), while the second session explored how teachers implement Arts Integration (Appendix D). These sessions took place in a conference room in the school and lasted approximately one hour after the instructional school day.

Throughout the study, each of the participating six teachers was observed at least one time teaching a lesson that integrated the arts. Concurrently, intensive classroom observation of one of the second-grade teachers took place approximately three times a week over a four month time period. The classroom observations were video recorded and the Arts Integration projects were photographed. The classroom observations helped to provide information on whether the teachers were able to implement what they had expressed during the interviews. By focusing on one school in depth, the study provided insight into the inner workings of how particular elementary educators implement Arts Integration, and the findings could then be applied across a multitude of situations.

For each classroom observation, interview, and focus group session, I wrote field notes and personal reflections, often referred to as memos (Charmaz, 1983; Maxwell, 2005). The field notes attempted to explain what I saw and felt from my viewpoint as a participant observer, and the memos were subjective notes that contained personal reflections and were written after the data collection. Exploring areas or recurring themes that I thought were important at the time, I included topics that were absent from the observations, focus groups and/or interviews. The notes also explored the challenges that I encountered during the research study.

The study also included a textual analysis of written documentation on Arts Integration. On the district level, the written curriculum, mission statement, and lesson plans were reviewed. The district-level curriculum document was divided into different subjects and included the following sections: objectives, content (activities and instructional strategies), procedures for measurement of objectives, supplemental materials/resources, re-teaching and enrichment activities. The classroom teachers based their teachings/lessons on the district-level curriculum documents, which referenced the adopted textbook and text materials, handouts, and/or coloring books in either the procedures for measurement or supplemental materials section. The Pennsylvania state academic standards were also examined, as well as the national standards, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and the No Child Left Behind Act. Such texts were reviewed for their themes, patterns, ambiguities, uncertainties, and contradictions, as was the data collected from the interviews, focus groups, and observations. As I collected data, I attempted to recognize the items, emerging patterns, and overall structure during the analysis of the data (Lecompte & Schensul, 1999). Comparing the document analysis with the interview and focus group responses and classroom observations presented an understanding of the space of Arts Integration. Furthermore, when reviewing the written texts I acknowledged how the texts can become detached from the document authors' intentions and understandings and thus become open to interpretation by the teachers (readers) who bring in their own beliefs and experiences.

Analysis was informed by Ellsworth's (2005) writings on places of learning, Britzman's (2007) notion of uncertainty, and Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) theory of the rhizome. In the book, *Places of Learning*, curriculum scholar Elizabeth Ellsworth theorizes that there are anomalous places of learning (e.g., public events, media, performance art) outside of schools that provokes us to rethink education as "in-the-making." Not only can the messy and blurred spaces among academic subjects in Arts Integration be rethought of as atypical places of "outside" learning, but

so can teachers' feelings—in this case, feelings of uncertainty with Arts Integration. Traditionally, feelings as places of knowing are not often addressed in teacher education, because it makes the profession seem scary and unmanageable by exposing the ambiguity that is an integral part of teaching. However, as teachers reside in complicated and uncertain spaces, they struggle through teaching, constantly engaged in processes of risk-taking and experimentation, which are important elements of artistic inquiry and educational progress. Furthermore, throughout the study, I attempted to investigate the multi-dimensional, rhizomatic, and living aspects of Arts Integration; I searched for not only what was directly observable, but also what was missing or absent.

Many themes emerged from the data, among them the use of the arts, or hands-on making activities, by the general classroom teacher. The teachers consistently asked their students to perform art-related activities (or at least what they viewed as art-related activities) on a weekly, if not daily, basis. Having formed various understandings, or misunderstandings, of art and Arts Integration through their education impacted how they used the arts in their classrooms. Although the teachers often felt uncertain about Arts Integration and their ability to effectively teach through the arts as they attempted to meet the demands of limited time and teaching to the statewide standardized tests, it did not seem to greatly affect their use of the arts in the classroom, especially with subjects such as language. In the district curriculum documents, many references were made to art activities in the non-art subjects (Appendix E); however no information was presented on how to successfully plan, implement, or assess such lessons. The next sections will explore the devaluing of the arts in Arts Integration and focus on two of the main themes that emerged from the data: Arts Integration as decoration and the general dilution of Arts Integration. Weaving together data collected through the teacher interviews, focus group sessions, classroom observations, and written texts,<sup>iv</sup> I will focus on what is actually happening in this school in regard to Arts Integration and make recommendations for teacher education programs.

### **Devaluing the Arts in Arts Integration**

Having the opportunity to research how Arts Integration is practiced in a primary school, I was excited to see how the visual arts would come alive with the other academic subjects. However, over the course of the study, I witnessed a devaluing, or a reducing or underestimating, the worth of the arts in the classroom. Although much research contends that the arts have significant benefits, the teachers often reduced the significance/meanings of the arts by using them primarily for decorative purposes and diluting the arts component.

### **Arts Integration as Decoration**

Using the arts as *decoration* in the classroom has been a common practice throughout educational history (Stankiewicz, Amburgy, & Bolin, 2004) and today helps contribute to a devaluation of the arts in Arts Integration. Although the arts can be used as decoration, the addition of ornaments to enhance the attractiveness of something, such as the classroom or school building, should be just one of the many purposes of Arts Integration.

As I walked through the school's hallways, I encountered walls that were inundated with multi-colored and visually appealing student artworks (Figure 1). Proceeding into a second-grade classroom, student work hung brightly from the ceiling and bulletin boards (Figure 2, Figure 3). Art decorated the room, establishing a comfortable and busy looking environment. The two-dimensional works created from traditional classroom art materials, such as pencils, crayons, glue, scissors, and paper, showcased a level of neatness, realistic drawn images, and student ability to color inside the lines on worksheets. Many of the products related to holidays, such as Groundhog's Day (Figure 4), and others connected to seasonal topics, such as winter snowflakes.

Examining the student works, I had a difficult time differentiating among them, as they all looked quite similar and had no personal or unique attributes. The concept of cookie cutter art is a common practice in the classroom (McKay & Monteverde, 2004; Walling, 2006), as such projects are simple, help keep students working at a similar pace and increases the chances of an attractive, teacher-driven finished product with which to adorn the walls.



Figure 1: The decorative school. Photo taken by author.



Figure 2: The decorative classroom: Bulletin board. Photo taken by author.



Figure 3: The decorative classroom. Photo taken by author.

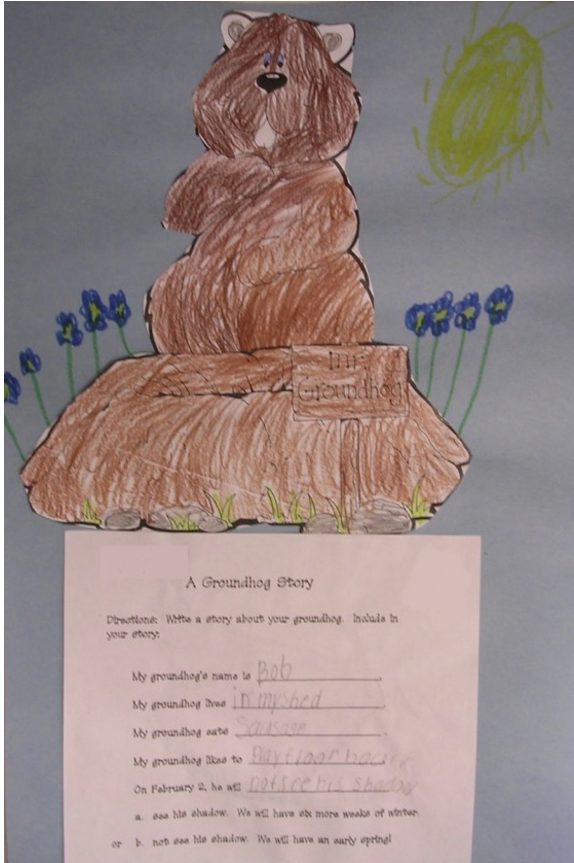


Figure 4: Groudhog's Day: Student work. Photo taken by author.

I observed a lesson where second-grade students learned how to make decorative snowflakes by following sequential steps (Figure 5). They folded white paper, cut with scissors to make snowflakes, glued the snowflakes onto 9 x 12 blue, purple, or black construction paper, and hung them on their hallway lockers. After the lesson, I realized that the teacher never discussed symmetry, a topic they were studying in math, nor was there a link to science (e.g., an exploration of the chemistry of water and formation of crystals into unique shapes). The lesson seemed separate from any academic learning. How had this seemingly obvious connection been overlooked? Is it that teachers are trained to see the academic subjects as disconnected areas, and/or did the teacher just want to quickly create some wintry decorations for the wall?



Figure 5: Snowflakes: Student artwork. Photo taken by author.

Arts Integration as decoration reveals a narrow understanding of art, as decorations are used to make something more attractive, or to beautify one's surrounding. Ms. C., a second-grade teacher states:

If it's visually appealing, then I'm a sucker. I will buy it if I like the packaging. You can put the same thing and decorate it with ribbons and bows, and I will be like, it's beautiful. I will pay five more dollars.... I like things to look nice. (Personal communication, December 5, 2007)

This statement helps to explain one teacher's understanding of how she positions the arts in her classroom. Wanting her classroom to look nice, she incorporates art projects that will create a visually pleasing environment, but when it comes to art and life, there is a need to investigate the many complex "messy" layers hidden underneath the surface.

When I asked how the teachers themselves understood Arts Integration, Ms. R., another second-grade teacher described it simply as, "the icing on the cake" (Personal communication, January 28, 2008). This explanation supports the notion of art as decoration and conflicts with the intent of Arts Integration. Highlighting the arts' unique ability to reconnect the inherently related academic subjects, Arts Integration is aimed to promote the establishment of meaningful associations among art, classroom content, and everyday life (Grumet, 2004; Weissman, 2004). However, understanding Arts Integration as "icing" implies it is an extra, separate layer that conceals what is underneath, not really needed but a delightful appealing surface.

Many teachers struggled with the preconceived notions that there are fundamental differences between art and crafts. In an attempt to explain Arts Integration, Ms. C. responded: The first thing that comes to mind is tying parts of the curriculum together in a way that's not workbook or reading from the text[book].... It's what you do extra to make it

memorable to the kids.... I may be more crafty, which I don't know if I classify it as artsy. I see the two as separate things. (Personal communication, December 5, 2007)

Many teachers equate art as "high art," or something pretty in an art museum, and believe "real" art is taught only by the art specialist(s) in the school's art room. So, although she readily incorporates special, or extra, hands-on "crafty" lessons into her classroom, Ms C. is unsure of its relationship with Arts Integration.

Furthermore, emphasizing the arts for decoration purposes seemed to diminish the importance of the artistic process by focusing on the final product. Many of the teachers preferred to have students create their own art piece so they would have a product to hang up and/or take home to show their parents what they "did" in school. Teachers equated art with doing and making a product, and did not associate art as an entry point or space of learning/teaching that could promote discussions and learning. Consequently, discussions about historical and contemporary works of art that related to academic content were absent from the classroom.

### **Diluting the Arts in Arts Integration**

Not only did the Arts Integration projects decorate the classroom and hallway, but the arts also regularly decorated the other subject(s). Many of the works that were produced in the classroom displayed a diluted, or weak, art component. Although students created hands-on art projects, the arts really were not being fully integrated into the lesson with integrity. A common critique of Arts Integration is that one subject is promoted at the expense of another (Brophy & Alleman, 1991). Arts Integration aspires to promote student learning in art and (an)other subject(s), but many of the lessons I observed focused more on the non-arts area and used the arts for various rudimentary purposes, thus devaluing the importance of the arts.

Arts Integration was often used to fill up extra class time in the schedule and was viewed as fun busy-time doings. Although being busy in school implies something positive such as working hard, if the busy work does not reflect learning or critical thinking, then it is mundane and without thought. For example, after students completed their compulsory in-class workbook assignments and language arts writing, they were invited to color in the worksheet (Figure 6) or add a visual component (Figure 7). Lowenfeld (1960) warns that coloring in the lines is more detrimental than no art activities at all, because it forces children into imitative behavior that hinders their creative expression. In this case, the arts were used for classroom control to keep students occupied and quiet.

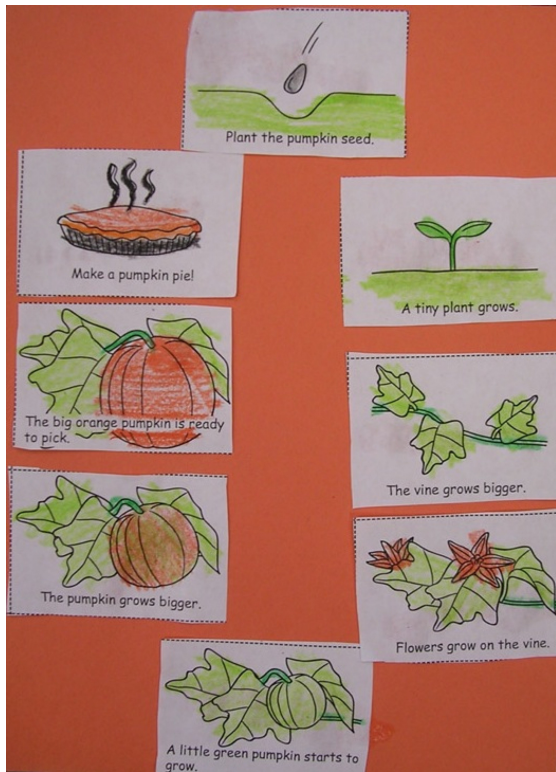


Figure 6: Coloring, Cutting, and Pasting: Student work. Photo taken by author.

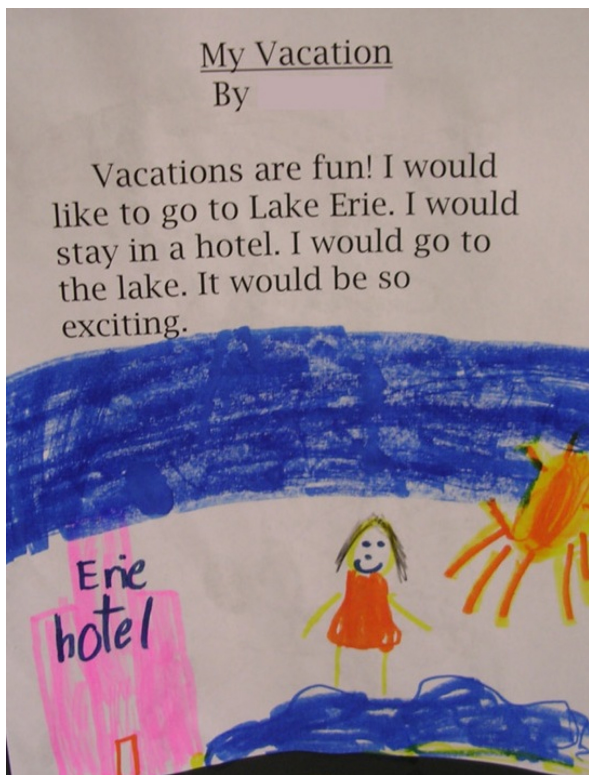


Figure 7: Coloring classroom student work. Photo taken by author.

The dilution of the arts was also insinuated into the teachers' lesson plans. In reviewing them, I was surprised to often not see any mention of the Arts Integration lesson. For example, one

teacher wrote that the students would work on telling time and included a page number from the math workbook, but she did not mention anything about creating their own clocks out of construction paper in order for use in their telling time skills (Figure 8). The absence of the arts in the plans provides insight into her positioning of the arts in her classroom as less important than other academic subjects, and perhaps not even worth mentioning.



Figure 8: Clocks-Telling time: Student artwork. Photo taken by author.

A perplexing topic associated with Arts Integration involves assessment. In U.S. schools, much emphasis is placed on letter grades that demonstrate student learning of academic objectives included in the school district curriculum documents. Since the arts, along with the other academic subjects, have written curriculum with prescribed objectives, the students' ability to demonstrate their understanding of the objectives can be assessed (as well as the teacher's ability to effectively teach the objectives). But because the classroom teachers did not have to assign grades for art on the report card, they did not assess the art component of the Arts Integration projects. Although the Arts Integration lessons may have stimulated thinking through the arts and higher-level cognitive abilities, e.g., integrating knowledge and ideas and problem solving in creative and effective ways (Beattie, 1997), the classroom teachers did not understand the arts as a way of learning and understanding. Thus, if the art portion of a lesson is not graded in the general classroom then it can be interpreted by students (and others) that it is less important than other subject areas that are given grades as assessment. In most cases, the teachers did not assign grades for the art itself of the Arts Integration project; they often just checked for a product and/or would give extra credit points. Ms. C said, "I don't assess art...It's about creativity... It's not cut and dry" (Personal communication, February 25, 2008). Why do teachers think it is unfair to assess art, while they assess mathematic abilities, writing skills, and so forth? There is confusion and apprehension because of the unique characteristics of art. Eisner and Day (2004) state:

The [art education] field embraces outcomes that are not simply routine or definable in their entirety in advance; it values outcomes that are imaginative, diverse, and interesting in any number of ways. Thus, there may not be a single criterion or rubric as they are called that can adequately represent what students have learned. (p. 5)

If teachers continue to not assess the arts, will they continue to be further marginalized, or conversely, if they work within the assessment constraints, can learning be fully assessed? Since Arts Integration attempts to teach art and (an)other subject(s), there should be learning in both academic subjects, and each should be assessed accordingly.

Similarly, using Arts Integration as an out of school activity and as bonus points also dilutes its place in education. Due to time constraints during the school day, many teachers used the Arts Integration projects as take home activities. Justifying why she assigns an Arts Integration project as an out of school activity, Ms. C. states:

Some kids can't handle anything extra.... And then you have that group of kids that is so creative and they need that outlet. And then you have the group of kids that is gifted and you need to challenge them. (Personal communication, December 5, 2007)

Although she is trying to address the complexities of teaching toward the diverse needs of the students, using this project as an at home activity for bonus points perpetuates the success of certain students and the neglect of others. The teacher sees the importance of this Arts Integration, because she invites the students to engage in the activity, but, at the same time, by making it a voluntary at-home assignment, demonstrates to the students that the arts may not be as important as other in-school subjects and assignments.

Reviewing the district's written curriculum, I found that it suggests using the arts not only to help teach instructional content, but also as an enrichment activity and as a method of re-teaching. For example, in the Language Arts document, enrichment activities include creating dioramas and puppets. Although it may offer value for students who need additional enrichment (or who are recognized as gifted and talented), it devalues overall importance by targeting an exclusive group of students only. Additionally, in order to explore environmental issues, the school district social studies document states that posters can be used as a re-teaching activity, as well as an enrichment activity. The artistic posters are not used as the primary teaching activity, rather a secondary activity. There are assumptions in the curriculum documents that teachers are able to efficiently integrate the arts in their teaching. Assuming that all teachers are able to design, implement, and assess art activities in the classroom devalues the difficulty of such lessons. The document presupposes that the teachers are knowledgeable about the arts, as well as confident in teaching them effectively. For example, the social studies document fails to account for the possibility that teachers might not be informed about art from different cultures. Similarly, the language arts document fails to address the possibility that teachers may not understand a broader definition of "text" that includes visual, digital, and other forms of nontraditional texts. Many of the standards also assume that teachers know how to encourage students to talk about and draw what they see and think, and that they know and understand different types of art such as collages, dioramas, and mobiles, as well as the art materials needed to create such products. I believe that these assumptions are dangerous, because they do not take into account the complex nature of teaching/learning and the diverse backgrounds of teachers.

### **In Reflection**

As I conducted the research study, I discovered that the two participating second grade teachers were working toward their National Board Teaching Certification. The early childhood generalist teacher certification application asks teachers to prepare a portfolio with four entries, one of which supports Arts Integration. The second entry, *Building a Classroom Community*, asks

teachers to demonstrate their knowledge and “deepen student understanding of an important topic, concept, or theme in social studies through the integration of social studies and the arts” (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2008, p. 135). This requirement implies that Arts Integration is significant in the primary classroom, or at least that it offers strategies for meaningful learning in social studies. However, when it comes to what is actually happening in the classroom, the arts really were not being integrated into the classroom with integrity, as shown through the previous examples<sup>v</sup>.

In order to attend to the problem of the devaluation of the arts in Arts Integration, it is necessary to reevaluate the position of art in teacher education (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004), such as pre-service education, graduate programs, and professional development training. Although teachers live in a world that is complex and inherently interconnected, their academic education does not foster teaching/learning in such ways. Additionally, many students enter college with problematic assumptions about arts teaching/learning; hence there is a need to critically reflect upon their own notions in teacher education training. Pre-service teachers should be encouraged to discover the “uncomfortable ways teachers are implicated in any pedagogical encounter, and the tensions already embedded in practices” (Britzman, 1991, p. 62). Through self-reflection and critical examination of why they choose to cling onto old instructional practices, teachers can become empowered to move beyond what they encountered in their schooling (e.g., analyze the purpose and outcomes of coloring worksheets).

One teacher, when asked to discuss how she was educated to integrate the arts into the elementary classroom, had a simple response—she had no training in Arts Integration<sup>vi</sup>. But as she spoke, she referenced informal experiences such as asking the art teacher and other teachers for help and looking through teacher magazines and Internet websites. Without an arts education, teachers lack an understanding and comfort level with Arts Integration. Ms. C. states:

I don't see myself as an art teacher....My comfort level is here [her hand gestures down low] and it would take a lot for me to get here [her hand moves up higher]. I am more comfortable with the cookie cutter or cut and paste (Personal communication, December 5, 2007).

This teacher was hesitant to enter into the space of Arts Integration because it was uncomfortable and seemed unattainable at this point in her career. She expressed insecurities about not having learned how to talk about art or been engaged in art making processes. It was more convenient to continue teaching in ways to which she was accustomed and/or was exposed in her K-12 schooling. Although she later remembered she took a graduate course that encouraged teachers to think past cutting and pasting, she acknowledged that, as she looked around her room, her use of the arts had not evolved past that graduate course. Because Ms. C. was well educated and moved across a pre-service education program to earn a teaching certificate, in addition to her teaching for 17 years, the assumption would be she is confident and capable in her teaching abilities. However, in actuality, she has hidden layers of uncertainty about teaching with the arts beneath her poised façade.

Adopting a more *felt* approach to teacher education may help construct curricula that take into account the vital role feelings of uncertainty play in teaching/learning (especially when working with Arts Integration). Engaging pre-service teachers with the opportunity to take risks and venture out into uncertain spaces can help them move away from their comfortable art-as-doing activities and move into understanding art as a way of knowing, learning, and teaching. Just as the arts are woven in, through and out of our daily lives and education, so is uncertainty and risk-taking.

Teacher education programs would benefit from rethinking what it means to become a teacher and embrace change, a goal that is inherently difficult (Burnaford et al., 2001). Learning to become a teacher denotes learning to think like an artist by using creativity and taking risks. Teachers need to become well informed about the arts, and, consequently, teacher education models must be redesigned to explore art materials, artists, and historical/contemporary art to move past decorative hands-on cut and paste activities.

The knowledge gained from this study can be transferred to Arts Integration models used in many teacher education programs. For example, as the instructor for the art education course that explores the arts in the elementary classroom, I was detached from the other courses in the Arts and Literacy block. Even though each student was required to take all the same courses (art education, music education, and language arts and literacy education) in one semester that highlight the contribution of arts literacy in a complex diverse world, there was a lack of course integration. Since the instructors did not work together consistently and were unfamiliar with the content across the curriculum, how could students be expected to understand the rhizomatic concept of Arts Integration? All early childhood and elementary pre-service teacher education programs would benefit from incorporating at least one course that explores the arts in the elementary classroom to address practical needs and lived situations (some of which are presented in this paper). There should be qualified faculty members teaching the arts course, specifically those familiar with the demands and expectations of the general classroom teacher, general elementary academic content, Arts Integration, and learning in/through/with the arts.

As Arts Integration often becomes compartmentalized in teacher education programs and K-12 schools, it can be argued that the traditional structure of formal education resists Arts Integration. With separate subjects, textbooks, workbooks, and curriculum documents, how is integration even possible? Understanding the high costs associated with textbooks, school districts invest a great amount of funding for the purchase of such books. Would any publishing company take a risk and attempt to reorganize their formats to better embrace integration and the interconnectedness of the world? Or are the constraints of high-stakes testing too discouraging for such changes? Is a reformatting of textbooks, curriculum documents, or tests what education needs? Or should we begin/continue arguing for the destruction of such prescribed, limited ways of teaching and learning? My findings show that many teachers seem to hang onto antiquated views of schooling, since their teacher education programs did not guide them to reflect critically on their own schooling. Thus, they lack confidence in trying something new and unfamiliar to them. Teaching in today's global world requires teachers to be taught from a contemporary perspective that attempts to collapse boundaries and compartmentalized learning and teaching. Teacher education therefore needs to be reconceptualized to keep up with the times. Efforts toward reworking teacher education to support interdisciplinary scholarship and arts as a way of learning are being initiated (as shown by my experience teaching in the Arts and Literacy Block), but more work and experimentation is needed. Recently, the San Diego *Improving Teacher Quality Project* established the *Teaching Artist Project*, which aims to train teachers and provide students with quality arts instruction. During the first year of the professional development program, early childhood (K-2) teachers are partnered with professional artists who help co-teach arts lessons; in the second year, teachers are expected to teach the lessons individually with the support of resource teachers (Center for Learning in the Arts, Sciences, and Sustainability, n.d.). This program extends arts learning/teaching from college training into professional development for current teachers and offers guidance to teachers as they work through the uncertain and risky space of arts teaching.

Curriculum documents have also been undergoing changes that reinforce the relationship between the arts and interdisciplinary learning. For example, the National Coalition for Core Arts

Standards (NCCAS) recently released a framework for the new National Standards for Arts Education. It states that creative practices of imagination, investigation, construction, and reflection connect artistic processes among the different arts disciplines as well as non-art disciplines, and that arts literacy provides “opportunities to access, develop, express, and integrate meaning across a variety of content areas” (NCCAS, 2013, p. 13). In other words, students not only learn about art as a discipline, but are also able to transfer their skills and knowledge to other contexts. This working framework supports Arts Integration as it attempts to merge art with other discipline(s) in an attempt to open up a space of inclusiveness in teaching and learning. Just as the arts community understands the importance of making cross-curricular arts connections (and exploring art as a way to communicate, realize one’s creative self, explore culture and history, and engage in the community (NCCAS, 2013)), it is important for other academic subjects, policy makers, and non-arts teachers to do so as well, while maintaining a level of integrity of the arts.

In reflection, it is vital for academicians to spend time in the classroom and understand what is truly happening in the schools. Because general elementary teachers spend an extraordinary amount of time each day with students, they impact student exposure to the arts. If we simply ignore the misunderstandings about arts in the classroom, the devaluation will continue to perpetuate. This is of particular concern for schools that have dropped their arts programs. Where will their students begin to experience the arts? Who will be teaching them about the arts? Since the actions of general classroom teachers can greatly influence the future of arts education, it is imperative that we explore the possibilities and complexities of teaching and learning with Arts Integration, immediately address the misunderstandings of the arts in teacher education, and focus our efforts toward re-valuing the arts in Arts Integration. In conclusion, I hope this research promotes discussion and inquiry that further investigates the exciting yet often problematic space of Arts Integration.

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## Appendix A Arts Integration Programs

Over the last few decades, many Arts Integration programs were included in large reviews initiated by the Department of Education and Arts Education Partnership. *Champions of Change*, a compilation of seven studies, investigated the impact of the arts on learning. Researchers found that learners attained “higher levels of achievement through their engagement with the arts” and that “learning in and through the arts can help level the playing field’ for youngsters from disadvantage circumstances” (Fiske, 1999, p.viii). *Critical Links* summarized and discussed 62 research studies that examine the effects of arts learning on students' social and academic skills (Deasy, 2002).

One Arts Integration program, Arts for Academic Achievement (AAA), was implemented in the Minneapolis Public Schools in 1997 with a school reform grant. Teachers and artists worked together to create a program that used the arts to teach across the curriculum. Based on test scores, evaluators found that Arts Integration increased student achievement and improved teaching as educators became the designers of the creative lessons and accepted responsibility toward school improvement (Weissman, 2004).

Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE) was created in an effort to improve the schools in Chicago early in the 1990s. Understanding the relationship between art and culture, CAPE put emphasis on establishing cooperative partnerships between the urban schools and various local arts organizations. CAPE stresses not only the importance of the artist-in residency, but also the integration of the arts into schools on a recurring basis (Burnaford et al., 2001). Evaluators found improvement with student-student, student-teacher, teacher-teacher relationships, and student behavior (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004).

North Carolina A+ Schools Program in North Carolina used Arts Integration as a reform to increase student learning. This Arts Integration program supported Gardner’s (2006) Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), which believes that human cognitive competence is best understood through a combination of abilities (musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligences). Evaluators did not find evidence that this program increased learning, but, according to teacher surveys, students who did not learn well through traditional teaching techniques, learned better with Arts Integration. Teachers also experienced community building as the school created partnerships and more parent involvement (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004).

In 1996, Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge (TETAC) was created by the National Arts Education Consortium (NAEC) to improve student achievement and the learning environment. The NAEC selected 35 schools from California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Nebraska, Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas to participate in the study. There was no evidence that demonstrates an increase or decrease in learning or transfer of knowledge. Teachers did, however, experience an impact on student thinking, writing, and curricular connections. They also reported better student behavior, parental involvement, and staff morale (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004).

Arts in the Basic Curriculum (ABC) program started in 1987 in South Carolina to ensure that each child receives an equal quality education in the arts. Evaluators did not find an increase or decrease in student learning, but teachers reported to have witnessed better student behavior, an increase in parental involvement, and improved staff morale (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004).

Schools, Parents, Educators, Children, Teachers Rediscover the Arts (SPECTRA) was an arts infused program that was implemented into two elementary schools in Ohio. Based on an empirical evaluation, when compared to two other controlled schools, the SPECTRA program

produced a greater increase in math and reading test, improved attendance and reduced discipline problems (Fowler, 1996).

Project Zero, a research group at Harvard that studied learning processes, collaborated with ETS and Pittsburgh Public Schools to establish Arts Propel. A goal of this program was to study and improve education of the arts with an emphasis on a cognitive approach to art education. Arts Propel stressed the importance of students to think artistically, by engaging in the processes of production, perception, and reflection. Although this is a widely known Arts Integration program, no one has systematically evaluated this approach (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004).

## Appendix B

### Sample Interview Questions

#### Interviewee Background

1. How long have you been teaching (in this particular school)?
2. What do you think qualified you to teach in this particular arts integrated school?

#### Teachers' Understandings

3. How do you define/understand Arts Integration? In other words, what is Arts Integration to you?
4. What are the goals/objectives of Arts Integration in your school/classroom?
5. What motivates you to use the arts in your teaching?
6. How were/are you trained to teach an arts integrated lesson (attend In-service programs, professional development, or college courses)?
7. What is your understanding of the official school policy regarding Arts Integration (written/verbal)?
8. What resources are available to teachers to learn about or improve the Arts Integration program (verbal/written instruction/explanation)?

#### Teachers' Implementation

9. How do you incorporate the arts into your teaching?
10. How do the arts fit into your curriculum?
11. How do you design an arts integrated lesson?
12. Explain one arts integrated project that you have implemented in your classroom.
13. How do you think your Arts Integration teaching could improve?
14. What do you think are the benefits of Arts Integration?
15. What do you think are the challenges of Arts Integration?

#### School Information

16. How/Why did this school (or you) become involved in Arts Integration?
17. What is the strategy at this school for learning/improving Arts Integration instruction?
18. How did/does the school district/administration/principle help you to understand Arts Integration?
19. What rewards do teachers receive from the school for incorporating arts into classroom learning?
20. Do you think teaching in this Arts Integration school has changed overtime? If so, how?
21. Describe how Arts Integration teaching practices are evaluated, valued, improved at your school?

#### If time permits...

22. What do you think is the future of Arts Integration at this school?
23. How do you collaborate with others (teachers, artists, organizations, parents)?
24. How often do you incorporate the arts into your teaching (into the curriculum)?

## Appendix C

### Sample Questions: Focus Group Session I

1. When was the concept of Arts Integration introduced into the school? How were you trained?
2. Why did you choose to incorporate Arts Integration program in this school/ into your classroom?
3. How do you define “art”?
4. Why do you think it is important to incorporate the arts into your classroom? Benefits? Challenges?
5. How are you currently trained to adequately teach in this Arts Integration program (attend In-service programs, professional development, or college courses)?
6. Are you satisfied with your training? Please explain your answer.
7. How do you think the training could be improved in order to help you teach better in this program?
8. Do you feel it is important to improve your teaching in relation to the arts?
9. How do you explain Arts Integration?
10. What are the goals/objectives of Arts Integration in your school/classroom?
11. What resources are available to teachers to learn about or improve the Arts Integration program (verbal/written instruction/explanation)?
12. What motivates you to use the arts in your teaching?

## Appendix D

### Sample Questions :Focus Group Session II

1. Please explain one arts integrated lesson that you have previously taught that you think was successful. What made it a success?
2. How do you get your ideas for arts integrated lessons?
3. How/When do you plan/design arts infused lesson? What are the important components that you try to include in the lessons?
4. What resources are available for you to use for your arts integrated lessons (supplies, personnel, art prints, etc)
5. How comfortable do you feel teaching arts integrated lessons?
6. How do you teach the arts integrated lessons? How often?
7. Do you think the arts fit well into your curriculum? Please explain.
8. How do you rate the importance of the arts in relation to the other academic subjects?
9. Please explain one arts integrated lesson that you have previously taught that you think needs great improvement. How could you improve the lesson?
10. How do you assess the students' arts integrated projects?

## Appendix E

### Art References in the School District Curriculum Document (By Subject)

Each of the subjects below are taught by the general elementary classroom teacher. If no direct art reference were made in a section, the column was deleted in the chart below.

#### Language Arts

Objectives	Content	Procedures for Measurement	Supplemental Materials	Enrichment Activities
Recognize the purpose and types of text	Discuss Types of Text	Illustrate information (comprehension)	Graphic Organizers	Create dioramas (reading ciritcally)
	Identify dialogue in cartoon-converation bubble	Create scenarios orally or illustratively (reading critically, identiifying advertisments)		Puppets
	Write a main idea sentence about a picture			Portfolio
				Journals
	Design ads for various media and explain how ads work	Draw an illustration of a poem		Plays
		Identifly literary elements orally, in writing, or in pictures		
	Write a fictional selection using illustration as a story starter			
	Use a picture to inspire the students to write an informational (or main idea) sentence			
	Develop orally or pictorally information of self			

## Mathematics

Objectives	Content	Procedures for Measurement	Reteaching Activities	Enrichment Activities
Construct and use drawing to learn numbers	Draw lines (in measurement)	Use pictographs, graphs, and pictures (in solving addition or subtraction problems)	Use charts, pictures, and magazines	Develop original patterns
Identify and describe repeating shapes and number patterns	Construct a calendar (to learn dates and numbers)		Draw graphs and patterns	Student-made activities for class presentations
Draw and compare geometric shapes	Draw a graph, chart, or table (statistics)			
Draw lines of symmetry	Draw a repeatable pattern (with shapes and numbers)			
	Draw 2-D and 3-D shapes			
	Use coordinates to create picture on graph paper			

## Science

Content	Procedures for Measurement
Make and label pictures or models (land and water forms)	Illustrate and label pictures with accuracy (maps)
Compare size, shape and movement of bodies of water	Projects
Suggested activities: Models, Picture Books, and Dioramas	“Good Neighbor” Water Quality Coloring Book
Create a visual representation of a food web	Draw a diagram illustrating the basic needs of people
“Good Neighbor” Water Quality Coloring Book	Cut magazine pictures from scrapbook to discuss and make collage (energy sources)
Create a game board of words/pictures of	Create a poster advertising ways to reduce trash

energy

Art activity reusing trash

“My Wetland” Coloring Book

Use stories/illustrations to explore/develop vocabulary (ecosystems)

Include visual aid (or diorama) for animal research paper

Create posters about endangered specie

Create models of gems

Create dioramas for animal and/or dinosaur habitat

Show an example of each matter and discuss differences

Social Studies

Procedures for Measurement  
Group projects (research skills)

Student drawings (multi-cultural awareness)

Projects (community and consumerism)

Student drawings (mapping)

Supplemental Materials  
Art materials

Magazines (career awareness, current events, ecological concerns)

Art activity reusing trash

Poster promoting your environmental responsibility towards animals and our earth

A book sequencing a raw item to its processed form

Visual Aid (poster)

Label/illustrate maps

Creation of collage

Magazine posters to make posters of each type of matter

Design your own dinosaur

Reteaching Activities

Hands-on activities (government)

Make a poster (environmental concerns)

Collage (citizenship)

Enrichment Activities

Art projects (environmental concerns)

Posters (environmental concerns)

i I had originally planned to select a school based on their history with Arts Integration, academic performance, as well as geographic urban and/or suburban location serving the needs of a diverse student population. Due to the difficulty of finding a public school that would allow an independent researcher to conduct a study and proceed with IRB protocol, this research site was ultimately chosen for their willingness to participate.

ii The verb “integrate” means to combine (one thing) with another to form a *whole*, and “integration” (n.) describes the *action* or *process* of integrating.

iii In order to follow IRB protocol and to protect the identity of the participants and school, I am unable to provide the specific website address.

iv Data collected by the written texts was also included in the previous section, Exploring Arts Integration.

v Additional information about how one of the second-grade teachers integrated social studies and the visual arts can be found in the 2013 article, “The Lost and Found Space of the Arts in Education,” published in the *International Journal of Education Through Art*.

vi Similar to this teacher’s response, most of the other participating teachers also noted that they did not have formal training. Some teachers recalled taking art or elementary art courses during their college career (which was many years ago), and others recalled that many years earlier, the school received an arts and literacy grant so select teachers received special in-service arts training.