

A Variety of Approaches to Studying the Value and Implementation of Arts Education

In this volume, we hear from researchers across the spectrum of arts education, who look at implementation in classrooms and out-of-school programs, in teacher and health care worker preparation. The articles describe programs in the United States and a range of other global communities, including: Canada, Denmark, Sweden, and Brazil. The unifying topic is the value of arts education for enhancing thinking skills and deepening understanding in children, youth, and adults. Authors show how the methods and processes of arts education can be used effectively, especially when integrating the arts with other disciplines. This issue begins by exploring teacher attitudes and preparation programs, then investigates the psychology of teaching and learning through the arts. Examples are provided of how the arts may be used to enhance learning in other disciplines. The issue closes with two articles that focus on the use of media to explore human potential and to create thematic instruction for medical workers.

Teacher Preparation and Development

In “What Predicts Pre-Service Teacher Use of Arts-Based Pedagogies in the Classroom? An Analysis of the Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes of Pre-Service Teachers,” Bridget Lee and Stephanie Cawthon analyze the results of a survey of 160 pre-service teachers. The survey questions covered both performing and visual arts practices, revealing that there is often a disconnect between perceptions of the importance of the arts and pre-service teachers’ actual plans for implementing arts education in the classroom. The authors found that perceptions of the “systemic” challenges in present in schools limited pre-service teachers’ vision of how they might implement the arts successfully. The article includes a helpful sample lesson plan for teaching history through theatre.

In “Pilot Study on Kindergarten Teachers’ Perception of Linguistic and Musical Challenges in Nursery Rhymes,” Pascal Lefebvre, Jonathan Bolduc, and Christel Pirkenne look closely at the reactions of 88 Canadian teachers to nursery rhymes used in their classrooms. Their findings suggest that training teachers to use nursery rhymes should focus on the educational opportunities they provide for improving emergent literacy and musical skills.

Teaching and Learning Through the Arts

In “Innovating Schools through Dialogic Arts-Based Practice: Ingredients for Engaging Students with a Whole New Mind,” Kristen M. Snyder and Karen Cooper argue that arts education can influence high school students to stay in school. In this pilot study, students at risk of dropping out of a Swedish school participated in a story telling and painting pullout program that enabled them to work with professionally trained artists. The program combined the management principles of “customer focus and satisfaction” with inquiry and arts-based learning methods. The program was based on what the authors called “consequence pedagogy,” in

which students were responsible for the consequences of their actions. While their goal was to address problems with high school dropout rates, their findings have relevance for all students.

In “‘I’m a writer. But I’m an artist, too. Look at my artist’s notebook’: Developing Voice through Art and Language,” S. Rebecca Leigh describes research with three grade 2 students as they use language and art to explore their own learning. The article focuses in depth on the experiences of one student as she uses an artist’s notebook to record her learning experiences. Leigh argues that the inclusion of art in the notebook leads to a much richer learning experience for the child.

Arts and Sciences

In “Learning Through The Arts In Denmark: A Positive Psychology Qualitative Approach,” Tatiana Chemi presents a comprehensive discussion of both historical and current ideas about the impact of positive emotions on learning and their place in arts education. The author’s research project, “Making the Ordinary Extraordinary: Adopting Artfulness in Danish Schools,” is part of a larger study of the “Many Ways of Learning,” which focuses on how learning in and through the arts is pleasurable—even when difficult or challenging—while also stimulating thinking and reflection. The author describes students’ reactions when presented with activities that stimulate deep thinking and cognitive challenges. When they are engaged in challenging arts activities, students exhibit persistence in their work. Chemi sums up the paper with clear and succinct observations about “how the arts positively affect emotions and cognition.”

In “A River Runs Through It: Art, Geology and Life on the Upper Mississippi,” Lynette K. Henderson presents an exciting six-week interdisciplinary summer project for middle-school students studying the river environment of the Upper Mississippi. The students work like real scientists and artists as they explore the many dimensions of the local river environment through language arts, visual art, geology, and the study of indigenous peoples. The author presents in detail the content of the program, illustrating the article with examples of student work. She helpfully reflects on areas that could be improved, suggesting a team-teaching approach with more in-depth instruction in documentary skills, visual history, and interpretation.

In “Upper Elementary Students Creatively Learn Scientific Features of Animal Skulls by Making Movable Books,” Julie L. Klein, Phyllis Gray, Ksenia S. Zhbanova, and Audrey C. Rule describe another summer program that served nine students, ages 9 to 12, in a summer camp. They employed science content and craft skills in making pop-up and other movable books, which helped them illustrate what they were learning about animal skulls. The authors point out that integrating the arts with the science curriculum can increase motivation for learning science concepts, richly illustrating the article with examples of the movable books. Close observation, practicing fine motor skills, and learning about documentation are important skills

for a scientist. The researchers argue that the benefits of this kind of learning holds promise for classroom use as well.

Multimedia Approaches

In “Education through Movies: Improving Teaching Skills and Fostering Reflection among Students and Teachers,” Pablo Gonzalez Blasco, Graziela Moreto, Mariluz González Blasco, Marcelo Rozenfeld Levites, and Marco Aurelio Janaudis describe their approach to using movie clips and conversation to stimulate students’ engagement in describing and constructing their attitudes and identities, in the process “enrich[ing] themselves as human beings.” The authors describe how this alternative type of learning is being used in their Brazilian SOBRAMFA-Medical Education & Humanism program. While originally conceived for medical student education, the program reaches out to a range of learners including an audience of high school and college students. The article includes a rich resource of movie clips for a would-be adopter, along with suggestions for how to stimulate students’ thinking by taking a unique approach to question and answer sessions.

Medical Humanities

In “Theme-Based Courses Foster Student Learning and Promote Comfort with Learning New Material,” Lisa Tessier and Jack Tessier report on their findings from creating, implementing, and studying college level coursework based on themes as differentiated from individual topics. Their findings suggest that thematic approaches, for example, “Art and Health”, “Biology of Beer”, and “Art Appreciation (food)” resulted in reports of greater satisfaction with the subject matter and improved the students’ ability to apply the acquired learning in their future employment.

These articles represent the depth of thinking and wealth of learning experiences evident in current research in arts education. Educators are offered both theoretical and practical applications across the disciplines. We thank the authors for sharing their methods and findings with other arts educators and researchers who are working in these areas, and for inspiring us to continue this good work for the benefit of our students.

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