

Defining Arts Integration

By Lynne B. Silverstein and Sean Layne

Introduction

Across the nation, arts education programs that provide discrete instruction in music, dance, theater, and visual arts have had a long history marked with many successful models. For more than 35 years, the education department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts has provided programs and resources in both discrete arts instruction and in arts integration. This dual emphasis is based on the belief that ultimately these programs feed and support each other. Recently, there has been an increased interest in arts integration by schools both in Washington, D.C. area as well as throughout the nation. In describing this growing interest, Nick Rabkin and Robin Redmond note in *Putting the Arts in the Picture: Reframing Education in the 21st Century*, “Over time arts integration literally bubbled up as schools, under increasing pressure to improve student achievement, became interested in focusing all available resources, including arts education, on that priority.” This “bubbling” interest has influenced the Kennedy Center’s education programs. While continuing its dual emphasis on the arts and arts integration, the Kennedy Center has worked to further clarify its work in arts integration. This article highlights Kennedy Center’s recent efforts to establish a working definition of the arts integration – and to put it into practice with training programs for local communities around the country.

The Kennedy Center offers four seminars for teaching artists – on arts integration, planning a residency, teaching teachers, and writing performance guides and a conference for school personnel on arts integration. In response to growing interest in arts integration as a school improvement effort, these seminars are available to any local community that requests them, anywhere in the country. In this approach, the Kennedy Center helps teaching artists and teachers leverage learning in other subject areas such as science, language arts, mathematics, and social studies.

Background

In 1999, recognizing the growing interest in arts integration, the Kennedy Center expanded its already considerable offerings in this area. In addition to its national partnerships program and its after-school workshops and courses for individual teachers, the Kennedy Center established partnerships with five local elementary schools committed to a school-wide focus on arts integration as a way to meet the need of their diverse, and often, disadvantaged learners. In 2009, the program known as Changing Education Through the Arts (CETA), has grown to include 20 participating schools in six school districts in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The program's goal is to increase student learning by impacting how teachers teach—building the capacity of all teachers in the school to provide arts-integrated instruction. To meet this goal, the program offers intensive, sustained professional learning experiences for teachers through workshops and courses followed-up with a variety of in-school supports, such as demonstration teaching, professional learning communities, and coaching.

One of the first steps in establishing the CETA program was to provide a definition for arts integration. The initial definition offered in 1999 was: *“Arts integration makes natural and significant connections between an art form and another subject area in the curriculum and meets objectives in both.”*

However, based on classroom observations and conversation with teachers, it became clear that the definition was insufficient. It left the door open to varied interpretations and misconceptions. The program needed a definition that would provide a stronger foundation for quality arts integration practice.

The revised definition would need to clarify that:

- Arts integration is a powerful way to help students learn
- Arts integration takes place over time; it is more than a stand-alone activity
- Arts integration requires higher order thinking skills

- The heart of arts integration is student engagement in the creative process

One of the first steps in rethinking the definition was to review how others in the field were tackling the same problem—defining arts integration. Definitions, descriptions, explanations, and examples of arts integration from numerous organizations were collected and reviewed for recurring philosophy, concepts, and vocabulary. This information was compared to the experiences in scores of classrooms in the CETA program. Additionally, informal interviews were conducted with teaching artists, teachers, and education specialists and misconceptions that influenced practice were identified. Literature about best practices in teaching was reviewed. This year-long research phase resulted in a draft definition that was presented to groups of teachers participating in the CETA program and Kennedy Center teaching artists for their feedback. Their questions and suggestions led to further revisions and clarifications, and an expanded definition.

The Definition

The research and development phase resulted in the following definition:

Arts Integration is
an **APPROACH** to **TEACHING**
in which students
construct and demonstrate
UNDERSTANDING
through an
ART FORM.

Students engage in a
CREATIVE PROCESS
which CONNECTS
an art form and another subject area
and meets
EVOLVING OBJECTIVES
in both.

Inside the Definition

The following discussion explores the definition and the concepts that support each of the key terms.

Arts Integration is
an APPROACH to TEACHING...

This first part of the definition establishes that arts integration is larger than a stand-alone activity. It is not something that happens once a week, or solely as a project at the end of a semester. It is a way of thinking, communicating, and responding that is embedded in one's teaching practice.

Every teacher and teaching artist has an approach to teaching, whether or not they are aware of it. Their approaches fall along a continuum from traditional, teacher-centered instruction to more student-centered. One's approach is based on beliefs about how students learn. The Kennedy Center's definition for arts integration sits on the student-centered side of the continuum. It is grounded in the belief that learning is actively built, experiential, evolving, collaborative, problem-solving and reflective. These beliefs are aligned with current research about the nature of learning and strongly align with the

theory of Constructivism. It stands in sharp contrast with more traditional “sit and get” approaches.

Arts integration practices that align with Constructivist practices included:

- Drawing on students prior knowledge
- Providing active hands-on learning with authentic problems for students to solve in divergent ways
- Providing opportunities for students to learn from each other to enrich their understandings
- Engaging students in routine reflection about what they learned, how they learned it, and what it means to them
- Using assessment of their own and peers’ work as part of learning experience
- Providing opportunities for students to revise and improve their work and share it with others.

Additionally, arts integration thrives in a positive classroom environment where students are encouraged and supported to take risks, explore possibilities, and where a social, cooperative learning community is created and nurtured.

Students construct and demonstrate

UNDERSTANDING ...

Arts integration, in its best practice, goes beyond the initial step of helping students learn and recall information. It creates the context where students are challenged to take what they have learned—information, facts—and act on it, do something with it, to build deeper understanding.

Understand (vt.) – (1) to get or perceive the meaning of; to know or grasp what is meant by; comprehend (2) to gather or assume from what is heard; to infer (3) to know thoroughly; grasp or perceive clearly and fully the nature, character, functioning, etc. of (4) to have a sympathetic rapport with

Arts integration provides multiple ways for students to make sense of what they know (construct understanding) and make that learning visible (demonstrate understanding). Visible demonstrations of learning serve as both formative assessments that guide teaching and summative assessments that determine what students have learned.

For example, when students are challenged to work as choreographers to create a dance that demonstrates how the seasons change, they are building their understanding of shared concepts in science and dance, such as rotate, revolve, cycles, patterns and change. Their dance also reflects their understanding and provides teachers with a quick, effective method to determine whether individual students know the difference between rotate and revolve, if a group understood the cyclical nature of the seasons, or if the class has mastered how to demonstrate the concept of change through physical movement.

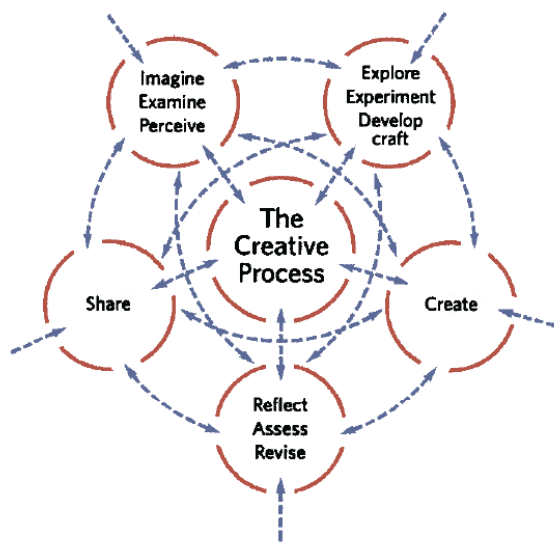
...through an ART FORM.

Students can—and should—have opportunities to construct and demonstrate their understandings in various ways. Nationwide, classrooms have become, and continue to become, more culturally, economically, and academically diverse. And yet, a great deal of instruction relies primarily, and sometimes exclusively, on reading and writing as the way for students to construct and demonstrate their understanding. Today’s research about teaching and learning, points to the power of learning through a variety of senses or modalities. Teachers are encouraged to plan for instruction that engages students through a variety of learning modalities—visual, aural, and kinesthetic. Researchers have compared different types of learning experiences and their effects. In reviewing research by Nuthall (Nuthall 1999 and Nuthall & Alton-Lee 1995), Robert Marzano states, “. . . one is struck by the superior findings reported for visual and dramatic instruction over verbal instruction in terms of the percentage of information recalled by students one year after the completion of the unit.”

The recognition of the arts as powerful learning modalities is embedded in this part of the definition. The arts, by their nature, engage students in learning through observing, listening, and moving. The arts give learners various ways to acquire information and act on it to build understanding. They also offer a natural way to differentiate instruction as the arts offer multiple modes of representation, expression, and engagement. Additionally, the arts provide an authentic context in which students solve problems encountered by professional artists.

Students engage in a **CREATIVE PROCESS...**

The heart of arts integration is engagement in the creative process. Arts integration requires that students do more than repeat (a song), copy (an art project), or follow



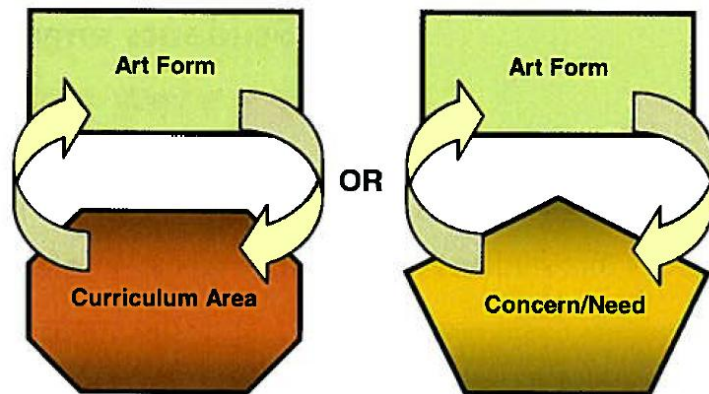
directions. Although these activities have value for other purposes, they do not involve students in the creative process.

In the creative process, students imagine, examine, explore and experiment. They develop craft, create, reflect, assess, revise, and share. When students engage in the creative process, they produce original work that communicates their ideas, insights, points of view, and feelings. If the teacher or teaching artist

makes the creative process may have been present, but only for the teacher. It is the teacher's or teaching artist's responsibility to set a creative problem or challenge for students to solve, but not to take over and solve the challenge for the students.

...which **CONNECTS**
an art form and another subject area...

A distinguishing aspect of arts integration is its interdisciplinary connections. In arts integration, connections are made between a specific art form and a specific curriculum area. For example, collage can be connected to the study of geographical regions or choreography can be connected to the study of life cycles. Connections can also be made between a specific art form and a school's



concern or need. Schools often identify a focus for improvement that is sometimes outside the formal curriculum. For example, the arts can connect to school concerns such as character education/bullying, collaboration, habits of mind, or multiple intelligences.



Both these connections are strongest when they are mutually-reinforcing. In other words, by engaging in learning in one subject, student learning in the other subject is reinforced and extended, and vice versa. Rather than imagining connections as two intersecting lines, mutually-reinforcing connections function as a cycle.

For example, students are challenged to create a tableau (motionless stage picture) that depicts a defining moments of the Trail of Tears. They must first engage with the social studies curricular content and research which led to the United States government forcibly relocating the Native Americans west of the Mississippi River and the impact it had on the Native American people. Then, they must distill their understandings into a tableau, which requires them to reconsider stage composition, characters, actions, relationships, and expression. Because a tableau is so concise, students must return to the social studies curriculum to determine the most significant parts. Once the tableau is created, students are challenged to write one-sentence statements they will speak within the tableau. Again, they must return to the social studies content and synthesize it. The

cycle continues. The social studies content enables students to create the tableau, and creating the tableau enables students to think more deeply about the social studies content. With each rotation through the cycle, student learning in both theater and social studies is reinforced and deepened. The more they learn about the Trail of Tears, the more their tableaus develop; the more their tableaus develop, the more they build their understanding of history.

...and meets
EVOLVING OBJECTIVES

in both.

This part of the definition underscores two ideas. First, that arts integration requires that objectives are identified in both the art form and the other subject area. Second, that just as objectives evolve and challenge students to deepen their understandings in science, math, or language arts, objectives must evolve in the art form.

The criteria that arts integration must have dual objectives—in both the art form and the other subject area—led teachers to teaching artists in the CETA program to wonder if each lesson within a unit required a 50%-50% balance of art form objectives and other subject objectives. This question led to a clarification about the balance of instructions in arts integration. The unit objectives are balanced—students are accountable for significant learning in both the art form and the other subject. However, the balance of objectives within individual lessons varies. Near the beginning of a unit, an entire lesson may build the foundational skills in the art form. For example, consider the earlier example of integrating tableau and social studies. In an introductory lesson, students need to learn about focus, concentration, and criteria for quality tableaus. Here, clearly the balance tilts toward the art form, as the Trail of Tears is not addressed. Another lesson focuses solely on the Trail of Tears, tilting the balance toward social studies objectives. Eventually, their experiences balance as students create tableaus that communicate the Native Americans' or government's perspective of the Trail of Tears through a tableau.

By the end of the unit, there is balance; students have met significant learning objectives in both.

The issue of evolving objectives is the second concept in this part of the definition. Objectives evolve and unfold over time as students' experience and understandings develop. Students' progress is monitored and objectives are adjusted to keep students interested and challenged. As students master each objective, they are ready to take on the next, more challenging ones. As objectives evolve and students' mastery grows, so do their feelings of self-efficacy- the belief in oneself and one's ability to achieve. In contrast, when students participate repeatedly in the same experience without having the level of challenge raised, they become bored and unengaged.

For example, as students create dances, throughout the year, the objectives evolve:

- From understanding and maintaining personal space to . . . moving with one partner with control and awareness of personal space, to . . . working with multiple partners with control and awareness of personal space.
- From responding to extend verbal or musical rhythmic counts, to . . . being able to maintain accurate tempo and rhythm with internal cueing.
- From responding to improvisational cues and structures, to . . . creating their own improvisations based on themes or limits provided by the teacher, to . . . selecting appropriate choreographic structures from a range of possibilities.

Sharing the Definition

Teachers' and teaching artists' reactions to the Kennedy Center's definition and the exploration of the embedded concepts have been overwhelmingly positive. As a result, two presentations have been developed to share nationally—one for teachers (a three-hour presentation) and one for teaching artists (an eight-hour seminar). The concepts embedded in the definition are explored in each format and participants have the

opportunity to participate in a model arts-integrated lesson, as well as view a video that demonstrates student work.

In evaluations, participants consistently comment that arts integration is deeper than they originally thought and more integrally tied to good teaching. Participants are energized by the definition and appreciate the clear delineation of when they are integrating the arts as opposed to using the arts for other purposes.

As the field of arts integration develops, it benefits from the work that various organizations undertake to clarify what they mean when they use the terms arts integration. By creating this definition and using it as a guide and touchstone, the Kennedy Center's Changing Education Through The Arts program is establishing a shared understanding of what arts integration means for its teachers, teaching artists, administrators, parents and visitors. By offering this definition here, the Kennedy Center hopes to contribute to the national conversation about arts integration.

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