The Expanding Role of the Arts in Education
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THE EXPANDING THE ARTS IN EDUCATION

by Ronald T. Lee

Specialized Arts Instruction
Provided by:
- art teachers
- music teachers
- drama teachers
- dance and other arts teachers

How:
- direct instruction in the arts
  (for example, music curriculum, art curriculum)

Arts in General Education
Provided by:
- classroom teachers
- arts education specialists
- community arts resources

How:
- infusion of the arts in the general education curriculum

Community Arts Resources
Provided by:
- individual artists (amateur and professional)
- community arts organizations, companies, and institutions
- colleges and universities

How:
- enrichment/expansion of the curriculum
- direct instruction in the arts

Arts for Special Populations—Handicapped, Gifted, Talented
Provided by:
- special education specialists
- arts education specialists
- classroom teachers

How:
- infusion of the arts in the curriculum for special populations
- direct instruction in the arts

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The ideal arts in education program, the arts are an integral part of every child's instruction. In such a curriculum, the arts are taught on the same level as, and concurrent with, disciplines such as English, mathematics, and foreign languages. They are not experienced as embellishments to the curriculum, nor are they isolated from the basic subject areas; they are part of the core of the educational program. In such programs, the arts most commonly include visual arts, music, dance and movement, and theater arts (drama, mime, and puppetry), but may also include folk art, creative writing, architecture, costume and fashion design, storytelling, and media arts.

This emphasis on the arts is based on the premise that the arts are basic to the education of all students. The Arts, Education and Americans Panel, headed by David Rockefeller, Jr., stresses this in its national report, Coming to Our Senses:

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ROLE OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

The arts are a function of life itself, and the process of making art—both creative and recreational—can give insight to all other areas of learning. The arts help people understand themselves in historical, cultural, and aesthetic terms; they provide people with broader choices about their environment and influence the way they do their work and live their lives. Since artistic expression is also truly basic to the individual's intellectual development, it must be included as a component of all education.1

Arts in education programs

There is a great variety of arts education programs, with little commonality in basic structure. Each curricular design is usually geared to the interests and needs of an individual school or district. In a survey of twenty-seven programs, I found that arts education projects occur both within and outside the school setting, usually receive outside financial assistance, last one to five years, are commonly external to the established school curriculum, and last longer and become more internal when their funding is included in the regular school budget. Programs occur at many different levels: individual school, school district, city, county, state, regional, and national. Rural, suburban, and urban areas are all involved.2

A comprehensive arts in education program, geared to the overall educational curriculum, is made up of four segments: specialized arts instruction, arts in general education, community arts resources, and arts for special populations. The six-year New York State Comprehensive Plan for Arts in Education, for example, describes this organization and suggests how it might be accomplished.3

Specialized arts instruction

This is an expansion of two programs already existing in most schools—music education and art education. In addition to these two areas, instruction is given in other art forms, such as dance, drama, poetry, and architecture. This part of a comprehensive arts in education curriculum consists of regular classes that offer all students opportunities to study individual disciplines with qualified specialists (for instance, music educators, dance teachers, or poets). Art and music educators are normally certified to teach in the schools by a state education department; a specialist in one of the other art forms is often certified by a professional agency in that particular arts discipline. The goals of such a program usually center on two aspects: development of the artistic talents and skills of students who wish to study a specific art form in depth, and development of perception and sensitivity to the art form in all students, regardless of talent.

To an extent, specialized arts instruction is offered by most school districts, because music and art are often parts of the instructional program. However, specialized instruction in dance, theater, photography, and other arts, taught on a long-term basis by trained and certified specialists in these areas, is not included in the school curriculum as often. If instruction is offered in disciplines other than music and art, it is usually on a short-term basis and is taught by community artists.

Arts in general education

Infusion of the arts into the general or basic education curriculum normally happens in the classroom, most often at the elementary level. Examples of curricular approaches include using the arts to promote an awareness of the environment and of self, to present a creative means for teaching problem-solving, to provide an alternate or dif-

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2. Ronald T. Lee, "Selected Arts in Education Projects and Research Studies: An Overall Description, and Identification of Art Forms Used and the Resultant Effects," paper presented at the national convention of the Music Educators National Conference, Chicago, Illinois, March 1984. The paper summarizes evaluation data from forty-six projects and studies. There were nine projects labeled as individual school projects, eleven as school district/city projects, seven as area/state/national projects, and nineteen as research studies (for example, dissertations). The projects and studies originate from all major regions of the United States.

ferent way of explaining and reinforcing basic concepts in other disciplines, to motivate students to learn appropriate academic and social behaviors, and to enrich and expand the overall curriculum. Most often, instruction is designed and implemented by classroom teachers with the assistance and involvement of arts education specialists, and community artists, arts agencies, and institutions.

Community arts resources

These resources are used separately or in combination with other segments of the comprehensive program. Such use may result in the infusion of the arts into the special and general education curriculums, enrichment and expansion of the whole school curriculum, or direct instruction in the arts. Arts resources comprise student artists, faculty colleagues with artistic expertise, individual community artists (amateur and professional), arts teachers with private studios, community arts organizations and companies, and faculty artists and arts educators at nearby colleges. Resources also include museums, libraries, theaters, special schools, studios, and historical sites and buildings.

The fourth method is to place the arts in the center of the total educational program, teaching the other subjects in terms of the arts. The arts are considered to be the core of the instructional program and are not taught as individual areas. Courses are developed on such aspects as the arts and language or the arts and science.

Arts for special populations

Arts training for special populations—handicapped, gifted, and bilingual—is achieved through both the infusion of the arts into the curriculum for special populations and direct and regularized instruction in the art forms. Teaching is done by special education specialists, arts education specialists, and classroom teachers. All three may be cooperatively involved in the development and implementation of this portion of the comprehensive program.

Many districts provide such a program, and schools are offering it with greater frequency. The availability of equal opportunities for instruction in the arts for handicapped students is mandated by law. Programs for the gifted in academic subjects and the talented in the arts are being initiated with increased frequency. New York State, for example, distributes funds to each district on a per pupil basis for gifted and talented programs. Large city districts often have specialized or magnet schools that provide extensive training in various art forms. Some states, such as New York, Pennsylvania, and California, offer special statewide summer institutes or workshops for the artistically talented.

Very few school systems have a comprehensive arts in education program with all four segments fully developed and operational. Each institution exploring the possibilities of the arts in education curricular format needs to consider the options in all four segments, decide which areas to include, and then select the content and instructional activities within each area that best fits the school's instructional goals and environment.

Curricular justifications

Advocates of arts in education programs offer several rationales. The selection of such justifications is extremely important to the success of a program because very often the community must be convinced of the value of the arts in education of children—a value that arts education programs place on an equal standing with English, mathematics, and science. In addition, the innovative nature of infusing the arts into general education, using community resources, and providing instruction in art forms other than music and the visual arts causes many schools and communities to be very cautious. Even after a decision has been made to accept an arts education approach, a clearly understood rationale is necessary if the development and implementation of the curriculum is to have direction. One of the chief causes of program failure is the lack of a rationale that allows the focusing of instructional activities.5

The following list identifies the more common justifications mentioned by those involved in designing and implementing arts in education activities.6 The resources suggested in the bibliography can be used to achieve a greater understanding of each rationale and how it is applied.

1. The arts are a major discipline. By studying the arts, students examine unique ways in which humans throughout history have perceived world events and cultures and have expressed their feelings and perceptions.

2. The arts can provide a means of helping the student to develop self-awareness and awareness of his or her environment. The arts deal not only with the student's inner feelings but also with his outward perceptions.


5. Lee.

The community must be convinced of the value of the arts in education of children.

3. The arts provide the student with a means of creativity. Instruction through the arts emphasizes active involvement by the student; the focus is on learning by doing.

4. The arts can provide added enrichment to the school program. For example, as part of learning about the community where they live, students might work with community artists or other cultural resources.

5. The arts may enhance learning. They are based on several concepts (for example, sound, movement, energy, space, color, or mass) also related to other subject areas, and, once learned, can be applied to those subject areas. Skills learned in artistic expression relate to other basic skills (interpreting symbols, coordinating muscles, concentrating on a task). The arts can assist students in the mastery of skills in such areas as reading and math.

6. The arts can help engender good feelings toward education in general and school in particular. Because most students find the arts interesting and enjoyable, the arts can be used to reinforce appropriate social and academic achievement.

7. The arts give teachers alternative means, through a variety of teaching methods and human and non-human resources, to introduce and reinforce learning. The arts give teachers a greater repertoire of instructional techniques.

Evaluation reports from arts in education projects and research studies suggest that these rationales are not idle claims. In a survey of forty-six reports, I found that all of the twenty-seven projects and nineteen research studies claimed to have positive effects on at least one of four basic categories: student achievement (academic achievement, arts achievement, readiness performance), student behavior (school behaviors, personal behaviors, academic/arts behaviors), student attitudes (school/learning/curriculum, self, society related), and other (curriculum, parents/community, teachers/staff). The most beneficial results in achievement were reported in academic achievement, especially in the areas of reading and language arts. Between 30 and 40 percent of the projects claimed improvements in school, personal, and society-related behaviors. Nearly 65 percent found that students showed improved attitudes toward school, learning, and the curriculum. Positive effects on the curriculum of the school, teachers and staff, and parents and community were mentioned in several of the reports.

Developing a curriculum

Before designing the instructional sequence, activities, and materials that make up an arts in education curriculum, careful consideration needs to be made of three tasks: content selection, project justification, and content study. Content selection is the determination of what disciplines or areas will be included in the curriculum. Project justification is the process of deciding whether or not adequate support services are present to permit the instructional development process to happen. Content study is a thorough examination of current information about arts education, including a study of the arts and non-arts disciplines that might be part of the curriculum. All three aspects may happen together or at different times depending on the nature of the project and the people involved in designing it.

An examination of current arts in education projects reveals that content selection is influenced by many factors. If a district receives outside funding for an arts education project, the specifications of the grant may determine or influence the choice of content topics. For example, Poets in the Schools is a grant project limited to poetry; Reading Improvement Through Art is a grant that only funds replications of a demonstrator program. Other grants specify the activity allowed (for example, use of community historical museums) or limit the population to a specific age or ability level.

The printed materials chosen for use in a project commonly become chief determinants of content. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich’s Self Expression and Conduct: The Humanities, for example, is a complete program for elementary grades. MARA—Mathematics/Architecture Related Activities (New York State Education Department) serves as a guide for several school programs. Quite often, the content areas are selected by the one or two
people who initiate the program or a very dominant project director. The selection is directly related to the needs and expertise of these people.

Ideally, content selection should be closely linked to the procedures involved in project justification and content study. Project justification involves gathering information about the amount of commitment on the part of key people (teachers, administrators, school boards), the amount and kind of expertise on the staff to carry out the project, the time available to develop the curriculum, the human and nonhuman resources needed, and the rationale on which the project is based. Content study entails reading about arts education as a curricular format, as well as potential art forms and non-art disciplines that might be used in the program. Content study also includes examining models of existing programs as well as investigating resources available for use. It includes identifying student and teacher priorities and anticipations, educational needs within the school district, and community interests and values.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of arts education, and the variety and amount of information that needs to be collected and studied during these initial tasks, a team approach to curriculum development is recommended. The team of three to five persons should include arts education specialists and classroom teachers who are innovative, creative, dedicated to teaching, and reliable. The willingness to listen carefully to other ideas and approaches, compromise and interact cooperatively, and work long and hard hours are basic requirements. An instructional development and evaluation specialist, principal or other administrator, and community artists can be very valuable resources to the team, either on a short- or long-term basis. A team leader who is respected in the district, gives inspiration to other teachers, and can achieve positive and effective interactions among team members is critical. Such a team should be able to conduct the initial tasks of content selection, project justification, and content study and, if a decision is made to proceed, continue with project design, implementation, and evaluation. Careful attention to these initial steps will provide the information necessary to help the team make wise decisions regarding the selection of content and the nature and design of the curriculum.

Selected readings

The following bibliography is included to help arts teachers, classroom teachers, administrators, artists, instructional developers, and others accomplish the task of gathering and studying arts education information. In addition, the bibliography provides quick access to a selective, but wide-ranging, list of sources for those who are not involved in the development process but simply want to acquire new ideas for creative teaching or to learn more about arts education as a current trend.

Aesthetics and perception

Dewey, John. Art as Experience. New York: Capricorn Books, 1958. (This resource is out of print but may be available from a university or other library.)


Overviews of arts in education

ACA Update. Quarterly bulletin of The Arts, Education and Americans. (570 Seventh Avenue, New York 10018)

All the Arts for All the Kids: An Advocacy Handbook for Arts Education Programs. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Minnesota Alliance for Arts in Education, 1982.
The Arts, Education and Americans has produced a series of nine monographs on arts education. Titles include:

People and Places: Reaching Beyond the Schools
Your School District and the Arts: A Self-Assessment
Local School Boards and the Arts: A Call for Leadership
Ideas and Money for Expanding School Arts Programs
Method and the Muse: Planning a School Arts Program
The Case for the Arts in Schools
Arts in the Curriculum
Creative Collaborations: Artists, Teachers, and Students
Arts in the Classroom: What One Elementary Teacher Can Do


Arts Education Review of Books. Triannual review of literature concerning arts education. (Department of Arts Education, Ohio State University, 340 Hopkins Hall, 128 North Oval Mall, Columbus 43210)


Design for Arts in Education. A bimonthly magazine. (4000 Albemarle Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016)
