



INSTITUTE for EDUCATION and the ARTS
Education Alive!

A DISCUSSION OF BEST PRACTICES
IN ARTS EDUCATION:
PERSPECTIVES ON MEANINGFUL ARTS-INTEGRATED EDUCATION

Roundtable Report from the National Overture of Education and the Arts

learning . academe
artistic experience
creative processes
New Mexico
connections
2004
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This report is the second in a series of the Institute's Best Practices in Arts Education roundtable discussions. The following conversation, held on April 2, 2004 at the Dance Barns of the National Dance Institute-New Mexico in Santa Fe, probed the different perspectives on the implications and meaning of arts-integrated education.

During the months of February-April 2004, the Institute for Education and the Arts held its second National Overture of Education and the Arts, in seven New Mexico communities, and this roundtable discussion was one of the sessions offered. Local educators, administrators, artists and community members discussed and challenged each other on questions of the meaning of "arts education"; maintaining the value, importance and integrity of the arts disciplines when combined with other curriculum, and the importance and challenges of effectively involving other stakeholders, particularly policy makers.

The Institute's focus is to promote the effective and regular use of the arts to teach core academic subjects. While educators are a primary audience, many of the Overture offerings are geared toward the larger community as well. The support and understanding of the community – parents, civic and business leaders and policy makers – are essential to effective education for all children and effective professional development for educators who work with the children.

The Institute continues to support and encourage continued dialogue through additional roundtable discussions and on-line exchanges both in New Mexico and other areas of the country. Because the arts can enhance the quality and effectiveness of every child's learning process, helping ensure that the arts become a regular, frequent and integrated aspect of every child's education is a central element of the Institute's work.

Ronald A. Stone *Jonna L. Power*

For more information or to share your ideas, thoughts and new perspectives with the Institute contact us at info@edartsinstitute.org.

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The first thing I want to do is to have a brief conversation about what we mean when we use the words “arts education” and what we mean when we talk about “arts integrated education.” Let’s start by talking about what we mean when we say “arts education.”

HARRY ■ Arts education would be education in the various forms of art – painting, sculpture, dance, music.

SANDRA ■ I think that it is a discrete study of an art form that could include technique, application, history, and the cultural contacts of the art form. This is very different from “arts integration” because in this case, you are focusing on the art form itself. If I’m looking at a program and saying “is this arts integration?” what I’m looking for is the coexistence of the academic values of the study (which could be history or math or whatever) with the use of art and techniques. They work together so that you can express literature through drama, or dance or music. In other words, you are talking about literature and about whichever art form is used in expressing it.

CHRISSIE ■ In Bali there’s no word for art. In Bali we would not be sitting around talking about art. We’d be making it. We’d be doing it. We’d be making our clothes. We’d be drinking out of a beautiful glass, rather than a plastic bottle. It’s integrated. It’s part of everyone’s lives.

SANDRA ■ I was on a panel earlier today, and we were talking about this same thing. It was stated that the only purpose of educating a person is to bring that person in line with his or her own mind – with the human mind. That is the center of human activity. It naturally puts together information to create things. And so, if the purpose is to educate, then we have no place to go but to be creative. And what happens to us is that we stop and we say, “No, we are going to educate children,” but what we really mean is “we are going to train them.” They are going to be able to have a sub-set of activities or abilities and they will be able to pass a test. That is not, in my mind, what education is.

RANDY ■ With arts education, we’re dealing with the discipline of the art, which is its own content area. This

means it has its own content standards. Its own benchmarks. Its own history. You have the processes of creating or performing and then responding to that art form. Discipline-based arts education involves learning about the history. Learning how to criticize in a positive way or in a constructive way what you’ve seen. Once we know that, then we know that an arts integrated session is going to have parallel sets of standards and objectives. We’re going to set objectives for, say, science instead of objectives for dance, or mathematics instead of music. We won’t be teaching first one and then the other. We’ll be teaching them both simultaneously, and they will each amplify and reflect upon and encourage each other.

CATHERINE ■ I guess I’ve never seen that really work well. Most arts integrated education that I’ve seen has been, “Let’s use dance for five minutes to teach this subject.” I think the first thing about arts education is art for art’s sake. To be well educated years ago, you studied piano, you learned to dance, you learned to draw. How have we gone so far away from that that we are even having a discussion about the value of the arts in education? I worry that arts integrated education is just a way to hold on to the arts.

CAROL ■ But the reality is that I’ve worked in a district before where there was no art teacher. There was no music teacher. If you wanted to do that, you had to do it in your classroom. It was just a budget restriction. They said, “OK, we’ll hire a music teacher. One of you has to go. Regular classroom teacher.” Unfortunately, that’s the way that it is. I really like the idea of matching up standards and objectives when we plan. I would like to do that for every single lesson, every single day, and I wouldn’t know how to do that. I would like someone to come to my classroom and show me how to do some of these things. And I would certainly be willing to try.

You know, this is the first year ever that I’ve worked with kindergarten students. I’m in an all kindergarten building. You know what? In kindergarten, they teach children how to be painters. And what to paint. And why you’re painting. They sing. They



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talk about how to sing. The singing has a context. I think that something happens after kindergarten, and as you move up, it's less and less and less.

SARAH ■ I think it has to be tied in to creativity. What that means to a child learning. I think that's the key to it somehow. Any parent sees their child as creative. You've got little children. You know how creative they are. They're making up stories. They're taking pots and pans and building castles. And then it just gets chipped away and chipped away and chipped away. If we could somehow get that conversation about creativity to parents and how that enhances a child's learning, I think we would have accomplished something.

JACKIE ■ There is a difference between planned, programmatic education (that which is curriculum based, really strongly going in and saying, "We're here and in three months we're going to be there") and emergent education (meaning, "We are here and we have a path to follow. We have directives. But we do not have a prescription of how we are going to reach that."). So we are teaching problem solving. Then we have students who aren't just learning facts but who can go out in to the world and bring ideas together. That kind of learning has to take place when teachers are also working together. You have, in some school systems, teachers working together as families. These families approach a broad idea and then each becomes excited in terms of how they might teach the concept through their own subject area. Of course, that creates a need for teamwork. It is strong and noncompetitive teaching as well. It requires administrative support, which includes support at the individual schools, at the district level, and perhaps, even up to the State; everyone understanding what is being attempted with this kind of learning. I think that is an integrative approach.

Before we go on, what does that big idea kind of teaching look like?

SARAH ■ I just wanted to tell you about an extraordinary school in Virginia with an extraordinary principal. It was a very diverse school with a thousand kids up to sixth grade. They had a lot of Down's syndrome

kids, and they had special, advanced kids. Rather than have the grade two with the not so swift kids, and the medium kids and then the bright kids, she had them name every single class in their school after an artist. So they had a "Beethoven Group" and a "Dizzy Gillespie Group" and all sorts of things. That's who they were for the year, and they studied everything from that person's viewpoint. History, science, math, that's how they taught music. Those kids were so turned on, and you could walk up to anyone of them and say "tell me about Beethoven" and they would rattle off where he lived, where he traveled, how he liked to write, what was wrong with his eyes. It was wonderful. That's an extraordinary school system where they let you do things like that. It's a very interesting thing to think about, and these kids were astonishing in the way they performed, including the Down's syndrome kids who were all of a sudden part of the group and able to express themselves. One group was Alvin Ailey, and the Down's syndrome kids all made up dances that they thought Alvin Ailey would like. Everyone was able to succeed.

CHRISSE ■ This is a project I did last year through the state of New Mexico. I went to 17 different sites around the state and worked with kids on water catchment systems. I went in as an artist, and they designed some of the best water catchment systems you can imagine. I went in as artist, but I also had water engineers and scientists talking to the kids about the problem in New Mexico of what was happening with the water, and how could you solve it? So they were problem solving and they wrote about it and they became inventors.

JACKIE ■ I want to pick up on this whole idea of art in problem solving. Deep within art education is very much the idea of the problem solver. The designer works in the realm of the problem solver. I think art by its very nature definitely promotes integrative thinking as a means to problem solving arts learning. Arts education needs to demonstrate this as well.

GIGI ■ The problem with our educational system is that they teach you science as a core academic subject, but they don't teach you to think as a scientist. They don't teach you to problem solve. I think that's the important role that art will play in the postmodern period, to bring that back, to problem solve, to think creatively.

JACKIE ■ How do we learn? We learn through interest. We only learn what we're interested in. Now, what can

build interest? Relationships can build interest. So that's why having a relationship with the educator can make a difference. Or we create interest by doing (something). We learn by experience. Experiential education. The other thing in early childhood is that we learn through play... which can be creative. Through play we challenge ourselves continuously. In adult learning theory, we are told adults learn what is useful to them. If a use can be found in it – that's what will motivate adult learning. But usefulness motivates everyone. Why does a child learn to talk? Because it is useless to not be able to communicate. So these are the keys: interest, usefulness. We can integrate all of that into the learning practices that we have. But we've lost an emphasis on these keys because teaching is viewed in terms of what is tested.

GIGI ■ We're talking from a perspective of a civilization that has decided to define arts as not a part of living. I think this is a problem of our civilization and of this educational system. It's so causative that it has compromised our sense of self. You're successful if you pass the IQ test, but you are not successful if you have a dance debut.

RANDY ■ You present an excellent question. How do you assess a student in class? You don't sit down and write out an assessment. You give them a correction and you see if they apply it. If they don't, you change your language. So, there is immediate feedback, right? That's what assessment is like. It has an affect on teaching and learning in an immediate way. And that feedback happens interactively.

SANDRA ■ I know there are teachers who have the constraints from the school system and what is expected of them. Not only what is expected of them in terms of their own performance, but what is expected of the children in terms of their performance. This is a very high expectation, especially considering the resources that these people are not given. But we don't seem to be able to get out of that trap, because of the testing that goes on and how it drives programs.

GIGI ■ And the money that comes as a result of the testing, that (set of consequences) becomes a threat to the school.

SANDRA ■ Not only that, but the teacher's salary is going to be based on how their children test.

RANDY ■ Accountability and assessment are not one and the same. Accountability means we try to measure a school's performance as an education institution by a set of test scores which are artificial and do not really reflect student understanding. We can't really call that assessment. Assessment has to be built on ways of having students prove to us that they understand something beyond a reasonable doubt. We have to convince them (policy makers) of teaching for understanding.

Politicians have found that children can read at a third grade level, but what does that mean? Each child learns differently. Some children won't read that material until they're in the 5th or 6th grade. But that's their natural process. If they're not made to feel that they have somehow failed, because they didn't learn in a particular way or a particular time, then we've transformed part of that discussion. Now we're starting to ask, "Okay, what is it that you do understand? How can you show me?" Maybe you have to dance it. Maybe you have to sing it. Maybe you have to draw it. Maybe you have to act it out. But in some way you can prove that you know.

You've hit the nail on the head when you say that we're training people. We're focusing on the skills. All the content standards and benchmarks ask what skills you have to have in order to write, in order to do mathematical operations. What we've stopped thinking about is what are the big pieces, the big processes that you have to understand in order to think mathematically, to think scientifically. What is it that we do when we engage in the creating of the arts? We're observing, we're recognizing and creating patterns, we're analyzing, and we're making connections between things. It's a holistic kind of thought.

CATHERINE ■ I walk into some schools and wonder, why is this school faltering? Why don't you have any programs? It's as though (standardized) testing has to be the assessment tool to gauge whether students are really learning.

GIGI ■ It might be too sophisticated for the people who prepare the tests to create a more comprehensive assessment tool, for example a portfolio. It's very professional to have portfolios. They are assessment tools.

This is why I think that it's important that we talk about issues of advocacy, because until people know differently, they can't make different choices. I'll take politicians as an example. A



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politician will come to a school and see a performance and think, “This is a great school.” They don’t realize that that same school may be marked “failing” when graded on standardized test performance. We need to help the policy makers connect a child’s third grade play with the test scores. If we don’t help them make that connection, then who is going to?

CAROL ■ I want to know what we can do bring the philosophies that we all believe in and value and are so passionate about to work in the schools.

SANDRA ■ Somehow as art people, we have got to get from the pure art form to the form that appeals enough to whoever is making these decisions so we can get our foot in the door. I can tell you that the conversation we had here is not a popular one, anyplace, in the education institutions. So, how are we going to get “real” about it? That’s what we need to do. As arts groups, we need to show, in a language that the people who are making the decisions can understand, that we are helping the education process. We recently took the Teaching Techniques that are all about the arts, and we compared them to these benchmarks. Lo and behold, they overlap. And they overlap. And they overlap. It was no contrivance on the part of the teachers. So, I think that we need to also educate the people who are making these policies – not in terms that we are artists, but as we are educators. We’re in here. We have another approach. It’s valid. It teaches. And it produces worth. Somehow or another, we have got to get in to this discussion and still have other people making these decisions.

And that’s what I have been trying to get to. I think that for our artistic personality, some artists can label that very thing you said as, “You’re making me sacrifice my art. You are watering it down.” But, I feel, as you do, a real urgency that if we don’t start speaking

the language of the decision makers, we will never get them. That’s why I keep coming back to, “How do we get them to see it the way we do?”

CATHERINE ■ We were trying to find funding. So we thought, let’s just take a look at the curriculum standards for the State of New Mexico. Let’s go in to their language, their work, their testing, and see if there is a parallel. And there was! We didn’t change what we’re doing at all. We now have a tool, an understanding as teachers, and a new language vocabulary to be able to bring to a principal or someone and say, “Look what we’re doing. Oh Math? Look at Standard B4 in Section Performance Standard A5.”

And that’s what we do as teachers. As teachers, when we see that our students don’t get it, we pick up another approach and another way to get to it. I think benchmarks are a reality and we’re going to lose if we don’t align with them

GIGI ■ I think one of the things that can be looked at as a part of this movement would be teacher education schools. I think that teachers in teacher education classes, before they are certified, have to learn how to use the arts. There are no teacher education classes where they teach teachers how to use the arts in core academic areas.

SARAH ■ It seems to me though, that to really be successful, we have to get to the principals and probably to the school administrations. Because those are the people who make the decisions, certainly in elementary schools. Principals start from the bottom and the whole school takes on a different focus, a different energy. That’s how a school comes alive.

CATHERINE ■ I was thinking the same thing. I was thinking that what if part of the restructuring is really empowering the principals and really going to a system where a principal is picked very, very carefully, given great training, and then given great power. Because the great schools that I have been in have a principal that comes in and takes over. They are like the CEO.

JACKIE ■ It's being done already, but not here. In the beginning, the administrator and the principal must be trained alongside the teachers. In a summer program or an institute program, you have the teachers who are working in the program, and they become the mentors to other teachers in their school until you have a full engagement. They go from one school to another. So it's got to work as a big plan. Some places have been relatively successful. Getting funding is a lot of that. When the funding dried up, then the continued training stopped. And so, you had problems in that regard.

SARAH ■ But somehow we have to inspire principals, not just train them.

JACKIE ■ That's something that I can really be passionate about! I have been in these training sessions. Principals are alongside the teachers. They are making the art, and they get excited about it. They're excited about their creations in a way a third grader might be excited about something they create.

CATHERINE ■ I was thinking that maybe part of the problem is thinking that education is its own Ivory Tower, like universities. Maybe one of the ways to look at it is to say, well, education is health. And education is juvenile justice. And education is the Department of Youth and Families. And get the Secretaries of all of these areas and then make education in New Mexico not just a function of the Department of Education. The Department of Health is going to have a whole lot more trouble if kids are coming out of school with no connections to their bodies and they haven't exercised and they don't know how to eat well. And Juvenile Justice Department is going to have trouble. So, instead of trying to do things separately, try to take a coalition of the Secretaries of all of these different Departments and bring them together to address education as a whole.

SARAH ■ She's on to something, and that is to include these other people. There's power in making a coalition with some of these groups because they know what it means for a different reason than what we're talking about.

CATHERINE ■ It's all the same. Rather than "We're only going to deal with the obesity of children over here," "We're going to deal with kids that are in trouble over here." The truth is, it hits all of them and it all comes

back to the schools, so it becomes an education issue, and it's a life issue for all of us.

Coleen, I watched your students today. And I'm pretty familiar with how fourth graders are. I was stunned at the length of their rehearsal today and how focused they were. That combined class was focused, concentrated, invested. I saw skills that would transfer to other situations and other classes. I saw self-control. And I saw real pride. I saw kids who wanted to improve what they did. And I was so moved by, and so energized by, being in that environment. I think that those are things that I would want to share with decision makers. I feel like I could go to an administrator and say, "If you implement this program, you're going to have kids who are more focused, more concentrated, more invested." There are numerous studies that talk about kids and the arts.

CHRISSE ■ I'm just throwing this out. Jackie was talking about how principals get really passionate when they do a hands-on activity through the arts. Then we go to the politicians. I mean, why not? All of this talk. We all bring out more of this paper that costs more money, more videos. The politicians get a gazillion pieces of these. Just talking about seeing the kids – that to me is what will spark them.

GIGI ■ To add on to that, I truly believe that there are many teachers who are doing great things in their classrooms, who are integrating art and nobody knows. We should document these teachers. We should let these teacher's voices come out in a broader audience where the teachers are on television. There's like a regular television, a weekly television program where we show teachers using arts integration into the classroom.



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One of the things that stunned me is that since we did a similar round table discussion last April, IEA published the discussion as a document, and it's been reprinted two times. Over 6,000 copies have been distributed. Our small meeting here can have that same effect. The conversation starts small and gathers momentum. And I think that what we are going to find is that people all over have these thoughts.

And that's why I keep hammering at – so what if we did have people's attention? When I look at who the decision makers are, I am looking at the US Department of Education. I'm looking at the State Department of Education. I'm looking at Governors. I'm looking at the President. I'm looking at the Cabinet. I'm looking in my state Board of Education. When we have their attention, what do we say?

CLOSING COMMENTS FROM IEA

This is why the Institute conducts these discussions – because it is important to learn what people think and to share this with others who need to know and who are in places to help make changes. The Institute shares these questions and suggestions with people in key places, like the New Mexico Public Education Department. When we do, also ask who else should be involved in the conversations? How can you move on some of these things?

You are right! It does absolutely no good to just create more paper. You talked about lots of different teachers doing great things in classrooms all over the place. We have also found great progress in schools across the country. Great teachers. Great research. Great documentation. But the information sits on the shelves and great models exist as islands. Nobody's connecting the dots. A major point of the Institute is to start to connect the dots. Momentum is building.

You're raising tough questions. You're raising questions that people often don't want to hear. We have to also start asking the fundamental question – as a nation, as a culture, as culture of many cultures - What is the point of education? What is it that we are trying to achieve through public education? We have to ask that question. It's a very tough one to answer.

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