

A DEFINITION OF ARTS INTEGRATION

The Southeast Center for Education in the Arts (SCEA) at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga has proposed the following comprehensive definition for arts integration. The characteristics summarize the key elements in definitions provided by practitioners, evaluators, and researchers throughout the United States. SCEA has situated arts integration in the larger context of curriculum integration. No single definition accurately characterizes the field; however, the elements identified by SCEA are consistent with the literature in this review.

– *Arts Integration Frameworks, Research & Practice: A Literature Review*
Arts Education Partnership, 2007

Arts Integration is instruction combining two or more content areas, wherein the arts constitute one or more of the integrated areas. The integration is based on shared or related concepts, and instruction in each content area has depth and integrity reflected by embedded assessments, standards, and objectives.

Integrated instruction is often designed, implemented, and evaluated in collaboration with other teachers, arts specialists, community artists, and institutions; and delivered, experienced and assessed through a variety of modalities: artistic processes, inquiry methods, and intelligences.

Integrated (or interdisciplinary) learning uses the knowledge and methods of several disciplines in combination to explore a central concept, object or issue as a framework for building student competence. The arts can enrich and deepen student understanding in this educational framework. Knowledge and study of the arts develop the abstract thinking skills necessary for complex and imaginative problem solving.

Curriculum integration is a way of organizing studies around real-life issues that are significant to both young people and adults, and applying content and skills from many subject areas and disciplines at the same time. Curriculum integration is a teaching approach that enables students and teachers to identify and research problems and issues without regard to subject-area boundaries, providing students the experience in a learning setting that will prepare them for effective teamwork in the future.

Integrating curriculum with the arts involves:

- Organizing instruction that is often drawn from life experiences – allowing students to question and engage in real-life issues
- Combining subject areas – not separating them. Students learn and use skills from all disciplines and across disciplines to become knowledgeable about personal and global issues
- Developing skills and applying knowledge in more than one area of study. In an integrated curriculum, education through the arts allows students to learn how to analyze, evaluate and draw reasoned conclusions from what they see and hear.

In an integrated curriculum, education through the arts allows students to learn how to analyze, evaluate, and draw reasoned conclusions from what they see and hear. They learn to reflect on the meaning of their perceptions and experiences. They learn to convey ideas, feelings, and emotions by creating their own visual art and by performing dance, music, and drama. Knowledge and experience in the arts provide children the capacity to expand their reasoning ability, to make connections, and to think creatively.

Integrated arts lessons can be extremely rich and deeply layered learning experiences for students who experience them. Teachers report that with an integrated curriculum that includes the arts, students have moments of exhilaration, personal transformation, and academic or life choice change. Teachers and artists who have successful experiences report profound changes in their approach to individual students, to learning, and to the classroom in general. Many teachers, parents, students, and administrators believe that integrating the arts makes classrooms better learning environments. The arts provide a window to understanding the connections among all subject areas.