

A leading arts educator takes on the false dichotomy between direct instruction and arts integration.

Direct Instruction vs. Arts Integration: A False Dichotomy

Let us please put to rest once and for all the false dichotomy between direct instruction in the arts and arts integrated teaching and learning. At a time when national issues of sustainability and conservation of energy and resources become ever more urgent, it is high time that those of us committed to quality arts education stop squandering time, money, and paper on arguing “either/or” when our schools are best served by a “both/and” approach. We need to stop seeing direct instruction and arts integration as contrary positions that need to battle it out for limited dollars, and start seeing them as complementary strategies in the service of learners. *The clearer we get on the learning needs of students (and the teaching needs of teachers), the better we will be able to prioritize limited funding.* We need to move from dichotomous thinking to dialogic thinking. In order to do so, we need to answer several questions:



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Why Is This Misleading Opposition So Persistent?

The persistence of the opposition between direct instruction and arts integration is based on several long-standing misunderstandings:

Scarcity economy: The basic issue underlying and generating this false dichotomy is inequitable and insufficient funding for public education, creating a “scarcity economy” that pits program against program and content area against content area. A 2006 national survey by the Center on Education Policy found that 71% of the nation’s 15,000 school districts had reduced the hours of instructional time spent on social studies, the arts, science, and other subjects to open up more time for reading and math. In the area of arts learning, insufficient funding has encouraged schools to

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buy transitory, quick-fix, drive-by packages that promise to raise reading or math scores through a month of visual arts workshops or dance lessons, or attendance at a series of concerts.

Schools are painfully aware that they are under the gun to raise math and reading test scores, and know that they ought to include the arts in their programming in some manner or other. This is a set-up for arts organizations, desperate for funding, to ride in to fill the vacuum with poorly conceived programs that claim to solve the schools' academic achievement problems by "integrating the arts." What's missing? A rigorous definition of arts integration, and a lack of planning and leadership at the school level. Arts instruction needs to be properly conceived of as part of the whole culture of a school, and any program, whether delivered by arts teachers, classroom teachers, and/or visiting artists, needs to explicitly contribute to that plan.

Rigorous Definitions: All kinds of gobbledygook is being promoted as "arts integration"—short-term residencies, predesigned arts activities, superficial connections between the arts and other areas of learning. Quality arts integration requires clear definitions and an extended instructional plan over time. The Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) defines arts integration in the following way:

Arts Integration is teaching and learning in which arts learning and other academic learning are connected in ways in which the arts learning AND the other academic learning are both deepened.

So, gimmicky exercises that lack depth in either arts learning or in other academic learning areas are *not* arts integration. Arts integration is not about "jazzing up" other content with arts activities to make it more palatable for students.

Purity: There is a persistent belief that the integrity of the arts ("art for art's sake") is dependent upon keeping the arts "pure"—untainted by other subject areas. But while we

must oppose misusing the arts as test prep for other subject areas, that is not the same as recognizing that the arts are inherently connected to other domains of knowledge. Art is a medium for engaging other content areas in almost all contemporary art—expressly critiquing concepts of identity, history, science, language, and so on. But the arts have always been intimately connected to other domains of knowledge.

Quality: There is a persistent belief that connecting the arts to other content areas will water down the quality of artwork produced. Superficial connections between the arts and other subjects are just that—superficial. Pointing out the fact that quarter notes are called quarter notes does not lead to profound understandings of music or mathematics. But serious arts integration results in extraordinary art work that is both conceptually compelling and aesthetically sophisticated. Rigorous approaches to arts integration not only promise to deepen thinking in other academic areas, but also promise to deepen thinking in the arts. CAPE's practice includes documentation (<http://www.capeweb.org/rexamples.html>) and exhibition (<http://www.capeweb.org/exhibit.html>) of arts-integrated teaching and learning from a wide range of Chicago public



Students at Healy Elementary studied cultural symbols with teaching artist Bernard Williams.



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Students at Kellogg Elementary School study ancient trade routes with teaching artist Ellen Tritschler.

schools, demonstrating that the art produced by rigorous integrated instruction is anything *but* compromised.

Who Leads Arts Integration?

Partners: A persistent misunderstanding about arts integration is that the practice of *connecting learning in the arts with learning in other content areas* is confused with the practice of *providing visiting artists' residencies*. CAPE believes that quality arts integrated teaching is best developed through co-planning between co-equal partnering educators, but those partners can be arts teachers, classroom teachers, and/or visiting artists in any configuration or combination. CAPE's experience has been that the finest integration results when ALL THREE work together—breaking down the isolation of both classroom teachers and arts teachers, and connecting teachers (and students) to the work of practicing artists. The value of visiting artists is not in providing arts education on the cheap, but

in opening up new roles and relationships between teachers, students, and artists, and in exploring innovative ways for reconnecting a fragmented public school curriculum that segregates the arts from the rest of teaching and learning.

Planning and Capacity Building:

CAPE opposes "service delivery" models. A partnership is only valuable to a school to the extent that it builds the capacity of teachers, and develops *innovative leadership inside schools*. This can only happen if planning time is provided for arts integration initiatives, whether they are led by arts teachers, classroom teachers, and/or visiting artists. This means that any visiting artists that participate in an arts integration initiative must be skilled at co-planning, at listening to both arts teachers and classroom teachers, and at collaborating. Working effectively with large-scale cultural institutions such as museums and symphonies may require intermediaries that can work with the intimacy and flexibility needed for meaningful collaboration.

In-School Arts Teachers:

Arts integration initiatives are often seen as an attempt to undermine the job security of in-school arts teachers. There are horror stories told of certified arts teachers being replaced by incompetent visiting artists to save money in underfunded schools, and of classroom teachers struggling to fake arts instruction by adding craft activities to their regular instruction in the name of arts integration. These horror stories are indeed horrible, but they don't reflect the experience of an initiative like CAPE in which arts teachers, classroom teachers, and visiting artists are all taken seriously. In CAPE schools, the presence of visiting artists

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has resulted in MORE full-time certified arts teachers being hired, not less. And CAPE has forged a long-term partnership with the Office of Academic Enhancement of Chicago Public Schools to support the arts teachers in sixty neighborhood schools in becoming leaders of both direct instruction and of arts integration in their schools. These teachers have formed a lively and unprecedented network of interconnected arts teachers in the district, who see themselves as whole school curricular leaders. This mirrors the values of the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations (the professional association of arts specialist organizations):

Arts specialist teachers must work to become more proficient at communicating their art to their fellow faculty. Additionally, the arts specialist teachers must learn to work with other curriculum specialists.

What Is Arts Integration For?

Test Scores? A lot of ink has been spilled over trying to prove/disprove that arts learning does/does not improve student achievement in high stakes testing areas (reading and mathematics). There was quite a stir over the “Mozart Effect”—a purported blip in improved spatial reasoning among college students after listening to the first ten minutes of Mozart’s “Sonata for Two Pianos in D Major.” The CAPE study in the research compendium *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* showed increasing correlations over six years’ time between arts-integrated programming and improved test scores in CAPE schools, contrasted with comparable non-CAPE schools that showed significantly



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Students at Telpochcalli Elementary School represent social justice leaders with teaching artist William Estrada.



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High School students create "Identity Museums" with art teacher Phil Coton and teaching artist Margy Stover.

less improvement. This was comforting to principals who wanted to commit to more arts programming, but were worried about their standardized test scores. Does CAPE believe that its arts integrated approach improves student achievement? Yes. The more important question is not whether, but how.

CAPE believes that student achievement improves in CAPE schools because its approach to arts integration helps generate an atmosphere of intellectual challenge, creative and critical thinking, of inquiry and expression, of reflection and community building in CAPE schools. This is not about popping in a violin lesson here and watching an improved math test score pop out there. It IS about cross-disciplinary thinking, collaborative and individual work, written

reflections, revisions, documentation, exhibitions, and critique. The academic content catalyzes innovative art making. The art making illuminates the academic content.

The 2002 CAPE research study *How Arts Integration Supports Students Learning* (<http://www.capeweb.org/demoss.pdf>) found strong evidence that arts-integrated instruction increased student willingness to tackle "difficult" academic content, turning difficulty from an obstacle into a positive challenge. Arts integration helps create what Lauren M. Stevenson and Richard J. Deasy call a "Third Space"—where learning, not testing, matters.

Beyond Contests and Assemblies:

Quality arts integration depends upon teachers

and students documenting the steps and stages of their work and their thinking processes throughout arts integrated learning. Again, the emphasis is not on process *or* product, but on *both/and*. Direct instruction in arts education all too often becomes focused on contests and assemblies. Many arts specialists, treated as second class citizens in schools, are asked to "cover" students while the rest of the teachers have prep periods, and work without sufficient space or materials. Arts specialists often receive most of their acknowledgement from their peers for enduring seemingly endless assemblies of students clumping on and off stages in acoustically hopeless lunchatoriums. Arts integration helps schools attend to artistic processes, and creates an atmosphere in

which arts specialists can return to teaching and learning, rather than focusing on holiday concerts and competitions.

How Can These “Opposing Camps” Work to “Reach Across the Aisle”?

Sharing Arts Standards: Certified arts teachers need opportunities to present their state arts standards to the rest of their faculties at professional development sessions, preferably with hands-on activities.

Arts Education Steering Committees: Arts education steering committees can be formed at schools to plan and oversee quality control of both direct instruction and arts integration. These committees can include arts specialists, classroom teachers, parents, school administrators, and partnering artists.

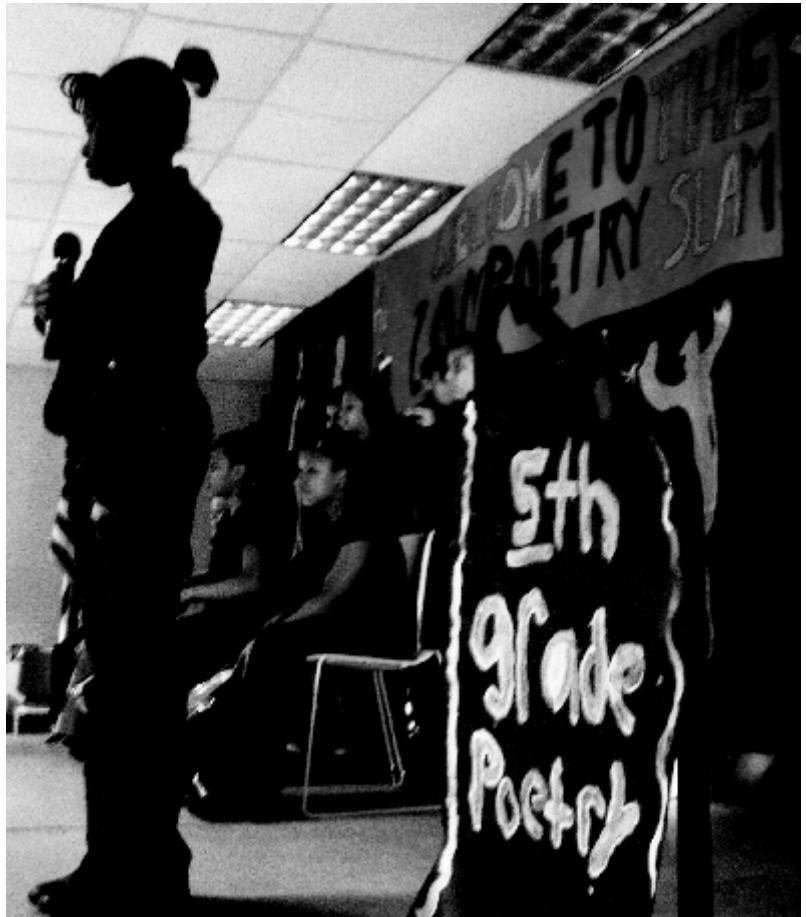
New Technologies: Interest in new technologies can bring together arts specialists, classroom teachers, parents, students, and visiting artists into meaningful and exciting collaborations.

After-School Curriculum Laboratories: There are significant time pressures and major dollars pushing arts education out of the school day and into after-school time. Part of the problem is that in many of our school systems, the school day is simply too short to address all the content being taught. But we must resist the temptation to embrace arts education by ghettoizing it. CAPE’s solution is to treat all its after-school programming as

“curriculum laboratories” in which classroom teachers, arts teachers, and visiting artists use the freedom of the after-school setting to co-develop innovative and effective teaching strategies, and to “migrate” these practices back into classrooms.

Collaborations Between In-School Arts Teachers and Visiting Artists:

The impulse of schools is to try to spread arts experiences as widely (and thinly) as possible, so that as many kids get exposed to the arts as possible. But this may not be the best strategy for deepening arts learning. It may be wiser to develop some deep-and-narrow curricular projects that “catch fire” in a school. Arts specialists should have the same opportunities to partner with visiting artists as classroom teachers.



Students at Daley Elementary School create a poetry slam with teaching artist Charly Barbera.

Arts Integration Led by Arts

Specialists: In Chicago Public Schools’ Fine and Performing Arts Magnet Cluster Program (a city-wide network of sixty arts-focused, neighborhood-based schools), in-school arts specialists conduct professional development on arts integration, and co-develop arts integrated units with classroom teachers. They have also stepped forward as leaders in the development of their schools’ official Improvement Plans.

Documentation and Reflection:

Influenced by the early childhood documentation and reflection methodologies developed in Reggio Emilia, Italy, CAPE has a commitment to supporting teachers and students in documenting and reflecting upon their work processes and their thinking processes, and representing their practice through a variety of media. This invites rich discussion about teaching and learning, connecting direct instruction and arts integration through a common language of inquiry and evidence. CAPE documentation guides are available on CAPE’s website: <http://www.capeweb.org/forms.html>. Articles by CAPE consultant Gigi Schroeder-Yu, describing documentation methodologies, are available at <http://www.capeweb.org/arnoldgigikorea.pdf> and http://www.capeweb.org/Schroeder_Yu.pdf

Exhibitions and “Informances”:

Documentation allows the presentation of exhibitions and performances that include artifacts and discussions that make visible the teaching and learning that went into the arts products, irrespective of whether they are the products of direct instruction or arts integration. CAPE has designed a guide for parents to support them in not only admiring their children’s work but also engaging their children in dialogue about the work: <http://www.capeweb.org/parents.pdf>

Big Ideas and Compelling Themes

Across Schools and Districts: CAPE schools have organized whole school curricular projects around Big Ideas and compelling, metaphoric themes such as “Rivers” and “Migrations.” CAPE worked with Chicago’s Fine and Performing Arts Magnet Cluster Program in coordinating a major exhibition of artworks and performances based on the rich and complex Big Idea of “Inheritance,” showcasing the work of arts teachers and students from across the city.

Arts Experiences for Arts Teachers:

Arts teachers need to be renewed as artists. Every summer, CAPE works with the Fine and Performing Arts Magnet Cluster Program to provide opportunities for arts teachers to work with partner arts organizations to

explore and expand their craft *as artists*.

Long-Term Relationships: Some CAPE schools have been developing arts integrated instruction with teaching artist partners for seventeen continuous years. The depth of these relationships has allowed meaningful connections to be forged between direct instruction in the arts and arts integrated teaching and learning, deepening both.

Presenting and Publishing: CAPE encourages both classroom teachers and arts specialists to present at conferences and to write for publication. This professionalizes all practice.

Authentic Audiences: CAPE supports classroom teachers and arts specialists in presenting student work to a variety of audiences in a variety of settings: universities, museums, professional theaters, galleries, community centers, cultural centers, libraries, restaurants, and of course schools. (See the video of the “Flight” performance at the Chicago Cultural Center: <http://www.capeweb.org/clscale>.

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Myths and Realities about Arts Integration

A Profound Central Paradox:

The development of the arts in education occurs in the context of a profound contradiction: the arts are marginalized in our schools in almost direct proportion to the centrality of the arts to our lives. This paradox encourages us to live in two worlds: the world as it is, and the world as we know it should be. We try to bridge the gap between these two worlds by creating a series of myths—optimistic and pessimistic lies we tell ourselves to resolve our cognitive dissonance. Our contradictory experience generates contradictory beliefs that we internalize as we try to advance our work in a paradoxical environment. Some of these polarized myths are listed below. One of the values of arts integration is its potential for moving beyond the myths of rigid positions into the realities of complex practice.

Myth: Those who can, do.

Counter-Myth: Those who can't, teach.

The More Complex Reality: Those who learn to teach can and do, joyfully. Those who don't learn to teach end up teaching anyway and hating it. The artist has always been a teacher. The social isolation of the artist has undermined this essential function. Arts integration re-integrates the artist into the social fabric as a learner, a medium and a mentor of cultural knowledge.

Myth: Any art is better than no art.

Counter-Myth: Only the very best will do.

The More Complex Reality: Good teaching is good teaching. Weak teaching is weak teaching. We always end up doing some of both. We tend to swing between being so desperate for the arts that we accept any half-baked program on the one hand, or on the other, being so perfectionist about the arts that we lose patience with the flawed nature of all programs. A culture of collective reflective practice in schools and arts organizations turns program flaws into opportunities for continuous learning and improvement. This requires organizational structures that allow educators, artists, students, and parents to continually critique programs and to collaborate on on-going program design.

Myth: The Muse does not like light or, art is all feeling and intuition.

This myth has its origin in nineteenth-century romantic notions of the artist as a mysterious exemplary sufferer with intuitive knowledge beyond words. Of course the artist

has knowledge beyond words, as we all do, but that doesn't mean that using language to describe the process kills the process.

Counter-Myth: We have it all figured out or, art can be totally systematized.

Just because we can put language to art processes doesn't mean that the language *is* the process, any more than arts education standards *are* arts instruction.

The More Complex Reality: Making and experiencing art requires a complex interplay of experimenting with materials, responding to models, sharing vocabulary, learning to discriminate between subtle artistic choices, making intuitive decisions, and processing those decisions through language *and* through the senses.

Myth: The only way to teach the arts with integrity is to teach the arts for their own sake, uncompromised by association with other academic areas.

Counter-Myth: The only way to teach the arts with integrity is to teach the arts as they connect to other domains of knowledge, uncompromised by isolation.

The More Complex Reality: Our eye needs to stay on the prize of quality instruction- and on learners developing increasing capacity to direct their own learning. As in all subjects, this sometimes requires isolated instruction in the content area, and sometimes requires integrated instruction. It is the dynamic between these two modes that gives a content area its vitality. Arts educator Eric Booth has identified the need to move from a focus on artistic materials to a focus on aesthetic

continued

thinking. It's not about playing violins; it's about making music. Having classroom teachers incorporate art activities into their instruction is not sufficient for high quality arts education. Visiting artists and arts specialists, whether they provide direct or integrated instruction, can model high levels of authentic engagement with the art forms. Arts instruction needs to provide high levels of aesthetic challenge in order to stimulate student learning. This is especially true for "at-risk" learners. As the arts education researcher Shirley Brice Heath has commented, we need "at-risk art for at-risk kids."

Myth: High art is the only real art, or "These kids ain't got no culture" (also known as the "Let them eat cake" myth). This myth assumes that students need to be "lifted up" to high culture; that culture is something that only occurs as curated in various official culture palaces. If the kids don't choose to be lifted up, well then, the school has the wrong kids or the kids have the wrong parents. There are contradictions in the high art world as well, with the prejudice in arts education being toward modernist high arts practice produced by honored and deceased individual artists rather than toward contemporary or postmodern or pre-modern practice.

Counter-Myth: Popular art is the only real art, or, the kids already know everything they need to know. This myth proposes that adults need to "get down" with the students in order for learners to relate to adult instruction. This patronizing myth depends upon the assumption that popular art is "low art" without complexity and sophistication, and that no authentic dialogue can be established across differences of age, taste, experience, or culture.

The More Complex Reality: Students need access to a wide range of aesthetic languages, including their own languages and a full range of diverse adult aesthetic and cultural languages. They need opportunities to perceive, create, present, compare, and

question a wide variety of genres and forms. Access to real expertise and understanding of cultural context about any form—popular or "high" art, culturally diverse or Eurocentric art, pre-modern or modern or postmodern art—are necessary to create authentic dialogue about artistic meaning.

Myth: Only certified in-school arts specialists are properly prepared to teach the arts.

Counter-Myth: Only practicing visiting artists are properly prepared to teach the arts.

The More Complex Reality: These two polarizing myths have been especially hurtful and divisive, pitting people against each other who should be advocating for each other. We actually need all the good thinkers about high-quality arts learning to work together across their differences in approach, rather than compete over limited resources.

In-school arts specialists are a bridge to school culture. Visiting artists are a bridge to the practicing arts world. Both are needed. In France, where in-school arts specialists remain firmly in place, national policy has added visiting artists working on integrated units as an element necessary for effective education in the twenty-first century. Visiting artists need better preparation in teaching methods, the scope and sequence of curriculum design, and developmentally appropriate instruction. In-school specialists need better preparation and support in collaborating with other academic colleagues, and in moving from a focus on presenting products and talent (contests, assemblies, "art nights") to developing products through ongoing critical thought and dialogue. Both need to advocate for theater, dance, literary arts, and media arts instruction in schools. The widespread myth that visiting artists are a wedge for eliminating certified arts specialists' positions has been contradicted by CAPE's experience: Those CAPE schools that have engaged the most visiting artists have *increased* their in-school art specialist positions.

html. See the “CAPE Convergence” exhibition as Chicago State University: <http://www.capeweb.org/indexVIDEO.html>.)

Research and Action Research:

Understanding teaching and learning in and through the arts is an ongoing process. Schools and initiatives must not only deliver programs, they must also see themselves as “learning organizations,” exploring the work as it unfolds. CAPE never initiates a new project without first determining what it intends to learn from the work and how it intends to learn it. CAPE engages professional researchers and employs a full-time research associate. All CAPE teachers and artists participate in “Action Research”—evidence-based investigations of their own teaching. “Arts Integration” is not seen as a rigid practice, but rather a field of inquiry (see <http://www.capeweb.org/rcape.html>). What’s next? Students as researchers of their teachers’ teaching and of their own learning.

In Conclusion

It takes work to plan effective direct instruction in arts education, and it also takes work to plan effective arts integration. With all the pressures on schools, it is tempting to leave arts education to the isolated arts specialist or to the transient visiting artist. But in an increasingly interconnected world, this will not do. The work of planning for *both* pays off in the end by generating self-sustaining positive

energy in schools for teachers, students, and parents. This requires vision, leadership, and effort. As does any educational success. When dollars are limited, it becomes increasingly important to prioritize our most innovative approaches. CAPE contends that a combination of direct instruction and arts integration are what the times call for. CAPE is just one of many initiatives across the country based on this belief, and these widely distributed programs collectively describe an arc that is well worth looking at as we consider arts education policy and arts education philanthropy. One thing that all these initiatives have in common, beyond their shared passion for the arts, is an ironclad respect for the creative capacities of teachers and students. They are based on the understanding that the arts are not only about content standards, but also about expressive human relationships, and they design their programs accordingly. Urban, suburban, and rural colleagues from all over—from Minneapolis, Dallas, Los Angeles, Alameda County, New York state, the state of Mississippi—are bringing innovative and effective arts learning to whole schools through a commitment to both direct instruction and arts integration. The false dichotomy has already been resolved again and again and again.

Let us close with a quote from the late, great arts education innovator Charles Fowler:

Properly conceived, the arts constitute a great integrating force in the school curriculum. To achieve such an end they must be viewed as a component of every discipline, for their subject matter is as broad as life itself.

Note

This piece was inspired by a presentation Arnold Aprill made at Grantmakers in the Arts.

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