

Advocating for the Arts in an Age of Multiliteracies

Samantha Caughlan

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Summary by Susie Mitchell

Summary of the Article

The article focuses on three types of benefits available through arts programs: art-based benefits, arts-related benefits (cognitive abilities, habits of mind) and ancillary benefits (further removed from the discipline of the arts such as the use of multiple intelligences through integration that raises literacy skills or facility with technology) (Caughlan, pg. 120).

Ancillary Benefits

- visual arts help students visualize what they are reading (Wilhelm, 2007)
- in today's technology rich environment, text does not stand alone, in electronic and print based materials there are pictures, graphics, layout, typefaces, etc. that contribute to the message (Kist, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2007)
- recent reference has been made to the development of multiliteracies with little reference to the arts
- many literacy studies operate outside the arts and arts education and focus on technology integration
- arts communities have embraced digital technologies, but not as much collaboration among researchers in both communities
- from over 40,000 articles linking reading and the arts, only 13 featured an strong experimental design

Arts-related Benefits

- recently, there is strong evidence to show that strong arts programs do promote academic achievement and lower dropout rates
- large-scale studies indicate "that the kinds of thinking and work involved in developing one's abilities in the visual arts, music, and theater also help students work collaboratively, engage in productive critique, complete complex projects, and develop a positive self-concept." (Caughlan, pg. 121)
- one study showed students in high-arts environments score higher in tests of creativity, fluency, originality, elaboration, and resistance to closure and their teachers in non arts subjects noticed strength in problem solving, maintaining attention during complex tasks, and collaborative work (Caughlan, pg. 121)
- the academic and social advantages for low socioeconomic status students with high arts engagement increased the longer they remained involved in the arts (Caughlan, pg. 122)

Arts-based Benefits

- some researchers argue that the arts should be studied for their own sake
- equity issue: Why should some students have access to arts programs and others don't and are denied the opportunity to develop artist skills?

- “The arts are important human ways of understanding and knowing, no less important than the sciences. Studying the arts should thus never be a frill, but should be a basic part of what we expect our children to learn” (Winner & Cooper, 2000, p. 66).
- arts provide authentic learning experiences based on rich learning tasks

Effectively Integrating the Arts and Literacy Learning

- arts in schools should be offered as a stand alone course AND integrated within the curriculum
- there is concern that without direct instruction the integration of the arts would only be a surface level implementation
- the arts give students something to read, write, and speak about and extends meaning
- examples of arts integration in instructional tasks include: creating picture books, using visual art and photography as writing prompts, web design, digital storytelling, blogs and wikis when visuals and sound are included
- an integration challenge happens when the teachers does not feel qualified to assess the quality of the art work, images, etc. and the assumption is the visual learners will make their own connections for why a specific image was chosen or a particular piece of art was used or the decision for the layout
- multiliteracies curriculum is strengthened by the integration of the arts
- electronic technologies can help support this integration
- multiliteracy advocates, technologists, engineers, artists all share the concept of design
- Rayala (2006) states that art educators should embrace design education including the study of fine art, visual culture, visual design, and visual communication in order to assist other classroom teachers with multiliteracy projects
- the article outlines some questions to consider when integrating arts in your school:
 - Who are the arts teachers and what does their curriculum look like?
 - Are there opportunities for integrated units?
 - Could you get together and talk about possibilities?
 - What is involved in art education? Get a clearer picture.
 - Bring artists from the community.