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Integrating art and literacy in the elementary classroom

Megan Kristine Sorensen
University of Northern Iowa

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INTEGRATING ART AND LITERACY
IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

A Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Designation

University Honors

Megan Kristine Sorensen

University of Northern Iowa

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INTRODUCTION

This project is about arts integration in elementary classrooms, specifically the integration of visual art and literacy. Its purpose is to examine the benefits of art integration and the ways it is currently being utilized in the classroom, both positively and negatively, in order to provide current and future teachers with a practical model for integrating instruction. As a pre-service teacher, I have spent time in a variety of classrooms observing the learning and instruction that is occurring therein. From these experiences I have discovered that art and content area learning are treated as two separate events. I see this as a problem since I believe that learning does not take place in a vacuum, there are connections that exist between every content area. In order for students to apply their learning outside of the classroom, they need to be able to see these connections. Art has always been a part of my life. When I was a child I enjoyed art because it was fun, engaging and an area in which I experienced success. Art provided me an active mode for self expression. I believe that when these elements are found in every classroom, more students will learn more, remember more, and do more.

Literature Review

What is arts integration?

Arts integration is generally used as an overarching term for the incorporation of the arts in the general education classroom. The four arts areas, music, visual art, drama, and dance, are actively taught in conjunction with the other core subject areas: math, reading, science, and social studies. In a sense, arts integration is really just mixing and matching content areas within the classroom setting. Learning activities associated with the arts are used to teach the core areas and vice versa. This could involve incorporating drama into a science lesson by acting out the

water cycle or studying quarter and eighth notes as part of a math lesson for fractions. Arts integration is intended to supplement specials classes, or the arts as independent classrooms that students visit once or twice a week and regular classroom instruction as a way to build connections within the curriculum.

As a whole, arts integration is becoming increasingly important as schools are calling on teachers to make connections between the subject areas. Current state and national standards are including 21st Century Skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving as part of the required curriculum. These skills are learned best through an integrated curriculum. As stated by The Partnership for 21st century skills, “Within the context of core knowledge instruction, students must also learn the essential skills for success in today’s world, such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration.” (The Partnership for 21st century skills, 2009, P21 Framework Definitions, para.3). Educators are recognizing the importance of building connections in the content as it brings relevance to student learning. Different subject areas reinforce one another through integration. When subject areas are presented separately from one another, students often miss out on important connections and may fail to find relevance in what is being taught (McDonald & Fischer, 2002).

However, arts integration is often defined differently among educators and these definitions vary in the quality with which the arts are addressed. In its best form, arts integration puts equal emphasis on both the art form and the content area being addressed. Both are given equal merit during instructional time and the learning goals concerning each are at the same level of rigor (Mishook, 2006). For some educators, however, arts integration in practice means something completely different. They believe that the art form should supplement the lesson and the lesson’s focus should be on the content area. In this case, art serves as a motivator for

students, something that teachers use to add flavor to a lesson, enhance the core concepts, or simply “provide background music” to the central learning activity (Mishook, 2006). Although some educators believe this to be art integration, the quality of art instruction is compromised when educators regard art integration as a supplementary activity. In fact, that definition of art integration is really not integration at all, but the act of using art activities to pad lessons. These activities are not learning based or high in rigor but activities that place art in a position that is secondary to the other subject area.

For my purposes, I will be treating the arts and the core subjects as equals in the classroom. I believe that arts integration is only truly effective when both are given equal merit. For the purpose of this paper, I will be focusing on one specific art form, visual art, and one specific content area, literacy (which includes both reading and language arts). I am interested in the natural connection that exists between literacy and the visual arts as both are means of personal expression (Hubbard & Ernst, 1996). Each is important in its own right. Art is an important aspect of culture (McDonald & Fischer, 2002) and literacy is “the basis of all learning” since all people read, write and speak to gain knowledge (McDonald & Fischer, 2006). As I have stated above, neither art nor literacy should take a backseat to the other in a truly integrated lesson. Art is more than decoration for literature (Hubbard & Ernst, 1996). Cowan and Albers (2006) put both art and literacy under the umbrella term “new literacy” which is the ability to read and interpret both words and images. They believe that students should be educated in new literacy. In fact, the Iowa Core Curriculum lists viewing as a central component of literacy. It states that teachers should be addressing visual art as part of the literacy curriculum (Iowa Department of Education, 2010). In order for students to meet these standards, they must be able

to recognize that visual art communicates meaning in a manner that is just as important as the meaning communicated through reading, writing, or speaking.

Why is arts integration important?

Now that the definition of arts integration has been established, its importance to classroom curriculum will be discussed. Arts integration creates dimension in learning goals and adds extra interest to the learning activity by creating concern for more than one concept (McDonald & Fisher, 2006). When students find an activity interesting, they will be more engaged; when students are engaged, they are more likely to retain what is taught. Connections within the curriculum also increase the relevance to students. When a student is able to connect a concept from one subject area to another, they begin to recognize that all subjects are small parts of a bigger picture. Connecting subject areas creates a context for the concepts that are being presented and students are able to build on their prior knowledge (McDonald & Fischer, 2006). The ability to activate students' prior knowledge is among the most important tools for a teacher to utilize during instruction. As Albers (1996) stated, "...arts inform our construction of meaning,". In other words, the arts create a forum for building connections between subject areas and students' prior knowledge.

Arts integration builds critical thinking and problem solving skills in students. This construction of skills happens when students are made active learners. The arts accomplish this naturally by requiring students to construct their own meanings for the art they make and the art they see or hear (Mulcahey, 2009). Art is all about process and learning through doing; the importance of art is not entirely in the finished product (Hope, 2008). The fact that art is so process based forces art makers to step back occasionally and think about what they have done

and what should be done next. This same process occurs when one is learning. The learner must step back and think about what they have learned; one must think about thinking (Catterall, 2007). This is called metacognition and it is an extremely valuable part of both the process of learning and the process of teaching. Art lends itself to these practices (Albers, 1997). When students reflect on their learning and assess what they know they are truly being active learners.

Benefits of arts integration go beyond the needs of the students as individuals and extend to the whole classroom community. Art lends itself well as a prompt for discussion and can therefore be used to bring up important issues like race and diversity (Mulcahey, 2009). It also benefits the classroom by being naturally differentiated to student needs, meaning many students who struggle in other subject areas may experience success when the arts are integrated into the curriculum. In the art room, students find equal ground. Since there are no “right answers” students do not experience as much pressure to do well. Therefore, students are likely to feel more capable and comfortable taking risks that will challenge them and extend their learning (Eubanks, 2002). Students who are “at-risk”, of low socio-economic status, or those who require extra support can benefit from the self-direction they gain through taking part in the arts (McDonald & Fischer, 2002). Students who are English language learners (ELLs) or who have disabilities are often able to experience greater levels of success in their arts classes than in the regular classroom (Catterall & Pepler, 2007). Choice and security are important elements that act as educational motivators for any student, and for ELLs, “Art class can be a non-threatening environment, empowering children with media choices they are free to make and setting secure boundaries for them within the scope of creativity” (Brunick, 1999, p.15). It only stands to reason that these students would show improvement in their regular classes if art were integrated. Overall, arts instruction positively impacts all students’ perceptions of their ability to succeed

when the arts are taught in a constructive manner (p. 556). When students believe that they can succeed, they are more likely to actually do so.

There are many benefits of arts integration as a whole, but I would like to focus specifically on the benefits of the visual arts and literacy. Visual arts include, but are not limited to, painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, and graphic design. Literacy includes both reading and language arts, which concern students' abilities to read, write, and communicate orally. Visual art impacts all three of these skills in profound ways. First, I will examine how visual arts and writing benefit one another in the development of student skills. According to Albers (1997), "Intimately connected to the authoring cycle, and artist's process of meaning making is situated within the artist's experiences, cuts across disciplines and sign systems, focuses its attention on meaning, invites revision, and critique in social setting, and is generative." Again, building on natural connections within the curriculum can only benefit student's current understanding and future learning.

Writing can serve as support for students' art when they write about an idea first and use that piece to prompt their artwork. The writing serves as a plan for their designs and often causes students to be more thoughtful about the processes they will use. Writing for art making also encourages students to think about the emotions, ideas, or key concepts that they want to be reflected in their art work. When students put this much careful thought into the art making process, both the learning experience and the product are of higher quality (Hubbard & Ernst, 1996). In reverse, when students are required to practice reflective writing *after* making art, they must think more about the practices they are using and how they are making choices that affect their piece (Hubbard & Ernst, 1996). In either case, writing descriptively can remind students to use detail and express ideas through their art (Mulcahey, 2009). Art can also be used in support

of writing, since artwork often serves as a prompt for students. In cases where students find it difficult to come up with something to write about, they can use art to generate ideas that will become pieces of writing (McDonald & Fischer, 2006; Cowan & Albers, 2006). When students base their writing on a piece of art, their use of figurative language increases (McDonald & Fischer, 2006; Hubbard, 1989; Hubbard & Ernst, 1996), the organization of the writing piece improves (Hubbard, 1989), and there is notable improvement in students' grammar and vocabulary. Because students can use artwork to express ideas that are more abstract, they are prompted to include these ideas in their writing as well. For example, Hubbard (1989) found that students who wrote about their art developed a greater ability to depict spatial illusionism in their art pieces which prompted their use of prepositions in writing. Visual art has always lent itself well to personal expression. Students are able to make art that reflects their own emotions while choosing the level of literalness they use in that art. Then, when they write about this art, the students bring more feeling and perspective to the writing piece (Cowan & Albers 2006).

Visual art and reading also greatly benefit one another, commonly through the use of illustrated books in the classroom. Teachers often use picture books as instructional tools, but when they make it a point to direct student attention to the illustrations, it can really aid in developing students' reading skills and art awareness. For early readers, illustrations are helpful for decoding unknown words. The students are able to deduct from the illustrations what is happening in the story and how this meaning is attached to the words written on the page (concepts about print are important for early readers to understand). In shared reading situations (where the teacher is reading to the students), teachers will often ask the students to use the illustrations to make predictions for what will happen next in the story. This also facilitates a child's ability to read and critically think about literature (McDonald & Fischer, 2002). Wordless

picture books and alphabet books are two specific types of children's books that are often used by teachers in literacy instruction. For obvious reasons, alphabet books are useful because they teach phonemic awareness. But, since many of these books are richly illustrated, they can also be used as a springboard for discussions about the visual art and art making (McDonald & Fischer, 2002). Wordless picture books can also help develop student speaking and writing skills since teachers often have students develop a written or spoken story to go with the illustrations (McDonald & Fischer, 2002).

Art benefits oral literacy in other ways as well. Art naturally lends itself to being discussed critically. When students talk about art, either their own work or the work of a peer or master artist, they are building their ability to communicate. Artists also often practice critique. Practicing critique, "the process and result of critical thinking about art; usually involves the description, analysis, and interpretation of art, as well as some judgment or determination of the quality of the piece" (Kentucky Educational Television, 2011, A section, para. 9), not only improves, student's art but their ability to effectively evaluate and communicate improves. When students are asked to think critically in a situation where there is not *one right answer* they build inquiry and problem solving skills necessary in all disciplines (Mulcahey, 2009).

Issues facing Arts Integration

Despite all the benefits of arts integration, not all schools are utilizing it, or at least not to the highest quality possible. Educators find it difficult to incorporate art into their regular classrooms for many reasons that. Many teachers feel that they are not qualified to teach art if they did not study art or have never felt confident about their art abilities. Other limitations on art integration have to do with the school system as a whole. Limitations on time and money can

greatly affect a teacher's ability to integrate art in the regular classroom setting. Time and funding for the arts may be overlooked by the curriculum, especially with the increased importance placed on standardized testing and goals for reaching proficiency.

Several possible solutions exist for these issues. For teachers who feel uncomfortable teaching art in their own classrooms, there are multiple ways they can educate themselves and build the confidence needed to teach art. First, teachers can develop their art skills by attending art classes offered through a college or adult learning program. There is also the possibility of learning art skills through professional development workshops (McDonald & Fischer, 2002). Classroom teachers can also benefit from increased communication with the school's art specialist. Through communicating with the art teacher, classroom teachers can learn new skills and collaborate on new ideas for integrating art with the core subjects. In circumstances where there are limited art resources, classroom teachers often default to teaching art in the same way they were taught, especially if a classroom teacher is not comfortable teaching visual art. (Mulcahey, 2009). These methods may or may not be the best way to teach art, so teachers must actively reflect on their teaching practices so students are receiving the best instruction possible.

Limited time and money also create challenges in integrating art. Public schools already receive limited amounts of funding, but, with the enactment of No Child Left Behind, increased interest is invested in the subject areas that are covered by standardized tests. Time and money is directed at raising student scores in these areas which often results in a shortage of funding for the arts (Mishook, 2006). One way to remedy this has been to integrate art into the regular classroom, which is important, but has its own set of challenges. Classroom teachers may already feel that their time and resources are taken up by the tested subject areas and that there is little left to direct toward art integration. However, when art is integrated in a quality way (that puts

equal emphasis on all subject areas) neither time nor resources are wasted. Rather, there is greater depth to the benefits of instruction. The key is that integration is done in a quality manner. When quality art integration is implemented, there was a notable correlation between the amount of arts integration and the improvement of achievement on standardized tests (Mishook, 2006, p. 9). If art is not integrated in a quality way, there is a risk that art may become too watered down and is of no benefit to anyone (p. 4).

Research Question

Instruction in the visual arts and literacy together can benefit student learning. When students are taught in this integrated manner, they gain more and develop their skills further than when subjects are taught separately or in an unbalanced approach. Quality art integration is not always present in the elementary classroom for a number of reasons. Once these reasons are identified, real steps can be taken to adapt instruction so that art can be integrated into the regular classroom curriculum. Through interviews and surveys, I identified the reasons that some teachers are not integrating art to the greatest extent possible. The main question I sought to answer was: How can elementary classroom teachers bring the visual arts into their curriculum? In answering this question, I also had to examine: How is art integration benefiting students in elementary classrooms? What challenges are teachers facing in trying to integrate art? How are these challenges preventing some teachers from integrating art in the best possible way or preventing them from integrating at all? What are some educators doing to improve integration? How can their methods be made applicable for all elementary classrooms?

The answers to these questions helped me develop a good model of how to realistically integrate art into regular classroom instruction. Classroom teachers should be given an idea of

how to meet the challenges that can arise with art integration. This model shows how one can assess the quality of the program as well as the quality of the students' learning.

Methodology

The procedure for this study consisted of two parts: surveys that were sent to several area schools and observation/interviews that were conducted at one school that is specifically focused on integrating art in the classroom. These two components were conducted somewhat simultaneously. First, the survey was created to assess teacher attitudes and strategies for art integration. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was attained and invitations were sent out to possible survey participants. Twenty possible participants total were selected from 8 rural and urban elementary schools in central and northern Iowa. These teachers were sent e-mails informing them of the study and inviting them to participate. The e-mail contained a link to the survey site (Appendix A). Participating teachers electronically agreed to the survey by reading the consent form and clicking yes. They were asked to respond within two weeks of receiving the survey.

The second part of my research was the observation/interview portion. The location of the school will not be disclosed, but it was selected for its current efforts to integrate art in to the middle school classrooms. Over the course of the past school year, classroom and art teachers worked together to develop a fully integrated curriculum. Permission from the principal was obtained, the interview questions were written (Appendix B) and approval was granted from IRB. Once IRB had given permission, consent forms were sent out to the students and parents (Appendix C). Visits to the school were conducted on two separate occasions. The first visit was conducted as the students and teachers were beginning a unit to integrate art with English class.

Since literacy is one of the primary areas of this study, I chose to observe the language arts classes specifically. The first visit involved the interviews with teachers and the principal and observations of the integrated classroom in action. The principal, art teacher and two other content area teachers, English and Math, were interviewed during sessions of about 20 to 40 minutes long. Photo documentation of student work was also obtained. During this visit the school was given the assent forms to send home with students (Appendix C). I then returned to the school to interview fifth and sixth grade students. These interviews took place after the Art/English projects had concluded. Five students were interviewed: three fifth grade students and two sixth grade students. All interviews were recorded and all participants were assigned pseudonyms. After the interview portion of the research I analyzed the data by reading the notes and reviewing the interviews. The information collected was then used to help design a lesson plan.

Results

My goal for this study was to determine how art integration is being used in the classroom currently and how educators may continue to incorporate art in their own classrooms. Through the survey I conducted, was able to get an idea of the current condition of arts integration in Iowa public schools. The purpose of the interviews was to learn more about how art can realistically be integrated based on one specific model of integration that is in use at such a school. First, the results of the survey give some indication of how art is being integrated in area schools.

Survey

Of the twenty teachers invited to participate in the survey, five responded. There was only a slight difference in the way that these teachers defined art integration. Two of the teachers defined art integration as the act of bringing art into the classroom as a concept that supports the instruction of core subjects. Two teachers stated that they believe art and core subjects should be equal in the classroom in order to fit the definition of true art integration. The fifth teacher defined art integration as bringing core subject concepts into the specials (art and music) classes. These differences in definitions likely contribute to the way in which teachers are using art in their instruction. The instruction of a teacher who says that art is a concept taught to support the core concepts will look different from the instruction of a teacher who feels art and core subjects are equals or the teacher who felt specials classes should be integrating the core subject areas.

All of the teachers that responded felt that art integration was important. Three of them even stated that integration is critical to quality learning. All of the teachers said that integration is important because it improves student learning. Four of the five also stated that art integration helps create connects between the different subject areas and that it excites and motivates students. The majority of teachers also stated that they integrate art in more than half of all learning activities. None of them stated that they integrated art daily. The most commonly integrated core subjects were Social Studies and Science. Teachers stated that these seemed like the most natural subject areas to integrate art with. When asked if they ever integrated art with literacy, four of the five teachers said yes. The most common way of integrating art and literacy was through story illustration. Across the board, the teachers said that art integration benefits their students by connecting subject areas, exciting and motivating students, and improving student learning.

When the teachers were asked about the amount of support they receive from administrators, their responses varied. Eighty percent of the teachers' responses were between moderate and no support. None of the teachers stated that their support was more than adequate. These results suggest that while art integration is recognized by teachers and administrators as an important element of instruction, it is not highest on the extensive list of priorities. To me, these results suggest that perhaps teachers would find integrating art more feasible if they had an easier means of approaching integration. Sixty percent of the teachers said that they would like to receive more information about using art integration in their classrooms. In response to this need, I set out to learn more about one school's specific model of integration and what teachers from that school could offer to the rest of the educational community.

Interviews and School Visit

In order to observe and collect data about a current art integration program, interviews were conducted at a middle school in an Iowa community of about 3,800 residents. Since the beginning of the school year in August, the teachers and administrators have been actively integrating art and the core subject classes. Art is a very important part of this community, which hosts multiple art festivals a year, is decorated by mural bearing barns, and is home to a small private college. The residents feel very strongly about art and that attitude is honored by the school system. Just by seeking permission to conduct these surveys, some of the more outspoken residents raised concern over how art has been integrated in their school and the future role of art integration as a result of this study.

This middle school educates students in grades five through eight. In past years, art has been an exploratory class, meaning students took art for 30 minutes every other day over nine

weeks of the academic year. Two years ago, a new principal, a self described risk taker, came to the school. As a new member of the school, she wanted to assess the school environment by finding out more about the teachers' concerns and goals. The art teacher specifically stated concern over the amount of art in the students' lives. He did not want to see art pushed aside in scheduling as it sometimes can be when emphasis is directed to the core subject areas. In response to this concern, the principal said, "As a fine arts person myself, I just think that that can really interrupt a child's life when we say to them, '[Art] isn't important, it's is not as important as everything else'..." Thus, they opened up discussions about how to establish art as a central part of the curriculum.

Shortly before the school year began, the principal, art, and core subject teachers began to sort out realistic possibilities for bringing art into the other classrooms. From these discussions, the current structure was created. In this structure, the art teacher circulates between the different core subject classes: Math, English, Science, and Social Studies for fifth, sixth, and seventh grade (he continues to teach eighth grade art as its own exploratory class). For three weeks of each subject, the art and classroom teacher work together to present a unit that incorporates the subject area concepts with art concepts. The lessons are usually designed to meet the classroom teacher's curricular plan. The two teachers meet and determine the point in the curriculum that the class will be at when their three week period begins. Once the art teacher knows what the classroom teacher's instructional goals will be, he creates a project that teaches art concepts in conjunction with the concepts for the core subject. The principal said that this structure is mainly based on her own philosophy about the arts, "It is about a deeper understanding of using hands on, visual representation of what a student understands about any concept...using art as a venue to get students to a deeper learning of any concept..."

Initially, the teachers agreed that they felt some apprehension. The English teacher stated that she feels she gives up three weeks of instruction during the three weeks of integration. Instead of teaching new concepts, she feels those three weeks become a time for review. The Math teacher said that she was apprehensive about a number of issues. First she was concerned about how art would fit into the curriculum. She was also concerned about who would be creating and instructing the art project since she felt she did not have enough art experience to feel comfortable teaching it. The principal said that there was also some concern from parents about the new art integration program. They were initially concerned about how well the core concepts would be addressed. Concern also developed about the state of the arts. Would they end up being phased out of the school entirely? The principal dealt with these concerns by providing lots of information to parents through monthly newsletters, a letter from the art teacher, research based booklets, and parent meetings to discuss the new format for instruction.

As the program evolved, many of these questions were answered and many more questions surfaced. In the interviews, the principal, Art, Math, and English teachers shared their personal feelings about art integration as it exists in their school. Five students were randomly selected to give their input about the way art integration has impacted their learning. From these interviews there were several common themes that I believe address the most important elements of art integration. These are elements that an educator should carefully consider when initiating an integrated curriculum. The first element of integration, and the element that was most commonly mentioned in the interviews, was time.

All of the teachers and students mentioned time in their interviews. In sum: everyone wanted more of it. The students felt that they were not getting as much art time as they liked having and teachers felt that they needed more time all around. Claire, a sixth grader, said that

she felt like she was missing out on the variety of art experiences she enjoys and Erin, in fifth grade, agreed. She said that she missed having art history as a part of the art curriculum. Overall, Arnold, a sixth grader, said that when art was a separate class they covered more topics and were able to address them in greater depth. Teachers shared similar feelings. Both the art and classroom teachers said that they felt that there was less time available for the instruction of their respective subjects. The teachers also stated that they would prefer more time for planning and reflection. As the English teacher said,

I wish we would have had a year before with our professional development days...I think we needed that planning time to do it as well as we could. We're jumping in, we're making it work this year. I hope we have some reflection time at the end of the year to say, "Okay, what works, what didn't?" at the end of the year to say, 'Okay, what works, what didn't?'

Another common factor from the teacher interviews was the importance of creating connections and maintaining balance between concepts. When multiple subject areas are integrated, natural connections between concepts are more visible to students and they benefit by learning to make generalizations. For example, the English teacher explained,

"Learning the writing process, that sort of thing...Having to generalize that to the project, it's kind of like 'Oh we do that here too. We're not in the English room. We have to use this in the art room too?'...I think that's really a great way to get them to generalize.... Here was a great way to see it and that you use those skills even when it's not just writing"

This connection is also illustrated by Figure 1, which shows an example of the storyboarding process students used to plan their integrated Art/English project.

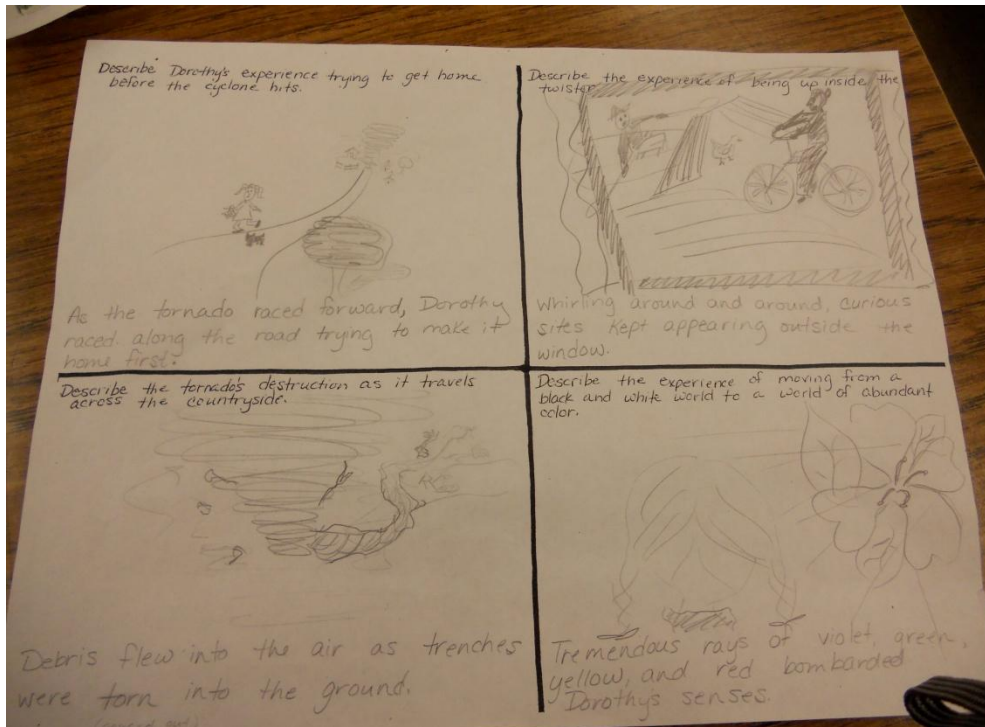


Figure 1: Drafting Sixth graders use planning time to build writing and drafting skills in their English/Art integration project, demonstrating to students the importance of planning and the connection between the writing and art making processes.

Maintaining balance between all subject areas was another common theme in the interviews. All teachers said that it was a challenge to keep the subject areas in balance. When both subject areas are in balance, however, the best characteristics of each are present. Both Claire and Erin stated that, as students, the freedom of expression is an important characteristic of art. When asked if he believed that expression was still present in this integrated style of teaching, the art teacher said yes. He also said that a benefit of art is that it allows the teachers and students to focus on the process of learning rather than just the product. The principal commented, "Because kids have to visually represent what they understand and when you can see it right there in front of you, you see what they get and what they don't get. When they're

just doing a problem and putting a number on the page, you don't know if they've copied that from the student next to them or how they got that." Figure 2 shows a student example of the social studies project students created to demonstrate the concept of absolute and relative location. For students and teachers to be able to see what and how they are learning as it is taught is very beneficial. The teacher can informally assess what students are receiving well and students can identify a purpose for the concepts that they are learning. As the art teacher said, "We don't always know what we know..." Learning through art can give students a glimpse at what they have learned.

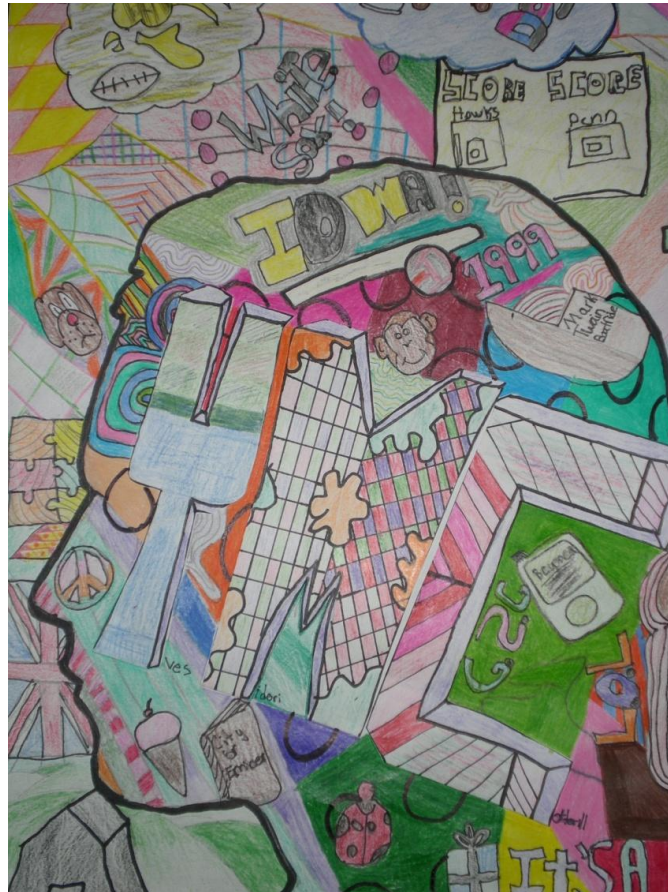


Figure 2: Social Studies Silhouettes Sixth graders demonstrated the abstract concepts of absolute and relative location by creating silhouettes about themselves.

Another main element of art integration is collaboration. The principal and all of the teachers stated that collaboration is critical to a program that integrates art well. There are many benefits of good collaboration. One is that classroom teachers learn more about art concepts, which improves the likelihood they will extend art activities into their own classrooms. The reverse benefit is that the art teacher also learns more about the core subject areas and about the culture of the regular classroom. As the principal pointed out, specialist teachers (like art and music teachers) can often seem removed from the rest of the staff. They are not present in the student's regular classroom activities and are therefore unaware of important events happening there. The principal said, "[The Art teacher] said to me he learned more about the sixth grade team and how they work together, how they discipline the kids, what their systems are, what their field trips are, what they expect of kids, their lingo...which only helps him support his classroom when he works with sixth graders." By teaching collaboratively, both teachers get the best of both worlds. This kind of collaboration also benefits the students. The students witness the live modeling of teamwork and get to see its benefits. As the Math teacher said, "Every kid in here knows art's my weakness... and he said, 'Here's what I just learned about math' and kids need to know that," thus demonstrating to students the importance of teamwork and that learning from others is a lifelong process.

The last common element in student and teacher interviews was differentiation and adaptation. Art is more fluid in nature. Art can change and adapt to meet the needs of the learner. This element was especially apparent in the interviews with the principal and the Math teacher. During the three weeks of integration of math and art, the endpoint of the unit shifted somewhat. The surrealism project (Figure 3) that was intended to focus on ratios and percentages became a lesson in decimals. The math teacher recognized that lesson actually became more directed

towards student needs than solely focused on meeting the curriculum goals. She stated, “We’re not on the same topic, but when we come to the percent chapter I’ll know a little bit more...I wouldn’t say behind...we’re at a different place with different materials, but I wouldn’t say behind.” In this sense, art integration allows for adaptability within the curriculum. Art integration also allows for differentiation. More different learning styles are addressed by varying the mode of instruction. As Brian, a fifth grader put it, “With art you don’t realize that you’re learning—you’re working hard and having fun.”

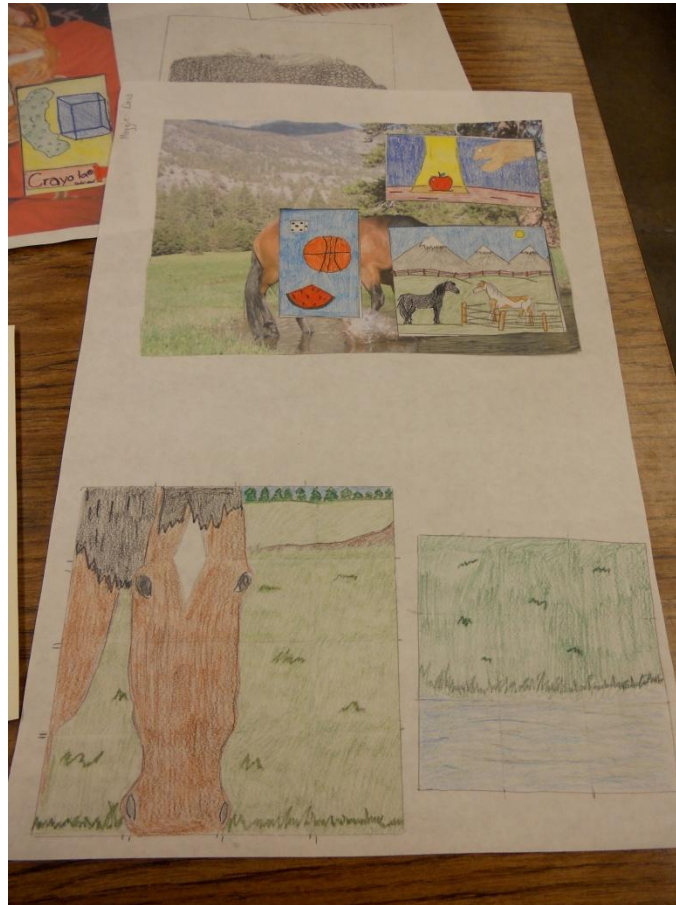


Figure 3: Surrealism and Math Sixth graders used ratios to enlarge an image and create a surrealist piece.

Conclusion

In sum, the main question that I sought to answer with my research was how teachers could better integrate art into their elementary classroom. First, I identified the number of ways in which art can benefit the students when integrated with core subject areas through my review of literature. Art benefits students by: establishing connections between learning goals, encouraging critical thinking, and providing a chance for all students to succeed through open ended work and opportunities for self expression. Literacy specifically shares many similar characteristics with art. Both of these subject areas relate to self expression and communication. When art making and literacy are paired, it establishes a reciprocal relationship that enhances both modes of communication. Art and literacy also both call for students to practice critique and revision. Even though all of these benefits exist, teachers are often reluctant to integrate art. Reasons for this reluctance include: a lack of time, resources, and skills. Most of this research concerned studies by researchers in classroom settings where they were noting their own reactions to the use of integration. Based on these findings, I wanted to find out if real teachers and students in an art integration model shared similar feelings.

Much of what the teachers and students said, echoed the findings of my research, however these teachers and students were able to offer their unique perspectives as educators seeking to meet the goals of a real-life curriculum; a curriculum influenced by the standards of the No Child Left Behind mandate. However, given the time constraints of the study, I feel there is room for further research. Considering this middle school had only been integrating art with its curriculum for little more than a semester, it would be very enlightening to return in a year or so to learn about the long term effects of this model. The other limitation of my research was that

the survey covered only a small sample of teachers in Iowa. Given more time, more teachers might be reached, and further data could be gathered for more thorough results.

Based on what I learned through the surveys and interviews, I would like to offer some advice to teachers who want to do more to integrate art into their own classrooms. After all, the purpose of this project was to answer the question, *How?* Here are the recommendations for how to better integrate art into elementary classrooms from the responses of teachers and students in an art integrated school, along with some recommendations based on my own observations and research.

Recommendations

During the interviews, students and teachers were asked to give advice to other teachers who would be interested in integrating more art into their curriculum. These are the recommendations that the teachers and students made based on their experiences over the course of the school year. First, attitude was cited as an important contributor to the success of an art integration program. As the Math teacher said, “You can make it what you want it to be. If you have a good outlook on it, a good attitude about it, it’s going to be great. If you go into it thinking I’m giving up three weeks of my time, you’re going to give up three weeks of your time.” As with anything in the realm of education, teachers and students must put in as much effort as they can hope to get out.

Second, as stated before, all teachers and students recommended that time should be given a great deal of consideration. Students recommended that time still be allowed for each content area independently, meaning that it is important that art still be honored as its own class along with the elements of art that are integrated into the regular classroom. Teachers were most

concerned about time for planning. All of them said that it was important to have time for planning and time for reflection.

A third suggestion was that teachers use mini-lessons to supplement classroom activities. That way there is the opportunity to provide direct instruction of new or difficult ideas. Finally, teachers in this school used technology to assist in their integrative teaching. For example, it was not always possible for the art teacher to be present for every integrated lesson that was taught. The English teacher decided that they could use podcasts to have the art teacher “present” for the lesson.

Along with these suggestions, I developed a lesson plan that could be used to integrate drawing and painting as art mediums with literacy through writing and reading (see Appendix D).. Not only does it provide practical application of these concepts, but it includes adaptations for multiple grade and ability levels. The materials required are of no extra expense. Paper, pencils, paint, crayons, or other mediums are materials commonly found in most elementary classrooms. Integrating art can be accomplished simply through regular implementation of lessons like this. This lesson is intended to serve as a small step teachers can take towards enriching their classroom curriculum and making student learning meaningful.

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APPENDICES

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Script for Email Survey:

You are invited to participate in a research project survey conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. The primary goal of this research is to learn more about current attitudes that teachers have about art integration and the extent to which art is being integrated. This survey is being sent to multiple teachers throughout the state of Iowa. You will be asked to complete it online and the answers will be compiled to provide research for our study. The survey consists of 10 questions and should take no more than 5 to 10 minutes to complete. There are no real risks or benefits in this study.

Information obtained during this study will be kept confidential. The summarized findings without identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized or lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

By selecting the 'yes' answer below, I am stating my awareness of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project.

Survey Questions:

Q: Which definition best fits your personal definition of what art integration is?

A: Art integration means making the arts a part of the regular classroom as they support core subject (math, reading, social studies, science) instruction.

B: Art integration means bringing the arts into the regular classroom as an element of curriculum equal to the core subject areas (in regards to time and rigor of instruction)

C: Art integration means bringing the core subject areas into special classes (art and music)

D: Other, please specify

Q: How important do you believe art integration is in the elementary setting?

Rate on a scale of 1 to 5

Q: To what extent do you integrate art into your classroom?

Rate on a scale of 1 to 5

Q: What subject is easiest to integrate?

Q: Do you use art with your reading/ language arts?

Q: Would you be interested in learning more about how to integrate art?

Q: How important is art integration in your school as a whole?

Rate on a scale of 1 to 5

Q: How much support for art integration do you receive from administration?

Rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being no support, 5 being full support)

Q: Why is art integration important? (select all that apply)

A: Connects subject areas

B: Excites/motivates students

C: improves student learning

D: not important

Q: What benefits do you see in your classroom from art integration? (select all that apply)

A: Connects subject areas

B: Excites/motivates students

C: improves student learning

D: not beneficial

Teacher Questions:

- How was your classroom different before art integration? (Both positive and negative differences)
- What does art integration mean to you?
- What do you consider when designing an art integrated lesson?
- What kinds of challenges have you faced in integrating art into the regular classroom curriculum?
- What are some things you have tried that haven't worked?
- What are some of the best methods you have used?
- How do you feel students are responding to art integration in the regular classroom?
- Have you noticed an improvement in your students' writing or reading skills? If so, how?
- Have you noticed an improvement in your students' art-making skills? If so, how?
- Do you believe there is a connection between the development of art skills and literacy skills?
- How has arts integration impacted your ability to differentiate instruction?
- How have parents responded to this change in the curriculum?
- How confident were you about teaching art before and after it was integrated into your classroom?
- Were you at all apprehensive about integrating art into your classroom?
- Do you feel art integration has changed you as a teacher? If so, how?

- What advice would you give to other teachers who are interested in integrating art into their own classrooms?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience with art integration?

Student Questions:

- Tell me about how your classroom was different last year (before art was integrated into the classroom).
- Did you prefer having art with you regular classroom studies or separate? Why?
- Do you think that your writing or reading skills have improved because of art? Why do you think so?
- Do you think that your art skills have improved because of reading and writing? Why do you think so?
- Would you like your school to continue having art as a part of the classroom? Why or why not?
- Tell me about your favorite project you've done so far. What did you learn from that project?
- Is there anything else you would like to say about art in the classroom?

Principal Questions:

- What does art integration mean to you?
- What prompted you to integrate art into the regular classroom?
- What steps did you take to do that (integrate art in the classroom)?
- What kinds of challenges have you faced in integrating art?
- What kinds of successes have you observed so far?
- What are some things you've had to change or tweak?
- How do you think you will be able to tell if the program is successful?
- What kind of support or opposition have you experienced from the faculty, community, and students?
- Why do you believe art integration is beneficial for students, teachers, or the school as a whole?
- What advice would you give to other educators interested in art integration?
- Is there anything else you would like to say about art integration?

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW**

PARENTAL PERMISSION

Invitation to Participate: Your child has been invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to allow your child to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate.

Nature and Purpose: This is a research study. The primary goal of the research is to observe a school program designed to integrate visual art in elementary/middle school classrooms, find out about the benefits and challenges of arts integration and to develop ideas to help other elementary teachers who want to implement arts integration into their classrooms.

Explanation of Procedures: We will be observing art classes that are integrated into the classroom at your child's school. Following these observations, your child will be asked to take part in a 30-minute interview at Mount Vernon Middle School regarding the integration of art into the classroom. This interview will not interfere with classroom time. The interview will be recorded on audiotape to help with collection of data. Your child's artwork may also be photographed.

Discomfort and Risks: There are no real risks in this study, although there is a chance your child may feel uncomfortable during our interview or embarrassed. In addition to these, there may be other unknown risks, or risks that we did not anticipate, associated with being in this study.

Benefits: We don't know if your child will benefit from being in this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through the learning of arts integration model at your child's school. We also hope that we can help future elementary teachers and art teachers become more comfortable integrating art into the regular curriculum. Your child will not be paid for being in this research study.

Confidentiality: Information obtained during this study, which could identify your child, will be kept confidential. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

To help protect your child's confidentiality, all interviews and information collected will be kept confidential in order to protect your child's identity and the identity of the schools in which your child attends. The final data will not contain any information that can link you directly to our research results. If

**University of Northern Iowa
Human Participants Review
Informed Assent**

Project Title: Integrating Art and Literacy into the Elementary Classroom

Name of Principal Investigator(s): Megan Sorensen and Wendy Miller, Instructor of Art Education

I, _____, have been told that one of my parents/guardians has given his/her permission for me to participate in an interview about how my art class has (integrated) become part of my regular classroom studies at school and have pictures taken of my artwork. I have been informed that this will not interfere with my classroom work.

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I have been told that I can stop participating in this project at any time. If I choose to stop or decide that I don't want to participate in this project at all, nothing bad will happen to me. My grades and privileges will not be affected in any way.

Name

Date

Lesson Plan

Title: Let's Play Telephone

Grades K-8

Learning Goal: Students will practice descriptive writing and expressive art making by playing an adapted game of telephone.

Objectives:

- Students will recognize and correctly name an important piece of art by a well known expressionist artist.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of expressionist characteristics through class discussion.
- Students will use descriptive writing and learned art vocabulary to write a simple analysis that describes the formal and emotional elements of the artwork.
- Students will create a piece of art based on another student's analysis.
- Students will critique one another's work.

Standards:

Iowa Core Curriculum

- **Writing** Standard 2: Students will be able to write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
- **Writing** Standard 4: Students will be able to produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- **Employability Skills** Standard 1: Students will be able to communicate and work productively with others emphasizing collaboration and cultural awareness to produce quality work.
- **Employability Skills** Standard 4: Students will be able to demonstrate initiative, creativity, self-direction, and entrepreneurial thinking to produce successful outcomes.

<http://www.corecurriculum.iowa.gov/Home.aspx>

Words and Artists to Know:

- Abstract
- Color
- line
- Edward Munch
- Franz Marc
- Jackson Polluck

<http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/ex/Expressionism>

<http://www.ket.org/artstoolkit/visual/glossary.htm>

Materials

- lined paper, pencils
- construction paper
- paints, crayons, markers, colored pencils

Introduction

1. Begin with a discussion with students about the Expressionist movement. Explain that artists of this era used their artwork to express their feelings and ideas. They did this through the kinds of lines and colors that they used: *What kind of colors might show that someone is sad? Angry? Happy? What kinds of lines show these same emotions?* Allow students to share their ideas.
2. Show students a piece of art by a well known expressionist artist. Have the students try to determine what the artist's purpose was by describing the kinds of lines and colors in the piece.
3. Then, introduce the artist. Students will need to know the name of the piece and the name of the artist.

Procedure: Guided Practice

1. Lead the students through an example of writing an analysis. This step will vary depending on the age and ability of the students. For younger students, a few sentences will be appropriate. Older students should be able to write a paragraph or two about the formal elements of the piece and what they believe the artist's purpose is.
2. Demonstrate how to write evaluative statements for the piece you have shown. Model your thought process by thinking aloud: *There are dark colors in this piece, the lines are bold and jagged...* On the board, put some of these statements into sentences so that the students can see how to construct a written analysis.
3. As you progress through the written analysis, invite students to share their own evaluative statements. Help them state their ideas in a way that is clear and meaningful and write them on the board.
4. Choose another piece of art to display for the students. You may choose to tell the title or not (sometimes telling the title of the piece will affect the way it is interpreted). Have students create a practice analysis of the piece. Encourage them to be clear and use lots of details. While students are writing, circulate the room to offer help as needed.
5. After students have had some time to write, ask a few students to share some of the ideas that they wrote about. Give verbal feedback to help them clarify their thoughts. At this time you may choose to tell students the title of the piece and discuss the artist's purpose.
6. Tell the students that they will now be writing independently. They will write an analysis of a new piece of expressionist art.

Procedure: Independent Practice

1. Display two or three new pieces of expressionist art. Students will choose a piece to write an analysis about, but they will not identify which piece in the writing. Students will be assessed based on the amount of detail that they use in describing the piece.
2. Once the students have completed their analyses, they will exchange their pieces among themselves. Each student will have an analysis written by another student. Take down the art pieces that students wrote the analyses.
3. From the new analysis, students will create a piece of art. They should first read the analysis they were given, and then create a piece of art that fits the description in the analysis. Students may interpret the analysis as they wish but they must try to stay as close to the description as possible.
4. Students should also consider neatness and completeness in their art piece. The goal for their artwork is that it be a quality piece of artwork: that it is neat, balanced, and completely colored.
5. After the students have completed their pieces, have them exchange again. Students will write an analysis for the new piece. Again, they need to be as detailed as possible.
6. Students will then compare the new analysis to the original analysis. *How are they alike? How are they different?*
7. Then, students will compare their art work to the artwork the original analysis was written from. *How are they alike? How are they different? Does the new piece express the same emotion as the original piece?*
8. Also, have the students make evaluative statements about their work. *How well did you describe the artist's work in your analysis? How well did you capture the essence of the analysis in your artwork? What would you change about your art work? What are the strengths of your piece?*

Assessment

- Writing assessment: Students will be assessed on 1) use of descriptive words, 2) organization/clarity of the piece, 3) correct use of punctuation, grammar, and spelling, 4) the ability to state the formal elements of the piece using the vocabulary. Points will be assigned for each of these criteria, and students who score more than half of the points are proficient.
- Art assessment: Students will be assessed on 1) ability to correctly recognize the featured artist/artwork 2) neatness and appeal of art work 3) effort to interpret and express the prompt artistically (Is their piece true to the feeling of the original? Are elements of the analysis present in the art work?). Points will be assigned for each of these criteria, and students who score more than half of the points are proficient.

Closure

1. Have students share their artwork and engage in a brief critique. *Whose piece was most like the prompt? Whose was most different? What kind of emotions do these pieces express?*

Adaptations

- **K-2 students-** Analyses may be shorter and simpler, focusing on adjectives and statements that express emotions. More time may be allowed for the writing and creating processes. Students may use crayons instead of markers.
- **3-5 students-** Analyses may be longer; about a paragraph or so in length. Focus should not only be directed to used of adjectives and expressive statements, but also organization. Students may be challenged to learn multiple artists and art works as well as some of the history of the expressionist era. Higher expectations for mechanics, grammar, and spelling.
- **Upper middle school-** Analyses should be multiple paragraphs, perhaps even a page or more. Descriptive and expressive statements should be well developed. Writing should also be well organized and clear. Students should use art vocabulary in their analyses. Students may learn multiple artists, art works and their significance, and historical background of the expressionist era. Mechanics, grammar, and spelling should be stronger. Art work should show attention to detail and be well developed.
- **English language learners-** Analyses should be written according to student ability. Translators may give help if needed. Make sure to model all steps of the processes. Artists from diverse cultures should be included.
- **Students with disabilities-** Analyses can be written according to student ability, they may be shorter and simpler for students who struggle. For students who have attention deficits, assign specific tasks and give clear directions multiple times in small intervals. For students with motor disabilities, provide larger paper and thicker markers or paint brushes.

Resources

<http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/ex/Expressionism>

<http://www.ket.org/artstoolkit/visual/glossary.htm>

<http://www.corecurriculum.iowa.gov/Home.aspx>

<http://officeport.com/edu/blooms.htm>

This Study by: Megan Sorensen

Entitled: Integrating art and literacy in the elementary classroom

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation University

Honors

Date

Wendy Miller, Honors Thesis Advisor, Art Education

Date

Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program