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Alexandria Sanford

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by

Alexandria Sanford

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the Education

Clara Baldus
Thesis Mentor

Spring 2019

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the
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Abstract

Although integrating art into instruction is commonly overlooked in elementary education, it is proven to improve student achievement. Pre-service elementary teachers should learn in college how to effectively teach students with arts integration. This literature review will discuss strategies to integrating art into instruction and the benefits to doing so. This study will confirm that arts integration is not frequently taught in education, but teachers are still expected to do so in their own classrooms even though they are not familiar with the strategies. Arts integration is key to student achievement and should be taught and used in the college of education curriculum.

Introduction

Art integration is commonly overlooked in elementary education. However, integrating art into instruction is proven to be a highly effective way to teach and learn (Cornett, 2015).

Students tend to be more motivated when art is integrated into the core curriculum, because it grabs their interest (Cornett, 2015). Arts integration is not often used in elementary classrooms.

It also is not often taught as an effective teaching strategy to pre-service elementary teachers.

Although art integration is key to improving student achievement, it is not seen as a priority.

Pre-service elementary teachers should learn how to effectively teach their students using arts integration. However, their education does not include this type of instruction. Also, pre-service teachers are not taught by their professors using arts integration. Pre-service teachers need to learn how to integrate arts into their instruction. Too often they are expected to teach this way, but they are not actually taught during their college years how to teach while integrating the arts for better achievement.

This literature review will discuss arts integration strategies, as well as the benefits to using them. This study will confirm the statement that arts integration is not taught frequently in the college of education, but is proven to improve student achievement. Arts integration is commonly expected of teachers, but it is not something they are familiar with because they have not been taught these strategies before. Arts integration is key to student achievement and should be taught and used in the college of education curriculum.

Specifically, my research question is:

How is arts integration taught to pre-service elementary teachers?

Review of Literature

Teaching Students How to Communicate with Art

Often times educators overlook the importance of storytelling and drawing with their readers. However, Martha Horn and Mary Ellen Giacobbe (2007) believe “in the early grades, talking and drawing can provide children with a natural pathway to writing.” The writing process allows students to analyze words they read regularly. Clements and Wachowiak (2010) state that “Children’s writing and their artwork are both enhanced by their learning to think, talk, write, and draw” (p. 102). It is important that we teach students to think their way through storytelling by talking, drawing, and then writing.

Kindergarteners often cannot write an entire story at their age, but they are capable of telling a story before they come to school. Peter Johnson explained that “Human beings are natural storytellers” (2007, p. 10). Teachers should make room for their students to tell stories in their classroom to enhance their writing. By telling stories, students will become known to each other. This strategy can and should be used in all classrooms and all grades. The most important aspect of storytelling or talking is that as students tell their story they will discover how the story should be organized on paper. For example, as a student tells a story other students may ask questions for more clarification, which pushes the storyteller to include more specific information. The story must also be organized in a way that allows the listeners to make sense of the story. As the student tells a story, he or she can tell if the audience is listening or finding the story interesting. For example, the student will notice his or her audience’s immediate response, such as whether they laugh, ask questions, or even their facial expressions.

Once students have told their stories aloud, they need to write their stories on paper. Horn and Giacobbe (2007) explain that “we want [students] to know there is another way to tell their

stories: on paper” but, this does not mean they need to use words to express their thinking (p. 27). Students can accurately draw pictures to represent the events in their stories. Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson (2003) explain that “Just as teacher-generated drawings help students visualize events and relationships portrayed in text, drawings done by students are or are not understanding about a text” (p. 761). Educators can teach them this by doing a picture walk through a picture book, by talking to the students about what is happening in the picture without reading the words on the page. Teachers should encourage students to tell stories through illustrations, but they must give their students the tools to draw well, just as they do with writing. Too often teachers do not have the tools or knowledge to teach their students how communicate through drawing.

Integrating Art into Reading Curriculum

Integrating art and literacy can enhance students’ reading comprehension tremendously (Cornett, 2015). There are many different strategies, and Jennifer Klein and Elizabeth Stuart (2013) focus on teaching these comprehension strategies through the visual arts (2013, p. 1). Children tend to be motivated by art. Art grabs the students’ interests and motivates them to learn. However, art isn’t just having students draw in class.

Making connections is an important reading comprehension strategy. As Bassett and Mitchell (2012) say, “Great writers are great observers. They consider the world around them, notice overlooked details, and make connections” (p. 1). For students that are struggling with this, teachers can use art to model making connections. Students can easily make connections between what they see now compared to what they’ve seen in the past (Clements & Wachowiak, 2010, p. 102). It is easier for students to learn to make connections with art instead of language.

Klein and Stuart (2013) explain that “by teaching this strategy through artwork first, children learn to make connections with a visual prompt (piece of art) prior to being required to connect to the printed word” (p.11). Children can respond and make connections better with pictures rather than words. Once they can make connections with art, then they can try it with text. This strategy can be transferred between art and reading. Klein and Stuart (2013) define five more comprehension strategies and explain how to use art to teach these strategies and the benefits.

There are many benefits to integrating art into reading. For example, by using art to teach new reading comprehension strategies, it builds confidence in students because they can apply the new strategies in a text-free environment (Klein & Stuart, 2013, p. 24). Claudia Cornett (2015) also believes that arts integration boosts students’ achievement for multiple reasons. It forces students to focus on creative thinking, such as imagine possibilities, connect ideas, communicate, etc. Art naturally promotes a more positive school environment because it “promotes a culture of respect for diverse ideas and unique ways to learn” (Cornett, 2015, p. xxi). Overall, it promotes greater collaboration between teachers and students, improves instructional effectiveness, increases the use of differentiated teaching, and is more efficient.

Arts integration is not commonly used in schools yet. According to Cornett (2015), schools cut instruction that is not directly linked to the preferred areas of achievement (p. 20). Teachers typically prioritize knowledge that is emphasized on standardized tests instead of combining the two contents. Unless the arts become to be viewed as important, the curriculum will lead to decreased test scores, as well as low teacher and student motivation (Cornett, 2015, p. 20). Also, Cornett (2015) explains that “Common Core makes demands on learning that are

achievable without the arts” (p. 20). Using the arts in instruction is key to improving student achievement.

RQ: How is arts integration taught to pre-service elementary teachers?

Method

To answer the proposed research question, I would analyze my past education course syllabi. These syllabi would prove whether arts integration is stated as an objective in the elementary courses. To choose the sample, I would choose syllabi from all of the education courses at the University of Iowa. Then, I would analyze each of the textbooks from the courses to determine whether they discuss arts integration. To begin the study, I would count how many syllabi mention the use of arts integration. I would use this number to create a percentage. In the end, my study will explain how arts integration is taught to pre-service elementary education teachers.

Methodology

I approached Dr. Clar Baldus and asked if she had any on going research related to arts integration. I was in the honors program at the University of Iowa already and was looking for a research opportunity. Dr. Clar Baldus teaches Creativity, Imagination, Play, and Human Development Through Art at the University of Iowa. The research topic that I took on was how is arts integration taught to pre-service elementary teachers like myself. The component that I focused on was specifically how arts integration is addressed in the the required education courses’ syllabi. Arts integration cannot be ignored in an elementary education program. It must be taught and pre-service teachers cannot be expected to know how to integrate the arts without

being taught how to do so. So, I want to focus on how often arts integration is taught in the required elementary education courses.

After returning from summer break with ideas, Dr. Clar Baldus and I bounced ideas off each other. We decided to begin by reviewing the syllabi of the required elementary education courses. This meant that I would examine the syllabi of each course that are required in the elementary education program. I would specifically look for mentions of art integration in the syllabi. I felt like this was a good idea because professors usually list their course objectives and standards in their syllabi. I wanted to see if they mention anything about art integration, cross-curricular content, and/or cross-disciplinary skills. I examined each syllabus separately and made notes regarding the mention of arts integration.

As I began examining the syllabi, I had concerns of possible issues that could go wrong and I will list them now and address them later. My first worry was that if almost all the syllabi do not mention arts integration. I was worried that if they did not mention it that I would need to find another way to research the course. I was also worried for the opposite scenario: what if almost all of the syllabi do mention arts integration. I thought that if they did mention arts integration, I would need to determine whether they actually implemented it into their instruction.

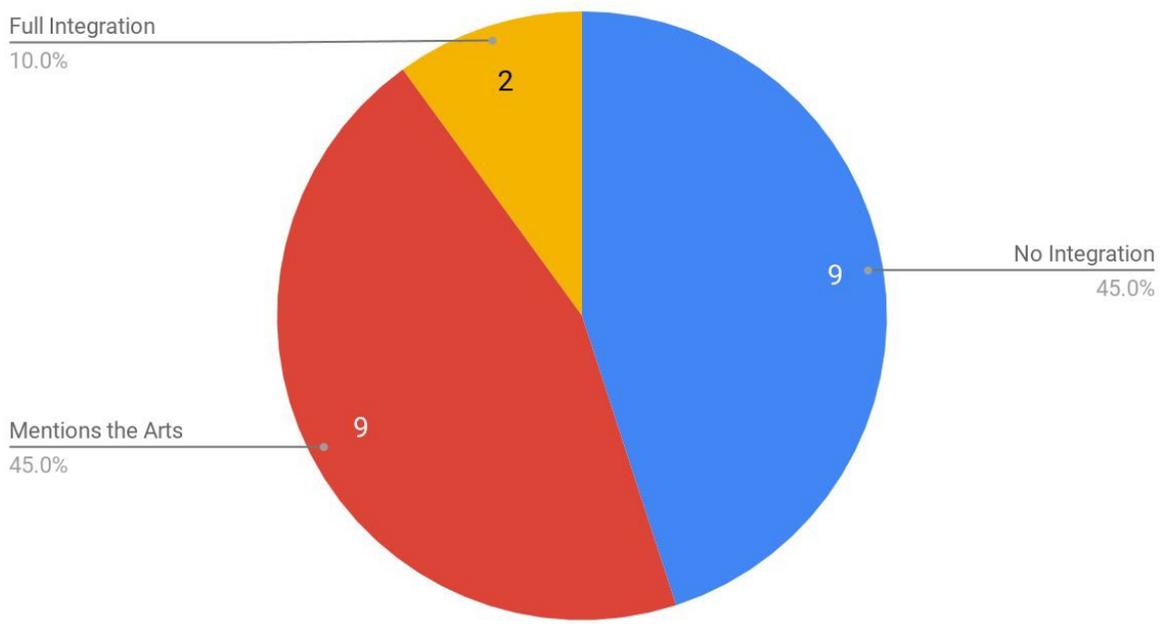
I had almost all the syllabi I needed since I was enrolled in the elementary education courses myself. If I did not have one of the syllabi, I was still able to log into the course website and receive it. Once I completed examining the syllabi, I began to review the data. Overall, this research project turned out with positive results.

As of now, I completed the only research for this project. I hope this project can be carried out in further years by myself or someone new. Since this is the first, I wanted to start small. I hope this project can grow into a bigger project because I believe arts integration is key to improving student achievement and should have a bigger emphasis in elementary education courses.

The Results

This study gave valuable data regarding the use of arts integration in the University of Iowa Elementary Education program. I analyzed 20 different syllabi of the required courses in the teacher preparation program. I used the syllabi to understand how arts integration is taught to pre-service teachers.

The Implementation of Arts Integration in the Courses' Syllabi



I read through each of the 20 syllabi and looked for words stating arts integration or something related to it. Overall, only two syllabi thoroughly discussed how the arts are integrated throughout the course. Nine of the syllabi mentioned the integration of arts subtly and at least once. However, nine of the syllabi did not mention arts integration at all.

The Discussion

This research study has many findings. The first finding is that arts integration is not seen as a priority to teach to pre-service elementary teachers. Even the syllabi that mentioned arts integration, did so very subtly and not enough to show that it is actually implemented throughout the course. The courses should be challenging students' to find ways to integrate art into the content they are learning about. The course should include material that will help them understand the coursework. However, students also need to learn how to implement the material in their own classroom so their future students can reach their full potential. Another finding is that only two course syllabi had a full explanation of art integration in their class. Nevertheless, these courses were focused on subjects that are not considered part of the core curriculum. So, it is interesting that these courses would focus on the integration, but the courses related to the core curriculum do not even mention the idea of arts integration.

This research project can be carried out in the future. It can be done more thoroughly, by analyzing the textbooks, the lecture information, and coursework. It also can be done by specifically researching as taking and attending the ongoing course. In my time at The University of Iowa I learned constantly about the importance of arts integration into the core disciplines. I strived to integrate it, but I had to do my own research to learn more about effectively and efficiently implementing it into my lessons. As my time at The University of Iowa is coming to

an end, I realize that I am not prepared to implement these strategies, but in order for pre-service teachers to be better prepared in this area, our teacher preparation program needs to require it in our courses. Arts integration is very important for elementary students and it should be taken seriously when planning the teacher preparation program at The University of Iowa.

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