

Arts Integration EVOLUTION: CAPE's Evolving Understanding of Effective Arts Integration

-Arnold Aprill, Summer 2004

CAPE's understanding of arts integration has grown from a binary **alignment** of an arts content standard with another academic standard to a **social definition of integration**—in which a variety of thinkers with diverse knowledge bases (classroom teachers, arts specialists, visiting artists, community members, other students) collaborate to form a rich and varied learning environment with the students at the center.

A Commitment to Constructivism:

CAPE is committed to the concept of **constructivism**- that the purpose of instruction is to support students in generating their own knowledge and in taking responsibility for their own disciplined inquiry. We believe that arts integration is an essential pathway to constructivism. This approach is not in contradiction to the standards movement, but does recognize that the standards only spring to life in the context of a community of adult and child thinkers in active dialogue with each other. The goal of rigorous self-directed student learning resolves the false divide between arts integration and direct instruction in the arts, with both contributing to this larger goal.

Multiple Purposes, Strategic Thinking:

Understanding the richness that arts integration contributes to education requires a recognition that arts integration serves multiple purposes, and that schools need to think strategically about how to best address each purpose. This requires documentation, reflection, and collaborative planning. These purposes include:

- **Deepening arts instruction** Arts integration is often perceived as compromising arts instruction. Our experience has been the exact opposite. Quality arts integration deepens the quality of arts learning. Very little art is (or ever was) purely formal. The idea that the content of art is limited to formal aesthetics is a historically recent concept that dominated the Western art world for a brief period, but seems to have “stuck” in the world of arts education. In fact, one of the primary characteristics of much contemporary art is the integration of ideas and questions from history, language, politics, media, science, etc.
- **Deepening other academic instruction:** The arts are primary and essential modes of perception and expression. Effective teaching of learners with a wide range of learning styles requires the inclusion of the arts in all instruction.
- **Creating Community:** Arts integration creates social cohesion- between classroom teachers and arts specialists, between educators and parents, between schools and arts organizations.

Arts Integration, General Education, and Authentic Art Making: CAPE's commitment to quality arts integration is explicitly located in the larger context of improving general education. Delivering arts content never trumps the wider learning

needs of the child. “We covered the arts, too bad the kids can’t read” is equivalent, in our minds, to “the patient died, but the operation was a success”. This does not, however, mean that arts instruction needs to be compromised. The integration of other academic areas into the arts and visa versa has consistently improved the quality of arts learning and art production in CAPE schools. For those arts specialists who have been willing to step forward as educational leaders in their schools, arts integration has deepened their teaching and connected them to the rest of the school. We stand by the artwork created in arts integrated classrooms. The integration suffuses the work with the dynamism and the grounding in personal and social meaning that we recognize from the best adult art practice. The students are not going through activities or exercises—they are making art, with all their faculties engaged.

“By offering more philosophic, less narrowly utilitarian rationales than those often discussed today, advocates for the arts and for arts education might help illuminate the woefully truncated nature of current discussion of education. Whether or not that would ensure the arts the central place they deserve in America or not, it might at least foster a keener appreciation for the kinds of discussions that are needed if education is to serve all people well... If artists, arts educators and arts advocates can discuss the arts in education in ways that will foster better, broader and less familiar ways to think and talk about education, they will have demonstrated the vital import of their craft. Few things could be more important.”

- E.C. Lageman, “The Arts and Educational Debate, “Teachers College Press