

What Is Arts Infusion?

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Arts infusion is an approach to teaching that brings the arts into the regular classroom setting to inspire creativity and promote problem-solving skills in non-arts subjects. While this concept may seem novel, it actually possesses a deep and rich history. The roots of arts infusion extend back to the early 20th century, when John Dewey called for a “correlated curriculum” in American schools. His groundbreaking book, *Art As Experience*, outlines the unique qualities the arts offer students in the process of learning. Arts infusion also finds inspiration in the work of educational pioneers Jerome Bruner (constructivism) and Howard Gardner (multiple intelligences). In an arts infused lesson, students use critical thinking skills to explore problems and construct real world solutions. As stated in the book *Renaissance in the Classroom*, arts infusion is “a powerful vehicle to cross the boundaries of core subjects and arts concepts, affective and cognitive modes of expression, form and content, process and products, the self and the world” (p. xxxiii).

In the arts infused classroom, students are actively engaged in learning. A typical lesson may involve singing, dancing, creating original art or simply responding to a piece of art (visual or musical). A key component in these experiences is in the connections made between the art form and the non-arts subject. In the *Handbook for K-8 Arts Integration*, Dr. Nan McDonald says these links come about through “purposeful planning with the arts” (p. xvii). In the arts infused classroom, the teacher plans with other classroom teachers, art and music teachers and teaching artists to find and plan strategies for making these connections in the classroom. As recognized by Goals 2000 and No Child Left Behind, the arts serve as a core content subject area. The introduction of the arts into the classroom should not be seen as a gimmick or solely for entertainment- the arts serve as unique, yet equal partners at the table of comprehensive, whole student education. In the Whole Schools Initiative report, *The Arts are an “R,” Too*, research in arts infused schools showed statistical gains in student achievement in comparison to non-arts infused schools. Dr. Dick Corbett, the lead evaluator in the four-year long research project, says he also observed drastic changes in the perception of schools when infusing the arts:

There’s no question that parents, in the interest of trying to provide the best education for their kids, sometimes don’t want their kids in public schools. The effect on the community and several of the Whole Schools is that they see parents bringing their kids back to the school (WSI web site).

School climate also benefits from a comprehensive arts infusion program. Across the country, schools infusing the arts into classroom teaching report having happier, more engaged students. Parental involvement often increases, and student suspensions and absences often decrease. Even teacher themselves show improvement in attendance. Dr. Debbie Davis, principal at Thomas Street Elementary in Tupelo, Mississippi, an arts infused model school, says her teachers often comment on their need to be at school, especially when involved in teaching an arts infused unit of study.

Finally, the collaboration between all parties involved in an arts infused school is the key determining factor in the program's level of success. Positive working relationships must exist between teachers, administration, parents and the community at large. Teachers must also learn to work in collaboration with their own students. In the arts infused school, education is truly a team effort!

Resources and Information on Arts Infusion

Here's an example from arts infusion in my classroom:

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2009/mar/15/education-soundtrack/>

Chicago Arts Partnership in Education

<http://www.capeweb.org>

Mississippi Whole Schools Initiative

<http://www.mswholeschools.org>

Kennedy Center ARTSEdge (great resource for lesson plans)

<http://www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org>

A+ Oklahoma Schools (statewide network of arts infused schools)

<http://www.aplusok.org>

Renaissance in the Classroom

http://www.amazon.com/Renaissance-Classroom-Integration-Meaningful-Learning/dp/0805838198/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1270152109&sr=1-1

Handbook for K-8 Arts Integration

http://www.amazon.com/Handbook-K-8-Arts-Integration-Purposeful/dp/0136138136/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1270152165&sr=1-1