

Arts integration enriches learning experiences by fostering creativity, critical thinking, and emotional expression, thereby enhancing students' overall cognitive and social development.



Unleashing
Creativity
in the
Classroom

★ **The Power of Arts Integration** || Jennifer Clements
Cathedral Arts Project



Have you ever wondered how to inject more creativity and innovation into traditional classroom settings? The Cathedral Arts Project (CAP) uses an exciting tool that's reshaping and revolutionizing the way it approaches education: arts integration.

According to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, arts integration is a method of teaching that supports students in constructing and demonstrating understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process that connects an art form and another subject area — like dance and math or visual arts and science — and meets evolving objectives in both.

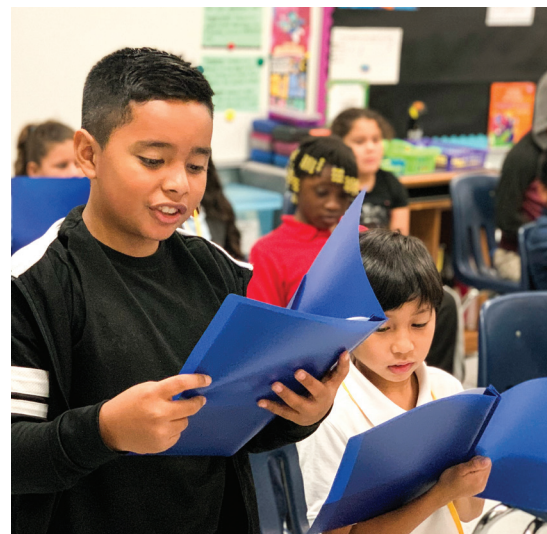
Arts integration makes learning meaningful. It helps students reach academic goals at a high level, build self-confidence, and increase cooperation and collaboration. This concept provides students with new ways to learn and retain lessons and equips educators with techniques that can be recreated and used in the future.

Breaking Down Barriers

Let's start with a common challenge in education: engaging students across diverse learning styles. Traditional classroom methods often rely heavily on lectures, textbooks, and standardized testing, which can leave many students feeling disengaged and uninspired. This one-size-fits-all approach fails to tap into the full potential of every child.

Arts integration takes a different path. By seamlessly weaving an art form — whether it's dance, music, theatre, or the visual arts — into core academic subjects like math, science, history, and language arts, educators can create dynamic classroom experiences that cater to various learning styles. Suddenly, abstract concepts become tangible and students are encouraged to think outside the box, fostering a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the material.

Consider, for example, CAP's dance and math arts integration program. Using number lines taped to the floor, students are able to solve addition and subtraction problems and use strategies like counting on and counting back while dancing across the floor. In the visual arts and science program, students use sand, dry lentils, and pebbles to depict the varying layers of the earth's crust, combining artistic expression and scientific understanding.



CAP's arts integration program at Spring Park Elementary School uses theatre to teach English language arts and improve literacy.

Photo: Elise Johnson

A student in CAP's visual arts and science arts integration program at Hyde Grove Early Learning Center puts paint to paper, illustrating science concepts they learned for a mural at the school.

Photo: Ingrid Damiani

While all students benefit significantly from arts integration, students who struggle in a particular academic area can rediscover their love for learning. Students who may not show success with traditional approaches to learning often find success through arts integration. That success then gives them more self-confidence to keep learning and growing.

Painting a New Picture

You might be wondering what sets arts integration apart from traditional education models. Imagine

this: Instead of memorizing multiplication tables, students create rhythmic patterns with body percussion to understand mathematical concepts. Rather than reading about historical events, they step into the shoes of historical figures through role-play and theatre.

Arts integration isn't just about making learning more fun — it's about making it more meaningful. By connecting abstract ideas with creative expression, students develop critical thinking skills,

We are honored to have CAP in our school to provide support for instruction in an innovative and engaging way. Arts integration exposes our students to theatre and nurtures their creativity by having them learn their grade-level reading concepts and standards using an extraordinary approach through the arts. This successful partnership elevates our instruction to a new level as students can think critically about a text and find unique ways to present their learning.

-Principal, Spring Park Elementary School in Jacksonville, Florida



Students at John Love Early Learning Center in Jacksonville, Florida, practice counting and math concepts while studying musical rhythm and meter. Photo: Ingrid Damiani



A student in CAP's arts integration program at Spring Park Elementary School gains confidence and improves literacy by reading aloud from a theatre script.

Photo: Elise Johnson

problem-solving abilities, and emotional intelligence. They learn to collaborate, communicate effectively, and approach challenges with confidence — all essential skills for success in the 21st century.

Unleashing Unlimited Potential

One of the most remarkable aspects of arts integration is its ability to unlock the full spectrum of human potential. It celebrates diversity, encourages self-expression, and nurtures a culture of curiosity and exploration. In a world where innovation reigns supreme, creativity isn't just a luxury — it's a necessity.

Arts integration also fosters empathy and cultural understanding by exposing students to different perspectives and experiences. Through the arts, they learn to appreciate the richness of human expression and the interconnectedness of our global community. In doing so, they become compassionate, socially conscious individuals who are equipped to tackle the complex challenges of our time.

The benefits of arts integration extend beyond the students in the classroom. This innovative approach also re-energizes educators. They are encouraged by the high levels of student engagement, hearing from all voices in the classroom, watching students learn through discovery, and learning new teaching strategies to add to their toolbox.

Making It Personal

Now, here's the million-dollar question: Can arts integration be adapted and adopted to improve your own efforts in shaping positive futures for children? Absolutely! Whether you're a teacher, parent, or community leader, there are countless ways to incorporate the arts into learning experiences.

Start by thinking outside the traditional curriculum and exploring interdisciplinary connections. Look for opportunities to integrate art into subjects that might seem unrelated at first glance. Encourage students to express themselves through various mediums and provide them with the freedom to explore their interests and passions.

Here's an example from one of CAP's recent theatre and English language arts integration programs. First-grade students immersed themselves in the story of *The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry & the Big Hungry Bear* using imaginative play to understand vocabulary. They explored the word "conceal" by acting out creative ways to hide their strawberries from the bear. The students were eager to move and play, and through the process gained an understanding of a new word.

Putting It to the Test

But does arts integration actually work? Yes, and there's plenty of evidence to demonstrate its success. Numerous studies have shown that arts integration leads to improved academic

Students used visual arts to connect with nature and study science objectives related to nature.

Photo: Ingrid Damiani



performance, increased student engagement, and enhanced social-emotional development. It's not just a theory — it's a proven strategy for transforming education.

In fact, through CAP's own data collection and analysis, the organization has seen statistically significant differences between CAP students and non-CAP peers, including:

- Attending three more days of school during the year
- Increasing an average of 100 Lexile points (specific to English language arts integration program)
- Receiving half as many behavioral violations
- Performing better than peers in non-arts integration classes.

By incorporating rigorous assessment measures and collecting data on student outcomes, researchers have been able to demonstrate the effectiveness of arts integration across diverse populations and settings. From urban schools to rural communities, from early childhood education to higher education institutions, the impact of arts integration is undeniable.

Sustaining Success

We know arts integration actually works, but is it a sustainable means of providing education? The answer is a resounding yes, but it requires commitment and support from all stakeholders. As educators, policymakers, and advocates, we must prioritize the arts as an essential component of a well-rounded education.

This means investing in professional development for teachers, allocating resources for arts programming, and fostering partnerships between schools, arts organizations, and the community. All this can be achieved through a collective impact model, which relies on collaboration between diverse stakeholders to pool resources, expertise, and perspectives, ultimately leading to more comprehensive and sustainable solutions for improving arts education access in the community.

This holistic approach can bring the benefits of arts integration to a broad spectrum of learners.

The social studies arts integration program at John E. Ford Pre K-8 Montessori greatly influenced student achievement. This school earned the highest student proficiency rate in the district that year and students became confident learners receiving coordinated arts-integrated teaching strategies.

-Chief Academic Office, Duval County Public Schools

By building a culture of creativity and innovation, we can ensure arts integration continues to thrive and evolve for the 21st century and beyond.

Embracing the Creative Revolution

Arts integration isn't just a trend — it's a revolution. It challenges us to rethink the way we approach education and empowers us to unleash the full potential of every child. By embracing creativity, innovation, and collaboration, we can create a brighter future for generations to come.



Students at John Love Early Learning Center created their own musical instruments while learning essential math skills, such as measuring. By making their measurements longer or shorter, they learned they could change the pitch of their instruments. *Photo: Ingrid Damiani*

Whether you're a teacher looking to spice up your lesson plans, a parent seeking to inspire your child's imagination, or an advocate fighting for educational equity, remember this: the power to transform education lies within each and every one of us. Let's harness the power of arts integration and paint a brighter future for our children — one brushstroke at a time.

Disclosure Statement:

The author is an employee of Cathedral Arts Project.

More About Arts Integration From Edutopia

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By Heather Sanderell

Seven ways teachers can use works by Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, and other artists to teach elementary and middle school math.

www.edutopia.org/article/using-art-teach-math-elementary-middle-school



An Arts-Integrated Approach to Teaching Engineering

By Liz MacLauchlan and Priscilla Kane Hellweg

Incorporating the arts into STEM education helps foster students' creativity, cognitive development, and content knowledge.

www.edutopia.org/article/integrating-arts-k-12-engineering



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By Louis Ford and JoDee Scissors

Culturally significant music can enhance lessons across several disciplines while building classroom unity.

www.edutopia.org/article/using-music-traditions-enrich-learning



Using Theatrical Activities to Teach Problem-Solving

By Mary Ann Loesch

Students can participate in collaborative and engaging activities that promote critical-thinking skill development.

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