

Music and Arts Integration

"Music is the electrical soil in which the spirit lives, thinks and invents." Ludwig van Beethoven

Music Education and the teaching of music is characteristically cross-curricular. For many years the Kennedy Center has been advocating for an approach to teaching in which the arts leverage learning in other subject areas such as science, language arts, mathematics, and social studies. (Defining Arts Integration, The Kennedy Center) So much brain research says that the more we incorporate movement, drawing, painting, music and emotions the better we learn and the better we retain what we learn. (Briggs)

Art and music integration is a purposeful merging of musical learning and academic content. It is not a catchy tune to remember the states or the alphabet (although those have their rightful place in influencing the brain and memory). In 1983 Howard Gardner, psychology professor at Harvard University, presented his Multiple Intelligence theory based upon many years of research. Promoting the concept that intelligence is not one entity but that there are many different forms of intelligence. The Multiple Intelligence teaching model emphasizes education for understanding rather than rote memory or the mimicking of skills. Practical hands-on skill development is coupled with factual knowledge and the ability to apply skills and information in real-life situations. (Brewer)

As music educators we must advocate for the integration of music into other subjects. It is time for us to become the resource and the specialist that helps bring student engagement in music to the other 85% of our student body that is not actively involved in our ensembles. The traditional, compartmentalized school model is based on assumptions which are not viable in the 21st Century. Analyzing and synthesizing information are essential skills that are part of musical understanding. In the western scientific community much research has been conducted to validate and expand our analytical knowledge of music. This research supports what we know from personal experience: Music greatly affects and enhances our learning and our lives! (Brewer)

Learning can occur *in*, *about* or *through* any discipline, therefore it is possible to learn *in*, *about* or *through* music. The responsibility for each of these should be determined by each school. Usually the music specialist is responsible for teaching *in* and *about* music and collaborating when necessary to teach *through* music. The classroom teacher might help teach *about* music and is primarily responsible for teaching *through* music. (Snyder)

In Eric Jensen's text "Music With the Brain in Mind" he states, "the effects of a music integrated curriculum go beyond cementing a new concept into the mind of a student. It is actually changing the brain itself! Music causes an increase in the number and strength of neural connections in the brain thus actually changing it. If the goal is to educate the whole child and music has been shown to strengthen the brain in the areas of reading, math, social emotional behavior and listening then wouldn't it be of great benefit for those making curriculum and budgeting decisions to consider such evidence?"

In the United States many of our four-year postsecondary institutions fall under the category of Liberal Arts Colleges or Universities. A liberal arts college is a college with an emphasis on undergraduate study in the arts and sciences. This term doesn't necessarily refer to art as a subject instead, it refers to the freedom to study a diverse array of subjects, treating each of those subjects like "an art," and approaching it with the expectation to acquire not just knowledge, but a new way of thinking. With the addition of the letter "A" in the STEM acronym and the ever growing movements to save arts programs around the globe and evidence of employers looking for a background in the arts when considering candidates for certain positions it's becoming clear that students of all subjects areas will benefit from an engagement with the arts in order to fulfill their academic potential. Let's help those teachers in the core subject areas find ways to enhance learning while engaging more students in music.

References:

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