



# **Change, Challenge, and Complexity in the College Curriculum**

**Nancy L. Sukornyk<sup>1</sup> and William T. Smale<sup>2\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*School of General Arts and Science, Fleming College, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.*

<sup>2</sup>*School of Education, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.*

## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author NLS wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author WTS completed the edits and revised the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

## **Article Information**

DOI: 10.9734/ARJASS/2020/V12i330189

### Editor(s):

(1) Dr. Abdullah Aydin, Ahi Evran University, Turkey.

### Reviewers:

(1) Olusakin Oluniyi, Adekunle Ajasin University, Nigeria.

(2) Michail Kalogiannakis, University of Crete, Greece.

(3) Cláudia Maia-Lima, Escola Superior de Educação do Porto, Portugal.

Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/62466>

**Original Research Article**

**Received 14 September 2020**

**Accepted 19 November 2020**

**Published 09 December 2020**

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the growing need for integrated arts education at the college level. Specifically, the authors describe the need for an arts program which incorporates multiple disciplines and connects them to other, non-creative disciplines. Arts education affords students invaluable lessons in critical thinking, creativity, and communication, all of which are essential for the successful navigation of 21st-century challenges. The authors conclude that, contrary to current trends wherein arts education is being marginalized at the post-secondary level, an integrated approach to college arts education offers indispensable skill and enlargement of perspective for the general education of successful balanced individuals.

*Keywords: Arts education; curriculum design; adult learner; instructional strategies.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

To make a successful transition from the academic world to the competitive world of

employment, students require an integrated approach to learning. This approach can be achieved by introducing a college-level curriculum on arts education that incorporates

\*Corresponding author: Email: [wsmale@ualberta.ca](mailto:wsmale@ualberta.ca), [williamsmale@trentu.ca](mailto:williamsmale@trentu.ca);

the disciplines of various art forms – literature (drama, prose and poetry), visual arts (painting, sculpture and other fine arts), film and music, to name only a few. Through building this type of integrated arts education around the central theme of the human journey, such a program allows students to critically examine and comprehend the importance of the arts for themselves and for humankind. In comparison to other students, those who learn the connections between, for example, the arts and the sciences, the arts and philosophy, or the arts and history, may possess a more balanced and complete understanding of their professional world and the major life challenges that lie beyond the limited perspective of the workplace [1,2].

All human beings share the experience that connects birth, growth, and death. This universal theme of the human journey traces the human experience from childhood to death through smaller, significant journeys related to the cycle of life: Coming of age, adolescence to young adulthood, process of aging, mortality, and identity.

For students to thrive in our ever-changing, complex world, such an inquiry into the human journey should be at the core of education. Such a study of the human journey by using the arts has the potential to encourage students to reflect sensitively on the life cycle of birth, growth, and death — to understand where they fit into a broader cultural and historical context, to learn how to overcome many of life's challenges, to empathize with other cultures, and to grow in meaningful and productive ways. Ultimately, an integrated arts education gives students the critical skills necessary to navigate an increasingly complex world [2,3,4].

## 2. PRESENT DEMANDS

*“Ironically, one area of thinking that has the most to offer is often the most neglected in our schools. I speak of the arts”* p. 76. [5]. Art is basic to the human experience. Exposure to the arts is crucial to our daily existence and affords us new opportunities to see, think, wonder, and learn [2]. With the increasing demands on crowded curriculums, students need this grounding to ensure that they fully participate in society. In addition, aesthetic pleasure is one of the chief lasting pleasures of life, and educating young adults in arts appreciation provides lifelong benefits.

The need for arts education in the college curriculum is now, more than ever, crucial to students' intellectual development. Students are widely exposed to media influences in the form of television, radio, magazines, the Internet, and video games. In our ever expanding world of technology and mass media, the need for the arts in our lives can no longer be dismissed [6].

When the arts are presented in a stimulating and exciting curriculum, students are naturally curious to discover whom they are as individuals and how their perception changes from childhood to adulthood. For this reason, studying the arts is a journey of exploration into one's own identity and potential [6]. The challenge, then, is to discover ways to stimulate student interest. The study of various art forms, such as painting, sculpture, literature, poetry, dance, and theatre, not only appeals to students because of the engaging and aesthetic enjoyment accompanying exposure to these forms, but also provides what Griffin et al. [3] call “a unique platform for creativity and interaction” (para. 13). Therefore, using the arts as a foundation to teach writing ensures that students will think about their own lives, their own identities, their own destinies, and where they “fit in.” Whether studying Lawrence Hill's novel *The Illegal*, Vincent van Gogh's painting *Starry Night*, Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*, or the film *The Imitation Game*, students are eager to share their ideas, thoughts, and perspectives and learn how to work within a variety of art forms.

Moreover, students desperately need critical thinking skills to survive in a media-saturated world. Ensuring students have the cognitive tools to critically analyze art forms helps to develop excellent skills in written and verbal communication, creativity, problem-solving, and co-operative learning. Students also benefit by developing personal and social values, increased self-esteem, and an appreciation of diversity.

Educators can take different starting points in teaching the arts by, for example, focusing on different themes, artistic periods or genres. For example, courses or units might focus on Renaissance painting and drama, Romantic poetry, Canadian film and sculpture, world or children's literature, all of which contain many possible thematic groupings for an arts-based curriculum centered on the overarching theme of the human journey. Frye [7] writes about the cycle of life from birth to death and back again to birth and suggested that “a great many primitive

stories and myths ... attach themselves to this cycle which stretches like a backbone through the middle of both human and natural life" (p. 19). An interdisciplinary college curriculum that includes multiple art forms encourages students to develop meaning in their own lives and shows them how their experiences mirror those of various writers, artists, and poets through the ages [8,9].

Not only is an understanding of the arts vital to improving students' communication and problem-solving skills, but, at the most rudimentary and basic level, the study of a variety of art forms makes learning enjoyable, inviting, and creative. In Canadian colleges, some students show little or no interest in language usage. An important question, therefore, must be answered: How can instructors make college English exciting to an accounting student, an engineering student, a nursing student, or a potential social service worker and still cover the basic learning outcomes of reading, writing, and grammar? The answer is complex and multifaceted, but is linked to the teacher's ability to motivate the students to achieve success. For example, when students are interested in the subject at hand, they will want to learn; students working towards a professional diploma or degree gradually come to understand that English is an indispensable and necessary life skill. Thus, whether the National Ballet of Canada is performing *Romeo and Juliet*, Peter Robinson is reading at Humber College, or the Art Gallery of Ontario is exhibiting the works of Claude Monet, students should be encouraged to attend and to respond to these events.

Another significant reason for including the arts in the college curriculum is that art contributes to human development. If an English instructor poses the question "Why do we bother reading literature, listening to music, or watching movies?" to a class, s/hemay discover that the students have rarely thought about this question. Often, they are challenged and excited by it; they are eager to respond with their own life experiences. Students enjoy discussing and sharing their reasons for reading their favourite novel, poem, or short story; listening to a song that resonates with them; or watching a captivating film.

Perhaps the most convincing reason for including the arts in the college curriculum is the recognition of arts-related programs in the business world. Employers who support the arts

believe that skills found in the workplace, such as written and verbal communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, innovation, creativity, and collaboration, are best developed by the arts [1,10]. One Toronto woman who left a life in finance to pursue an undergraduate arts degree commented on the value of the arts:

[Even though] a knowledge of Chaucer is not a prerequisite for many jobs these days ... it has been said that anyone who can follow the Old English version of *The Canterbury Tales* shouldn't have a problem deciphering the Notes to Financial Statements (p. A 22) [11].

Our world is constantly changing. Twentieth-century phenomena, such as the birth of rock 'n' roll, the two great wars, and the inception of the computer and social media, are echoed in the arts. This interconnectedness between our world and the art world is inevitable: People need to write, draw, compose, dance, and film to reflect the world that they see around them. These forms of expression are a part of our history, part of what makes us who we are.

There is no question that the educational reforms of the future should make room for students to experience the arts. A curriculum that prescribes students to acquire the "right" answers upon graduation does not prepare them for a world that is sometimes vague, often ambiguous, and certainly never "correct." The world is many shades of grey, and in this grey area of ambiguity and complexity, the critical and creative skills honed through arts education become most valuable. Students who learn to recognize the many nuances found in the range of art forms may be ready to face the ambiguities and complexities of the future.

### 3. THE MISSING LINK

Professional educators have a responsibility to ensure that the students of the 21st-century are equipped with the necessary skills to compete in the global economy. Students need to learn how to think critically, to write and speak clearly, to conduct research, to analyze and interpret readings, and to discuss complex ideas intelligently. Does this list constitute all forms of learning necessary for students to flourish in our changing world? What about the importance of collaborating with peers, developing empathy for others, discovering a personal voice, respecting fellow students and teachers, or understanding

real-life issues? A missing link in our school systems today may jeopardize the future of our students and the stability of our educational community. The missing link is the arts.

Several factors directly influence the survival of the arts programs in our schools today: The widespread public voice for quality education, the pervasive importance of quantitative test scores and college/university entrance requirements, and the impending threat of further cutbacks. Cutting the so-called “frills” courses that include the arts and developing a “back-to-basics” approach may prove detrimental to the next generation of students entering the post-industrial world. What is critical, in fact, is the re-emergence of a strong arts program at the post-secondary level of Canadian education. In the Canadian college system, for example, the need to integrate and sustain the arts in the curriculum is central and crucial for the intellectual development of the students.

Current approaches to the topic of arts education have taken a significant shift from the traditional mode of teaching, which stresses logic, judgment, and reason, in favour of a creative approach, which stresses intuition, awareness, and perception. Professional educators who have investigated the value of an arts-integrated curriculum found impressive results, which have led to an increased awareness of the need to include the arts in our schools. Students who study the arts are motivated to learn, respect their peers and teachers, are critical thinkers with an historical perspective, and most important, have a solid grasp of real-world ideas.

One myth that pervades the educational community is the notion that the arts are merely a “frill” and are therefore unnecessary to a professional education. In fact, many professional educators still remain unconvinced that studying the arts develops higher-order thinking skills. With the pressure of decreased preparation time, larger class sizes, and the demands of after-school programs, teachers would rather concentrate their efforts on traditional subjects. These educators share the belief that the traditional approach to teaching is the best way to create educated minds. The school system supports this notion with its emphasis on higher-order, rational thinking in the three Rs of reading, writing, and arithmetic. As a result, teachers in favour of an arts-integrated curriculum continue to be disregarded and marginalized [1].

#### 4. ARTS ADVOCACY

The theory that the so-called “left-brain” subjects, such as math and science, better prepare students for the real world than the “right-brain” arts subjects is disputable. Oddleifson [12] argued that analysis and logical reasoning, through the study of the sciences, were not the only ways to develop “intelligent” minds. According to Oddleifson [12], meaning is achieved when the intellect and the senses are combined. He believed that intellectual concepts are associated with logic and reason, two areas that are emphasized throughout the school curriculum. Sensory concepts, on the other hand, deal with emotion, perception, and creativity, terms not often attributed to critical thinking. Learning how to perceive the world requires people to be creative, intuitive, flexible, and divergent thinkers, or the kinds of thinkers who can “see” the world in its fullest form. Oddleifson [12] stressed the need to find a balance between the rational mind and the perceptive mind. The development of critical or “higher order” thinking is possible in both the sciences and the arts:

The sciences and the arts are both investigations into the nature of reality. Artists and scientists share the desire to investigate and express the ways interlocking pieces of reality fit together. They simply use different symbol systems and different ways of verifying their conclusions (p. 448) [12].

Oddleifson [12] also raised a fundamental question: are the sciences and the arts different after all? Leonardo da Vinci, the famous Italian artist of the High Renaissance, claimed that both art and science were intimately related [13]. His detailed, precise, and vivid observation of the human form, as seen in numerous drawings and scientific illustrations, attests to his profound insight into the rules of line, perspective, and anatomical beauty. Moreover, Roy Lichtenstein, a pop artist of the 1960s, once stated that “organized perception is what art is all about” (p. 95) [14]. Andy Warhol took this concept even further in the 1960s to elevate the power of the conceptual idea in modern art over the execution of a “craftsman’s” skills in drawing or sculpting.

Perhaps the arts and sciences are not so dissimilar after all. On the one hand, the sciences teach us to investigate, to solve problems, to

hypothesize, to theorize, to categorize, and to organize. The arts, on the other hand, teach us to react, to record, to interpret, to express, and to share our impressions of the world. Take the example of a common subject, such as the ocean. A scientist, on the one hand, explores the effects of the ocean on our weather, detailed form of salinity patterns, studies its various marine life, ocean surface topography, and records the movement of the tides. A poet, on the other hand, describes how the rhythm and movement of the ocean conjure up impressions that may include feelings of serenity, joy, fear, or even hostility. Whether an analysis of the ocean is scientific or metaphorical, the result is the same: An increased appreciation and understanding of a complex natural phenomenon. The former approach relies on logic, while the latter approach relies on intuitive understanding and perception. Each is equally necessary for real, holistic learning to take place.

The Japanese educational system prides itself on a rigorous approach to academic excellence, not only in mathematics and scientific disciplines but also in the arts. In fact, in Japanese classrooms, more time is spent teaching students to recognize the value of aesthetics than in North American classrooms [15]. Because the arts and the sciences both demand a high level of mental concentration, “much of the competitiveness in business and industry of the Japanese can be attributed to the inclusion of aesthetics and design conceptualization” (p. 11).

Dewey [16] also agreed that the kind of “intelligent” thinking necessary for logic and reasoning to occur was not reserved for only those persons deemed “intellectuals of an academy” (p. 46). In his book *Art as Experience*, Dewey stated that “the production of a work of genuine art probably demands more intelligence than does most of the so-called thinking that goes on among those who pride themselves on being intellectual” (p. 46):

The idea that the artist does not think as intently and penetratingly as a scientific inquirer is absurd. A painter must consciously undergo the effect of his every brush stroke or he will not be aware of what he is doing and where his work is going. Moreover, he has to see each particular connection of doing and undergoing in relation to the whole that he desires to produce (p. 45) [16].

Schools that deny the arts a rightful place in the curriculum result in a system that is “intellectually debilitating” (p. 594) [17]. Much of the learning that takes place in our schools is evaluated in multiple-choice, true/false types of tests where one right answer is the norm. Students naturally transfer this mindset to their literature classes and therefore may hesitate to express their opinion on, for instance, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* for fear of not knowing the right answer. Whereas math and science usually demand one possible response, the arts allow several responses. In real-world situations, people are not always called upon to produce a single, correct answer. In fact, the strength of a political debate, business meeting, or teacher conference relies to a large extent on the speakers’ ability to present multiple sides of a particular issue. Likewise, the arts teach us that a problem can be tackled in many different ways. According to Eisner [17], the “arts ... teach the child that the grass is not simply green; it is lavender, grey, gold. And when it is green, its varieties are endless” (p. 594). This ability for the arts to expand the parameters of one’s response to a particular problem or issue makes arts education particularly integral to intellectual growth.

The ability to look at a problem and offer various solutions is the kind of educated thinking Howard Gardner [18] proposed in his theory of multiple intelligences. In his book, *Frames of Mind* Gardner stated that everyone has the capacity to perform in all seven intelligences (i.e., verbal, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal), but often, only the first two, verbal and logical/mathematical, are taught in school. As a result, when students enter the workforce, they may exhibit — not surprisingly — stronger skills in speaking, logical reasoning, and mathematics. Given this fact, another crucial reason to introduce students to the arts is to let people flourish in the other intelligences that come naturally to them. For example, students who experience difficulties communicating a complex problem verbally often have better success by using visual, spatial, or interpersonal skills.

A curriculum that combines learning and personal discovery is central to a student’s success in school and in work. John Dewey [19] was one of the first educational philosophers to propose a “connection between education and personal experience” (p. 12). For Dewey, learning through experience was paramount for a

student's development. Unlike the traditional school, which advocated rote learning, teacher-directed instruction, and standardized testing, Dewey and the Progressive Movement of the 1920s encouraged students to learn through their personal experiences. Dewey shifted our thinking about students as a "product" to a focus on the students' overall "progress" and life development. In this approach, evaluation was meaningless to Dewey unless it examined the student's personal contributions. Dewey [20] defined "education" as a "continuing reconstruction of experience" and held that "the process and goal of education are one and the same thing" (p. 12). This definition means that education is a process of lifelong learning for students at every stage of their lives.

## 5. ARTS AND THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Perhaps the most convincing evidence that supports an arts-based curriculum is the connection between studying the arts and working in the real world. For students to successfully compete in a global economy, they need to have the skills both to solve mathematical or "left-brain" problems and to think in a creative or "right-brain" way. The common trend toward more IT (Information Technology) training is becoming a thing of the past [21]. Instead, more and more businesses are employing graduates with more than just technical skills. Today, graduates need to wear many hats to thrive in the business world; that is, they not only need to possess outstanding qualifications in their fields of study, but also to be able to communicate well with others. Employers are seeking people who are problem solvers, innovative thinkers, independent workers, and, most important, collaborative team players [22,23]. Rarely are employees fired for inadequate job skills; rather, they lose their jobs because they do not get along with their boss and/or colleagues.

Reputable organizations such as Bell Canada and the Rothman School of Management are setting a new trend for the 21st-century. These and other enterprises hired the Avenue Road Arts School (a corporate arts training program) to teach their employees how to think quickly and creatively [21]. Through role-play and improvisation exercises, the art and drama teachers of this unique school advocate the importance of "forming partnerships, building networks and working in teams" [21]. According to Lola Rasminsky [21], the director of the

Avenue Road Arts School in Toronto, "an artist's expression has to come from a deep and real place if it is to be authentic and convincing". Our future, then, depends largely on our ability to think artistically.

## 6. THE ADULT LEARNER

In designing an interdisciplinary curriculum for college students, educators must consider the unique characteristics of the adult learner. Adults bring to the classroom many different prior learning experiences, interests, and types of knowledge. Therefore, for authentic learning to take place, instructors must be aware of mature students' likes and dislikes. Adults, first and foremost, like to determine their own learning experiences. For example, they prefer to be a part of the decision-making process, they like to have choices, and they want their ideas to be acknowledged [24]. Knowles (1984) stated that adults also enjoy small-group interactions where they can learn from other students' experiences and share their own. Some, but not all, adults like lectures. Variety is the key to active learning. Twenty-minute mini-lectures followed by group work, class discussion, jigsaw activity, pair work, or writing tasks work well to keep the adult learner stimulated. Adults are motivated when they identify a specific and relevant need to learn (e.g., societal or professional pressures) because they hate to have their time wasted [25]. Most important, adults want practical answers for today's problems.

## 7. RATIONALE FOR STUDYING LITERATURE, FILM, AND ART

### 7.1 Literature

The writings of professional teachers, philosophers, and cognitive psychologists (all strong proponents of the arts) continue to influence, inspire, and defend the role of the arts in shaping the lives of our students. One of the most revered authors on the subject of the social value of the arts, Northrop Frye [7], presented a compelling case for studying literature (the novel, short fiction, and poetry) in his book *The Educated Imagination*. Frye's thesis is that imagination plays a key role in our need to include literature in our lives because it gives us "the power [to construct] possible models of human experience" (p. 5). According to Frye, the human journey begins with our imagination, the kind of world we envision for ourselves (what we construct), and moves towards the kind of world

we experience (what we see). The former belongs to the world of literature. In other words, writers are constantly recreating literary archetypal models that already exist, such as Cinderella, the journey of the hero, and Oedipus Rex, to produce their own stories. It is not surprising, then, that in the books we read and the films we watch, we find connections with familiar literary themes: the loss of identity, the search for love, the need for revenge, and the fear of dying, to name a few. "In literature," Frye stated, "you don't just read one poem or novel after another, but enter into a complete world of which every work of literature forms part" (p. 27) [7].

Students themselves agree that, first and foremost, reading literature is a subjective experience, and they enjoy the vicarious journey of reading a good novel. In addition, literature has a timeless quality. The characters of Prim in *The Hunger Games*, Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, and Aminata Diallo in *The Book of Negroes* are archetypes; they possess character traits that students can identify in themselves, in their friends, in their coworkers, and in their family members. In essence, they come to understand that reading literature is reading about life. Third, literature awakens the students' power of imagination. When students enjoy reading a work of literature, they form "definite, vivid, and growing images" (p. 13) [19] that they connect with their life experiences. Finally, in the words of C.S. Lewis (as spoken by Anthony Hopkins in the film *Shadowlands*), "We read to know we're not alone."

Therefore, literature sends strong messages about personal discovery and, according to Frye [7], is a "living" art form. Characters in novels, though fictional, possess personality traits and morals that mirror and illuminate real people in our real world:

The poet's job is not to tell you what happened, but what happens: Not what did take place, but the kind of thing that always does take place. He gives you the typical, recurring, or what Aristotle calls universal event. You wouldn't go to Macbeth to learn about the history of Scotland – you go to it to learn what a man feels like after he's gained a kingdom and lost his soul. When you meet such a character as Micawber in Dickens, you don't feel that there must have been a man Dickens knew who was exactly like this; you feel that there's a bit of Micawber in

almost everybody you know, including yourself (p. 24) [7].

Here, Frye [7] presents a convincing argument that literature carries personal messages and makes a case for including literature in our lives.

## 7.2 Film

Film is a very popular art form. People of all ages watch film to learn something new, to relieve loneliness, or simply to be entertained. After watching films, people enjoy discussing what they have seen; for example, viewers are intrigued by a father playing a game to keep his son alive in a concentration camp during the Second World War in *Life is Beautiful*; single parents may identify with the pressure of finding a job and raising children in *Erin Brockovich*.

Films, therefore, allow people to experience a vicarious journey similar to that in good books. Watching a good film "lets us be other, to touch and taste the other, to sense the shock and satisfaction of otherness. A [film] lets us be ourselves and yet enter another person's boundaried world" (p. 405) [26].

Bringing film into the classroom, then, is another way for students to experience similar emotions, such as fear, loneliness, happiness, or relief, that are similar to those of the main character 'inner lives and outer worlds' [27,28]. Students soon appreciate common universal themes in film that matter in their day-to-day lives. One exercise that students find interesting is watching a film and taking notes about their favorite scene(s), the transformation of key characters, and possible themes. After sharing their ideas with the class, the students start to see connections between the opening and closing scenes, they start to understand a character's behaviour, and they start to discover major themes. For instance, after students watch the film *Dead Poets Society*, they begin to make connections between a character such as Todd Anderson and their own lives. At the beginning of the film, Todd is a shy, introverted young man who is afraid to recite a poem in front of his English class. Throughout the film, Todd overcomes many challenges that eventually increase his self-confidence and assertiveness. Students can identify with his fear, learn that they are not alone, and realize that they, too, can triumph over their limitations. By the end of the film, Todd has transformed into a stronger, more confident man with a voice of his own. Students watch this film and learn from it.

Students certainly enjoy watching films; yet articulating their ideas about them is a daunting task. Corrigan [29] asserted that if film is taught by using a cohesive framework and with clear objectives, students can improve their higher-order thinking skills. Compared to novels, film relies more on symbols, visual images, and graphics to communicate its message, yet students can increase their film literacy in a variety of ways.

### 7.3 Art

Studying art, whether it is a painting, sculpture, or architecture, is essential for students to be well-rounded individuals. Many academic scholars who defend the need for integrating art into the school curriculum provide sound evidence. For example, Perrin [23] described art as a lifelong process. Through art, according to Perrin [23], students are trained to be creative, devoted, collaborative, and nonjudgmental learners, or to be the kind of people who are deemed valuable in the workplace. College and university students who are exposed to art soon understand the unique relationship between learning the arts and academic learning. Eisner [17] supported Perrin's (1994) view that learning about art involves learning about one's self. In developing an integrated curriculum including the arts, Eisner's keen understanding of integrating art and literature should not be overlooked:

Consider the paintings of Francis Bacon, Velasquez, or Picasso, or consider the novels of John Steinbeck or Cervantes. Even fiction – perhaps especially fiction – can help us grasp the meaning not only of Don Quixote, the particular man, but of what we all share with him as we tilt at our own windmills, struggling to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles (p. 593) [17].

This passage by Eisner reinforced the notion that students who learn about art also learn about themselves.

Dewey [16], who discussed art and the human condition in his text *Art as Experience*, believed that the arts provide an avenue for people to be able to express themselves and connect with others through personal growth and meaningful learning experiences. Even though Dewey was writing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, his views are still convincing today. For example, Dewey [16]

agreed with Frye [7] that art mirrors personal experiences:

A work of art, no matter how old or classic, is actually, not just potentially, a work of art when it lives in some individual experience. A piece of parchment, of marble, of canvas, it remains self-identical throughout the ages. But as a work of art it is re-created every time it is aesthetically experienced .... The Parthenon, or whatever, is universal because it can continue to inspire new personal realizations in experience (pp. 108-109) [16].

According to Dewey [16], art is a universal human experience because people, at various stages of their lives, celebrate art in an infinite number of ways.

## 8. UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM

In recent years, the community college systems have undergone many changes in their approach to learning. The traditional teacher-centred approach, for example, which was prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s, has now been combined with or replaced by the student-centred approach. This latter approach, which was strongly supported by Dewey [16] and the Progressive Movement, allows students to have more ownership over their learning than the traditional approach provides. They learn to take initiative and become more responsible through co-operative group work, think-pair-share activities, debates, jigsaw activities, group presentations, and journal writing. In the past, the teacher took on the role of lecturer, with an emphasis on blackboard notes and rote learning. Today, however, the image of the teacher has shifted to the role of facilitator, with active student involvement, the use of the Socratic Method, and shared ideas.

The traditional teacher-centred approach has been most commonly replaced in the community college system. For three good reasons, college instructors have abandoned a didactic style and opted for a student-centred approach for adult learners in the classroom. First, adults dislike having their time wasted; therefore, they always seek practical solutions, they enjoy practical problem solving, and they want to be challenged. Second, adults like some lectures, but all lectures are not liked by all adults [e.g.,25,30]. They prefer a mixture of small-group interactions, mini-lectures, the Socratic Method, debates, and



seminars. Moreover, adults are motivated when societal or professional pressures require a particular learning need and when students personally identify that they have a need to learn. Third, adults like to contribute to their own learning experiences [25,29]. Whenever possible, adults like the opportunity to determine what they wish to learn.

Since the 1980s, college instructors have been experimenting with many innovative ways to present course material to their students. One way that has proven to be successful is for teachers to design an interdisciplinary curriculum in which students make connections between one subject, such as science, and other disciplines, such as art, music, history, and politics.

Many factors account for the growing popularity of interdisciplinary curricula in the school system. One significant reason has been the concern among professional educators that a connection does not exist between the school day and the real world [31,32]. A typical school day is broken up into separate time slots in which subjects are taught in isolation. A student's morning, for instance, could consist of math, English, and gym classes followed by an afternoon of science and history classes. More and more teachers are realizing, however, that this kind of fragmentation in a school day serves little purpose for students upon graduation. According to Jacobs [31], "When subjects are taught in isolation, 'accumulation' of knowledge is the focus; an integrated curriculum demands higher-order connection making and synthesis that promote real, long-term understanding" (p. 43).

Another relevant issue focuses on learning across the curriculum. For example, when students leave an English class and enter a history class to write an in-class essay, do they consciously transfer the principles of essay writing (e.g., thesis statement, topic sentences, supporting examples) and apply them in this new context? Or do they, instead, unintentionally "forget" the previously learned material? These questions raise the concern that, unless students are taught to transfer key skills from one class to another, they often will not make the connection by themselves:

It is taken for granted, apparently, that in time students will see for themselves how things fit together. Unfortunately, the reality of the situation is that they tend to learn what

we teach. If we teach connectedness and integration, they learn that. If we teach separateness and discontinuity, that's what they learn. To suppose otherwise would be incongruous (p.xi) [33].

## 9. INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

While the selection of meaningful course materials is an important factor in an integrated curriculum design, the ways in which the instructor presents the materials are crucial for constructive learning to take place. Jacobsen [34] discussed four main goals that instructors need to consider in the development of practical teaching strategies. First, the implementation of both teacher-centred and student-centred teaching methods is key to offering an interesting, varied approach. Second, instructors should consistently vary their learning methods in the classroom through such techniques as collaborative learning, the Socratic Method, and debate. Third, the instructor's sensitivity to the cultural diversity of the students is equally important in developing valuable strategies. Fourth, accommodating various learning styles according to Gardner's (2006) theory of multiple intelligences will aid in meeting the students' individual interests and needs.

Striking a balance between teacher-centred instruction (e.g., eliciting responses from a reading, teaching a particular literary style) and student-centred instruction (e.g., workshop activities) works well to ensure successful learning takes place. In this way, students are motivated to learn, knowledge and authority are not always dominated by the instructor, and the variety of activities fosters creativity in the classroom [35]. Alternating different teaching strategies gives students a fresh, unique perspective from which they can grasp ideas, learn new concepts, and synthesize information.

Another fundamental component of teaching strategies related to arts education is the recognition and inclusion of cultural diversity. Today, the idea of empowering minority students is gaining momentum. A new framework for addressing diversity needs to be implemented in the classroom, one that includes a broad representation of language and culture. One of the best ways to ensure equality is through group work because it brings together a blend of ages, genders, cultures, and religions, and it allows the instructor to cover large amounts of material in a short time frame.

The students' learning styles also need to be considered. Are the students visual learners or auditory learners or both? At what rate of speed do the students learn? Do the students take notes, tape lessons, or simply listen? Are the students second-language learners? Do the students have special learning needs (e.g., because of dyslexia, ADD, or a hearing impairment)? The answers to all these questions vary because each learner has a different style of learning. Therefore, instructors must make accommodations to meet the needs of all students. In each lesson plan, for example, modifications need to be clearly stated for ESL and special needs students in the form of handouts, audio-taped lectures, student note takers, web boards, and extended time for tests and alternative formats.

The development of effective teaching strategies involves a genuine concern for the maturity level, needs, interests, abilities, and knowledge of the students. Taking into consideration teaching methods, the classroom setting, diversity, and learning styles helps the instructor to create a productive and stimulating learning experience. Clearly, when students are taught in a variety of ways, they will have the desire to learn.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The literature on education in the arts reveals common components. First, many scholars call for the arts to be included in the school curriculum in order to teach students how to be logical, divergent thinkers [e.g., 12,15,16,36]. Second, readings on teaching art and film in the English classroom also present a convincing argument in favour of innovation, creativity, collaboration, self-expression, and journal writing [e.g.,16,17,23,25,26]. Finally, the teaching and studying of literature have undergone a facelift with an increased sensitivity to multicultural issues, an effort to connect literature with students' life experiences, and the incorporation of a diverse range of authors from around the world into the classroom [e.g., 7,19]. These principles, if implemented in the school curriculum, will be successful in producing students who are well-rounded, open-minded, and independent thinkers.

Courses that include poetry, literature, film, and art give students' more authentic and rich experiences than those provided by single-discipline courses. Students who are taught to be generalists rather than specialists will have a

definite edge in the world of work. For example, just as a doctor treats the whole human being, students need to learn how to solve problems, make decisions and think critically in a multifaceted way. In fact, "young people have too much curiosity about the world and far too much vitality to be attracted to an idea that reduces them to a single dimension" (p. 30) [37].

The teaching methodologies of the past raise important implications about the future of our schools. At one time, popular belief held that students should be taught in the same way at the same time, regardless of location. However, students today bring many diverse interests, questions, needs, and expertise to the classroom. Are our students' needs being adequately met? Are professional educators making the necessary changes in the structure of their schools to accommodate the needs of our students? Integrated learning should no longer be considered in theory alone; it should be a practical part of every classroom.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## REFERENCES

1. Buck R, Snook B. Teaching the arts across the curriculum: Meanings, policy and practice. *International Journal of Education & Arts*. 2016;17(29). Available:<http://www.ijea.org/v17n29/>
2. Ghanbari S. Learning across disciplines: A collective case study of two university programs that integrate the arts with STEM. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*. 2015;16(7). Available:<http://www.ijea.org/v16n7/>
3. Griffin SM, Rowsell J, Winters KL, Vietgen P, McLauchlan D, McQueen-Fuentes G. A reason to respond: Finding agency through the arts. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*. 2017;18(25). Available:<http://www.ijea.org/v18n25/>.
4. Nathan LF. Creativity, the arts, and the future of work. In J. Crook (Eds.), *Sustainability, human well-being, and the future of education*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan Press. 2018;283-310.

5. Eisner EW. The celebration of thinking. *National Forum*. 1988;30-33.
6. Lazutina TV, Ovsyannikova OA, Zhukova AM, Prokofeva IV. Education of the individual by means of art. *International Journal of Environmental & Science Education*. 2016;11(17):10071-10080.
7. Frye N. *The educated imagination*. Concord, ON: CBC Enterprises; 1963.
8. Sifaki E, Stamou A. Film criticism and the legitimization of a New Wave in Contemporary Greek Cinema. *Journal of Greek Media and Culture*. 2020;6(1): 29-49.
9. Kyprianos K, Sifaki E, Bantimaroudis Ph. Digital Gatekeepers and Website Visitors of the Acropolis Museum: Revisiting Gatekeeping Theory in the Digital Cultural Domain, *Museum Management and Curatorship*. 2020;35(4):409-423.
10. Cohen R. Ten reasons to support the arts in 2018. *Artsblog for arts professionals in the know*; 2018.  
Available:<https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2019/05/15/ten-reasons-to-support-the-arts-in-2018>
11. Everatt L. Spreadsheets, Shakespeare and me. *The Globe and Mail*, p. A 22; November 13, 2000.
12. Oddleifson E. What do we want our schools to do? *Phi Delta Kappan*. 1994; 75(6):446-453.
13. Hartt F, Wilkins D. *History of Italian Renaissance Art (7<sup>th</sup> Ed)*. New York: Pearson; 2011.
14. Piper D (Ed.). *Random house history of painting and sculpture*. New York: Random House; 1981.
15. Rayala M. *A guide to curriculum planning in art education*. Madison: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction; 1995.
16. Dewey J. *Art as experience*. New York: Perigee Book; 1934.
17. Eisner EW. The misunderstood role of the arts in human development. *Phi Delta Kappan*. 1992;73(8):591-595.
18. Gardner H. *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books; 1983.
19. Dewey J. *Experience and education*. New York: Perigee Book; 1938.
20. Dewey J. My pedagogic creed. In J. Ratner (Ed.), *Education Today*. New York: Greenwood Press; 1940;3-17.
21. Rasminsky L. A portrait of an artist as a young businessman. *The Globe and Mail*; April 7, 2018.  
Available:<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/a-portrait-of-an-artist-as-a-young-businessman/article770931/>
22. Half R. The value of teamwork in the workplace; 2020.  
Available:<https://www.robert-half.com/blog-management-tips/the-value-of-teamwork-in-the-workplace>
23. Perrin S. Education in the arts is an education for life. *Phi Delta Kappan*. 1994; 75(6):452-453.
24. Knowles MS. *Self-directed learning: A guide for teachers*. Inquiry Project No. 2: What is self-directed learning? New York: Association Press; 1975.
25. Cranton P. *Working with adult learners*. Toronto, ON: Wall & Emerson; 1992.
26. Shields C. The case for curling up with a good book. In S. Norton & N. Waldman (Eds.), *Canadian Content (4<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. Toronto, ON: Nelson. 2000;404-406.
27. Eken AN. The third eye. Electronic version. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. 2002;46(3):220-231.
28. Mishra S. The world in the classroom: Using film as a pedagogical tool. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*. 2018; 15(1):111-116.
29. Corrigan T. *A short guide to writing about film*. Toronto, ON: Longman; 2001.
30. Post HW. *Teaching adults: What every trainer needs to know about adult learning styles*. Pacer Centre; 2008.  
Available:<https://www.pacer.org/publication/s/fasttraining/Other/teachingadults-whattrainersneedtoknow.pdf>
31. Jacobs HH (Ed.). *Interdisciplinary curriculum: Design and implementation*. Alexandria, VA.: ASCD; 1989.
32. Scheidegger J. *New survey highlights disconnect between high school and the real world*. Ewing Kauffman foundation; 2019.  
Available:<https://www.kauffman.org/currents/new-survey-highlights-disconnect-between-high-school-and-real-world/>
33. Humphreys AH. *Interdisciplinary methods: A thematic approach*. Santa Monica, CA: Goodyear; 1981.

34. Jacobsen DA. Methods for teaching: Promoting student learning (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill; 1999.
35. Pratt D. Curriculum planning: A handbook for professionals. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace; 1994.
36. Gardner H. Multiple intelligences: New horizons. New York: Basic Books; 2006.
37. Postman N. The end of education: Redefining the value of school. New York: Knopf; 1995.

---

© 2020 Sukornyk and Smale; This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

*Peer-review history:*  
*The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:*  
<http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/62466>