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BOOK REVIEW of "Arts Integration in Diverse K-5 Classrooms: Cultivating Literacy Skills and Conceptual Understanding"

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Book review: *Arts Integration in Diverse K-5 Classrooms*, by Liane Brouillette

Submitted by Barbara L. Cohen

A 3rd-grade teacher stood at the front of the room, backed by a construction paper representation of the sun. The children faced their teacher, standing in rows an arm's length apart. The teacher started playing a recording of soft, slow music. Then the children, each pretending to be the Earth, followed the teacher in rotating slowly, in a counterclockwise direction, to the music. When the children again directly faced the "sun," the teacher paused the music and asked, "If you were on the surface of the Earth, looking up at the sun directly overhead, what time would it be?" Children looked at her quizzically. She reminded them of their science lesson showing that, when the sun is directly above, it is noon (Graham & Brouillette, 2016).

During this dance-based review of an earlier science lesson, children saw the "sun" disappear as they continued their counterclockwise rotation. When they were facing directly away from the "sun," it was midnight. As they continued to rotate, children came to a point where they could glimpse the "sun" out of the corner of their eye. The teacher explained that it was now dawn. Children smiled as they grasped the relationship between Earth's rotation and the time of day.

In *Arts Integration in Diverse K-5 Classrooms*, Liane Brouillette offers many examples of the integration of drama, visual art, music, dance, story-telling and poetry writing into classroom lessons in the elementary grades. Not only do these strategies enhance understanding of the lesson for students from diverse backgrounds, but they also boost the odds that the learning is retained long enough to enhance future success in school. Brouillette presents a comprehensive variety of arts integration models, while carefully laying out the theory behind them.

Professor Brouillette states in her opening chapter that student success relies on two aspects of literacy—meaning-making and effective expression. Both aspects entail a variety of skill sets, which are explored with an eye toward teaching them through classroom arts integration when students reach the developmentally appropriate stage.

Chapters 2 through 4 focus on meaning-making. In Chapter 2, Brouillette discusses several successful examples of making meaning through verbal interaction. In a San Diego kindergarten classroom, groups of children say key lines from "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," speaking in chorus so that everyone has a role to play. As their short play unfolds, they become familiar with the meaning of words like "character," "setting" and "actor." Links to online videos of children engaging in arts integration activities bring the descriptions to life.¹ Lessons at other grade levels incorporate dance and creative movement, as well as visual art.

¹ Kindergarten play:

<https://sites.uci.edu/class/kindergarten/theater-kindergarten/kindergarten-theater-lesson-4/>

Chapter 3 explores how children make meaning of narrative text, drawn by the love of storytelling that is instinctive to all of us. Yet there are times when students become so focused on what characters in a story are doing that they fail to grasp the overall plot. Brouillette shows how storyboarding (using stick figures and spare text) can provide an effective strategy for boosting comprehension, especially for students who have moved to reading chapter books. Storyboards created for previous chapters jog students' memory of what happened before and how this shaped subsequent events. Student connect the beginning, middle and end of a story.

Chapter 4 looks at making meaning from informational texts. This skill becomes increasingly important as children move from grade to grade. Students' difficulty in comprehending science texts is often a result either of not understanding the vocabulary of science or an inability to envision the complex phenomena described. Taking a playful approach, such as the dance-based exploration—described at the beginning of this article—of the relationship between Earth's rotation and the time of day can help students envision complex phenomena. Class discussion can also help students understand the graphs, diagrams, videos, and photos in the text.

Chapters 5 through 8 look at the second key aspect of literacy—effective expression. The first specific skill, described and demonstrated at length in Chapter 5, is oral communication. Much of this chapter is devoted to social studies, whose primary goal is the promotion of civic competence in our culturally diverse country. This goal is often difficult for children in the primary grades to reach, especially those for whom English is a second language. Brouillette shows how integration of music into the curriculum has been a great aid in achieving this goal, especially in regard to separating fact from fiction in regard to United States history. Historical songs help students to envision the lives, hopes and concerns of people who lived in earlier eras.

Narrative writing is examined in Chapter 6. The important role images can play in inspiring writing is aptly demonstrated by the Houston-based "Writing in the Museum" project for grades 3 through 5. Museum visits combined with writing components, both at the museum and in the classroom, teach children how to transform their museum experiences into written expression, guided by a step by step curriculum and creative teachers. Students learn the process for turning their own memorable experiences into stories and intriguing words into poems.

Informational and persuasive writing are addressed in Chapter 7, where Brouillette examines approaches for teaching children to express themselves through reading, keying in on main ideas and ultimately expressing themselves in written text. This is a difficult task for young students, not to

mention adults. Staring at a blank piece of paper can be daunting. One of a variety of strategies presented in this chapter uses student hand-drawn “concept maps” to get them started. In Chapter 8, Brouillette discusses how arts integration can be used to build executive function skills, which lie at the core of success in all goal-oriented activities. Language ability is closely related to executive function skills, including concentration, flexibility and working memory.

Brouillette presents the theory behind each of these skill sets in an accessible, yet rigorous, way. From there, she introduces a wide variety of examples and models of arts integration lessons that have proven successful in teaching these skills to elementary age children from diverse backgrounds. Each chapter provides a list of “possibilities” for teachers “to consider,” connecting the struggles of real students in real classrooms to the advantages of various art integration lessons. Each teaching strategy introduced is supplemented by specific lesson plans and other instructional materials on a user-friendly, comprehensive companion web site.

It is obvious that this book will be of great use to the classroom teacher looking to expand student success through the application of theoretically sound and practically successful arts integration strategies. It is also an important contribution to the general field of the arts in education. Additionally, and perhaps less obvious, this book will be of interest to scholars and teachers in the humanities, where recent discussions have centered around the current relevance of the humanities in today’s world. The number of students majoring in humanities disciplines, such as literature and philosophy, is dwindling as more students follow the conventional wisdom that technology and business majors own the key to success. However, many graduate schools and businesses, including tech companies, are seeking liberal arts candidates with well-honed skills in close reading, critical thinking, and writing, the very skills that Brouillette tackles here. Various interviews with tech entrepreneurs have underscored some of the advantages that a humanities major offers. For example, Steve Yi, CEO of web advertising platform [MediaAlpha](#), who has a degree in East Asian Studies from Harvard, says: “The liberal arts train students to thrive in subjectivity and ambiguity, a necessary skill in the tech world where few things are black and white” (Segran, 2014). Brouillette’s description of how the arts can help young children to learn effective skills in oral communication, informational and persuasive writing, as well as executive function, offers an innovative perspective on the importance of humanities study.

References

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