

# Integrating the Arts through Inquiry in the Library Media Program

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by Maureen Schlosser and Barbara Johnson, May 2014

Have you ever read a picture book to your class that just begs to be further explored? Maybe the book invites questioning, leading your students to want to satisfy their curiosity? Maybe the words are so lyrical that some children are just itching to create their own songs? Or maybe the illustrations are so interesting, many are asking to try the technique themselves? By integrating the arts through inquiry, students have the opportunity to examine their understanding about any given topic.

## THE INCEPTION

In August of 2012 our assistant principal, Amity Goss, introduced a scheduled open block time for integrated arts for students and staff at Colchester Elementary School in Connecticut. She explained that this would be a time for the school librarian, technology specialist, art teacher, music teacher, and physical education teachers to support student learning. When prompted to give details, Amity stated, "There are only two rules: Integrated arts will be a collaborative effort between the classroom teacher and the specialists, and students drive the learning." Collaboration? Students driving the learning? Sound familiar? Barbara Johnson, the technology specialist, and I were thrilled. We now had a set time to collaborate and administrative support to focus on important work.

## THE STRIPLING MODEL OF INQUIRY AND INTEGRATED ARTS

Through coursework at Mansfield University, Barbara Johnson and I learned about the Stripling Model of Inquiry, developed by ALA president Barbara Stripling. We use this model of inquiry for integrated arts in our library because the model encourages curiosity and spurs exploration, reflection, and expression of ideas and new learning. What better way to do this than with the arts? As an added bonus, combining the Stripling Model of Inquiry with the arts hits many of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) with just one project. To see an interactive explanation of the model along with the standards each step of the model covers, visit <http://popplet.com/app/#/431528>. For a step-by-step explanation of the model, go to <http://libraryschool.libguidescms.com/inquiry>. A complete guide to the Stripling Model of Inquiry along with graphic organizers can be found on this link: <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/D0544E4C-45EC-4038-BA78-616DB87C193A/33429/INFOFLUENCYCONTK12Final102006.pdf>

## WORDS FROM OUR ADMINISTRATOR

*Amity Goss, Assistant Principal*

"From an administrator's perspective, adding integrated arts blocks into the schedule is a logical support for the curriculum, especially now that we have moved to Common Core State Standards. Because our school's integrated arts model is anchored in inquiry, virtually all of the CCSS for any specific grade level can be addressed. In fact, this model allows for deep teaching in a very student-centered way, with a focus on student-to-student collaboration and critical thinking. Further, integrated arts projects support teacher collaboration, too, and allow educators opportunities to explore implementation of the CCSS. Adding integrated arts blocks to a school's schedule is a win-win for everyone involved!"

## THE EVOLUTION OF A PROJECT

An integrated arts project begins with a teacher approaching the specialists with a topic or an idea for a project. We all meet as a team, usually during lunch, to begin the brainstorming session. I always bring a choice of graphic organizers for the teacher to use or modify during the lesson. I also bring a picture of the Stripling Model of Inquiry to guide our scheduled lessons.

We begin with the standards and focus on what objectives should be met during the integrated arts process. If you haven't yet visited the AASL Common Core Crosswalk, it's time to take a peek: [www.ala.org/aasl/standards-guidelines/lesson-plan](http://www.ala.org/aasl/standards-guidelines/lesson-plan).

The first session of an integrated arts project with students is an introduction to a unit, and it is almost always done with a book that encourages students to wonder about the topic. We give students opportunities to share their connections and questions, and we post them on the board.

The second session begins with a mini lesson on how to find information from a nonfiction book. We talk about the index, the table of contents, the words that are in bold, and the glossary. Then students get to work trying to find answers to their questions with the help of the specialists who are in the room. We learned from the reading specialist that it is best to group the students by their reading groups in the classroom. This way the struggling readers will get extra support, and independent learners will check in for conferences throughout the research process.

The third session is an introduction to the databases. We have online subscriptions to Pebble Go and World Book Online Kids. We also use databases that are made available with state funding through iConn.org.

At this point, students are using books and databases to find their information with the support of the specialists reading with them and prompting them with questions to check for understanding.

The fourth session is where students begin to put together what they learned. Now that students have their information, it is time to break up into groups to construct their information and express what they learned.

Each special teacher shares a few ideas. For example, the music teacher may say, "If you join me in the music room, we will write a poem with your information and put it to music." The art teacher may say, "If you join me in the art room, we will draw a portrait of the president you have been studying." The physical education teacher may say, "If you join me, we will act as if we are planets and find our place in the universe." The technology specialist may say, "If you join me, we can use an app on the iPad to make it look like you are reporting from space." If you are the school librarian, you may say, "If you are with me, we can use Snappywords.com to find descriptive words to describe Abraham Lincoln's characteristics and physical features, and create a word cloud using Wordle.net."

When the products are finished, we ask students to consider with whom they think they should share their information. Who would benefit from their presentations? Students may choose to present their information to another class, their parents, administrators, the Board of Education, the newspaper, a local organization, or business.

## **INSPIRING CREATIVITY WITH SPECIALISTS**

*Barbara Johnson, Technology Specialist*

Howard Gardner believed that we can "improve education by addressing the multiple intelligences of our students" (*Concept to Classroom*). This theory of addressing (dare I say differentiating) methods of learning was a bit scary when first introduced to our specialists team. Our specialists team brainstormed ways to balance and support our students' needs to be creative and our teachers' needs to integrate Common Core Standards and inquiry. You may think that inspiring creativity in young learners and elementary school teachers is an easy job. Not quite true. Creativity should be as differentiated as reading levels for the students and staff involved in these lessons. Doug Johnson states that "Educators too often pigeon-hole creativity into arts classes—fine arts, music, theater, and dance." As the technology specialist for the integrated arts collaborative, it is my job to also find digital tools, adaptive resources, and "technical support" for research and final projects/ presentations. Integrated arts should not focus only on art/music, but rather incorporate the collaboration and expertise of the "specialists" in your building, whoever they may be. In our case it includes art, music, technology, and physical education/health.

Students need to have choices for presenting their findings, but also need the freedom to suggest a new or creative way to present their information. During one of our initial collaborative meetings between the participating building specialists and the collaborating teacher, the specialists each pitched their ideas for presentation methods. An assumption was made that the students would gravitate to the iPads. To everyone's surprise, the largest group was with the art specialist, who was creating presidential portraits from pastels. The next lesson using a digital tool did draw the largest crowd, but each class is different, and that keeps us on our toes!

When using this integrated arts approach, it is important to create a safe work environment where students (and teachers) can express themselves using methods that may be outside their comfort zones, but also creative and flexible enough to inspire the most reluctant of learners. Karen DeMoss and Terry Morris studied the impact of arts integration on student learning and found "students from all achievement levels displayed significant increases in their ability to analytically assess their own learning following arts-integrated units." During our lessons, even the youngest (kindergarten) students' learning reflected the Common Core principle of "a mile deep and an inch wide" as well as a perfect model for inquiry and reflection. Student projects included a variety of methods and:

created more independent and intrinsically motivated investments in learning, fostered learning for understanding as opposed to recall of facts for tests, transformed students' characterizations of 'learning barriers' into 'challenges' to be solved, [and] inspired students to pursue further learning opportunities outside of class (DeMoss

and Morris).

Once completed, student projects were shared, sometimes as a video, (<http://animoto.com/play/xqNBZqiQCYqoh8q3RWCKdA>), an activity (<http://animoto.com/play/PjUgih5lxymf4zKoaBoaJg>), or as a collection of short performances (<http://animoto.com/play/VgtSazGmqSvqnltyogkloQ>).

At the end of the day or project, your students' connection to their learning will be quite evident to both you and them. "Finding what most interests individuals may be the best way we can stimulate creativity. Linking a personal interest to a required area of study is one successful approach" (Johnson). Each specialist involved in your integrated arts lesson can provide a unique and engaging way for students to share their learning.

These learning experiences have created win-win lessons for students *and* teachers. Students are being engaged, encouraged, and inspired with questions they are connected to, information they can understand, and sharing that is creative. Teachers are being engaged, encouraged, and inspired with lessons connected to CCSS, 21st century skills, teacher evaluation, learning environments differentiated for all types of learners with enough staff to support them, and methods for sharing learning that, in the past, may have been beyond their comfort levels or expertise but "allows students to share their creative work with audiences beyond the classroom"

#### **INTEGRATED ARTS IDEAS** *Donald J. Levine, Health and Physical Educator*

- After reading *Exploring Space with an Astronaut*, students created a living solar system by physically moving in the orbits on the playground, either walking or jogging.
- Students went "orientteering" using compasses after reading *Henry and Mudge and the Starry Night*.
- After reading *The Strongest One*, students participated in an obstacle course as if they were ants.
- Students worked collaboratively to create a physical activity game board for their class and others.

For more ideas, resources, and student work, visit our website at [www.integratedartswithkids.com](http://www.integratedartswithkids.com).

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

"Concept to Classroom: Tapping into Multiple Intelligences." *Concept to Classroom: Tapping into Multiple Intelligences—Explanation*. Educational Broadcasting Corporation, 2004. Web. 10 Dec. 2013. [www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/mi](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/mi).; "Standards and Curriculum." *Library Services*. NYC Department of Education, 2013. Web. 20 June 2013.; DeMoss, Karen, and Terry Morris. *How Arts Integration Supports Student Learning: Students Shed Light on the Connections*. N.d. Web. ; Johnson, Doug. "Developing Creativity in Every Learner." *Doug Johnson*. Oct. 2012. Web. 11 Dec. 2013. [www.doug-johnson.com/dougwri/developing-creativity-in-every-learner.html](http://www.doug-johnson.com/dougwri/developing-creativity-in-every-learner.html).; Stripling, Barbara. "Inquiry: Inquiring Minds Want to Know." [www.teachingbooks.net](http://www.teachingbooks.net). Sept. 2008. Web. 20 June 2013.; Stripling, Barbara. *Stripling Model of Inquiry*. N.d. Illustration.

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