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Author

Brouillette, Liane

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A Celebration of the Diversity of Artistic Endeavor

The 2016 issue of the *Journal for Learning through the Arts* provides insights into the impact of arts integration in a broad range of environments. In this volume, each section contains two articles that provide contrasting approaches to and/or perceptions of a common topic.

Teaching and Learning through the Arts

The authors featured in this section look at contrasting approaches to the implementation of school-wide, arts-based reforms. Jamie Simpson Steele looks at an elementary school that had responded enthusiastically to Hawaii's ARTS FIRST initiative, which identified the arts as a core content area in the state. Her case study focuses on the experiences of eight families. Along with teachers at the school, family members were interviewed about how arts integration had provided support for their students as they transitioned to middle school. In the second article, Suzanne Gloria Windsor-Liscombe provides a cautionary tale about the conversion of a neighborhood school with falling student enrolment into an arts-focused school of choice. Having been a participant observer during the transition, Windsor-Liscombe makes effective use of documentary evidence, along with interviews with teachers and administrators, to flesh out a portrait of a school taking on a challenge for which it was, in retrospect, not prepared.

Arts and Sciences

This pair of articles, focus on the intersection of the arts and sciences. Graham and Brouillette utilize a quasi-experimental approach, investigating the impact of arts integration on student understanding of physical science in grades 3 to 5. The study suggests that well-designed arts-based lessons can provide upper-elementary students—who remain concrete thinkers—with a powerful means of envisioning the natural phenomena described in their science curriculum. Wyman, Waldo and Doherty, professors with diverse interests in the sciences and humanities, discuss their use of a campus museum as an applied learning environment where they facilitated interdisciplinary, experiential educational activities that helped to develop student agency and encourage imaginative inquiry. The researchers found that, when students were occupied with activities that were outside their typical routine, their sensory perceptions were sharpened; they examined their environment more closely and evaluated their experiences thoughtfully.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Mercurio and Randall discuss how they helped pre-service teachers taking a state-mandated course in content area literacy to understand that narrative is not available only through print. Focusing content area reading on the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, they integrated the arts through study of past memorials to the fire victims; this helped students realize that the world *shown* is very different, and often more compelling, than the world *told*. By incorporating memorials in the lessons they wrote about the fire, students learned that all content areas are well-served by broader definitions of literacy that encompass discipline-specific ways of knowing and the use of diverse media.

Ifeta provides a global viewpoint on artistic development, delving into the impact of Western education on sub-Saharan Africa by investigating the recent evolution of a traditional art form, the casting of bronze figures. The article discusses sustainable development in Nigeria,

then focuses on the evolution of the art of bronze casting as it has been handed down among the Olotan casters in Benin City. Historical accounts are integrated with insights from interviews with contemporary bronze casters, who describe the changes in bronze casting brought about by the relaxation of age-old practices and acceptance of western influences.

Research Approaches

Contrasting styles of disciplined inquiry are on display in the Research Approaches section. Gormley and McDermott investigated the impact of policy decisions on practice by inspecting contracted curricula, designed for teaching the Common Core State Standards, to see whether the visual and performing arts had been integrated into English language arts units for grades 3, 6, and 9. Using content analysis, the authors discovered the creative arts to be largely absent from the contracted curricula, further disadvantaging children in low SES areas. Hofmann focuses on the pedagogical instruction given to students during guided tours of art museums in Germany. He uses social phenomenological analysis to develop a model of pedagogical art communication, while introducing the reader to this research method.

Performing Arts

In the Performing Arts section of this issue, two articles look at complementary aspects of drama. Roy reminds us that the mask has been an iconic theatrical symbol from the time of Socrates to modern productions. Simply put, masks symbolize adoption of the role. In schools, however, there has been no formal development of pedagogies for mask use. Roy presents methodologies for applying masks and explores their pedagogical potential. In contrast, Saeed takes us into her United States history classroom, where she often incorporates brief, informal, yet content-rich history skits as a way to ease students into the academic content they will encounter in textbooks and primary source documents.

Liane Brouillette, Editor

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