

Running Head: FUSING THE MUSES

Fusing the Muses

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Abstract

Fusing the Muses

Few educators can doubt the profound connection between voice and vision. The resulting experience through a variety of artistic media can consistently be characterized as a snapshot of human expression, something with which students of all ages can identify. In this paper, the researchers liken an integrated visual and language arts curriculum to the metaphor of Muses working in harmony with one another. Like, Apollo, educators should lead the chorus of the Muses as an inspiring way to broaden educational opportunities. The philosophical foundations for an integrated visual art and language arts curriculum closely align with progressive theory that espouses that education is creative self-learning through direct experiences, which allow for artistic freedom (Doll, 1996). Gardner's (1999, 1991) Theory of Multiple Intelligences supports the premise that each person differs markedly and therefore requires differentiated teaching and learning experiences. Dewey (1934) links language to visual art as a parallel in communication. Connecting the two disciplines is the foundation of communication and self-expression. This blending or fusing process respects each subject. Fusing the Muses spotlights each subject equally, giving each relevance in its own right.

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Why Muses? Well, the very word *Muse* is derived from a number of words that relate to learning. This is an excerpt as synthesized by Michael A. Chapman in Arrien's (2000) book concerning the muses:

The noun "MUSE" is not only an English word but is found also in Old French. In Latin, the word is MUSA, and in Greek MOUSA, perhaps for MONTHIA, from MANTHANEIN, meaning TO LEARN. The Indo-European base is perhaps MENDH-, meaning TO DIRECT ONE'S MIND TOWARD SOMETHING. From Greek MOUSA, plural MOUSAI, we have the derivative MOUSEION. A MOUSEION was a PLACE OF STUDY or LIBRARY, a SEAT, SHRINE, or TEMPLE of the Muses, called a MUSEUM

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in Latin and adopted by English. From the Greek MOUSEION we also derive the words MOSAIC, and MOUSEIKE or MUSIC, lyric poetry set to music. (Arrien, 2000, p. 1).

Furthermore, each Muse has her own discipline “yet each discipline is capable of suggesting the range of all the disciplines taken together” (Arrien, p.15). Each of the Muses represent a path to creativity, in essence to learning, as we are then led further down that path. According to Arrien (2000), this journey happens “regardless of our cultural conditioning or family imprinting.” So the ideal curriculum would explore each muse as an inspiration for learning, connecting the appropriate academic subjects without losing the artistic exploration of them. It is important to remember that any combination of the muses can be developed for any educational level, though this model suggests exercises in language arts with the use of visual arts.

The philosophical foundations for this curriculum align most closely with the Progressivists, who believe that when developing learners intellectually, “education may be conceived of as creative self-learning” (Doll, 1996, p. 37). Doll (1996) continues to document that when learners are to be developed into functioning citizens, the Progressivists espouse “direct experiences” and preparing students to “exercise freedom.” This can only be fully developed when flexibility is offered within the curriculum, and when the aim of education is to develop learners as individuals in our society, urging them to reach their potentials which may remain, in some way, shackled by more traditional methods. As future workers, “abstraction and skills in both liberal and vocational studies” (Doll, 1996, p. 38) is encouraged, which allows learners to better adapt to ever changing circumstances and environment. In summary, the use of subject matter should be varied as “individuals differ markedly from one another,” and therefore “require widely differentiated curricula” (Doll, 1996, p. 39).

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While most curriculum draws eclectically on more than one philosophy, the fundamental premise of Fusing the Muses leans toward the Pragmatists in the basic desire to teach children how to think rather than what to think, and distances itself from the Perennialists by not eliminating what they refer to as “extras and frills” (Doll, 1996, p. 41). What is more, drawing, dancing, and music can be tools, not merely “frills” and are often the very instruments that turn *teaching* into *learning*.

Since children learn differently, the most complete curriculum will approach its subjects in more than one way. Creating art can be a way to tap into children’s imaginations; unlocking learning potential that they did not even know existed. According to Gardner (1999, 1991), we are all able to understand experiences through language, analysis, representation, and the arts. The difference lies in the strength of the intelligences or profile of intelligences that may be combined to solve diverse problems. The eight intelligences in Gardner’s (1999, 1991) model are Linguistic (Verbal Intelligence), Logical (Mathematical Intelligence), Spatial (Visual Intelligence), Bodily (Kinesthetic Intelligence), Musical, Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Naturalistic Intelligence. Each of these intelligences encompasses a number of traits and most people, while stronger in one area, tend to have characteristics of more than one. Even students who are too young to be profiled with any accuracy will find comfort with a certain style and easily excel in that area because it connects naturally to the identity and integrity of that individual. When areas of strength are identified, students can develop these areas through education. Likewise, over time, weaker areas can be better developed for a well-rounded academic experience. Fusing the Muses will introduce those important connections in intelligence contributing to the future successes of many students.

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The visual and language arts can be distinctively linked and are therefore creatively reciprocal in nature. Developmental psychologists and art educators have been long interested in the parallel of language and art (Brewer, 2002, p. 31). Richardson, Sacks and Ayers (2003), creators of Directed Reading Writing and Art (DRWAA), which is suitable for any level, researched how the arts provide ways of thinking, responding, creating, and communicating. Roucher and Lovano-Kerr (1995) accepted the idea of combining art with other subjects without subordination. In fact, they believed that art should be the focus of teaching and learning. Fusing the Muses spotlights each subject equally, giving it relevance in its own right.

Fusing the Muses is designed to foster independent thinking, creativity, and confidence. Using art as the background, and foreground, of language arts lessons reinforces the idea that the student's opinions are important. It is one of a few subjects in which the answer is truly subjective; grammar aside, they literally cannot be *wrong*. Having acquired the confidence to express themselves, the proper grammar and format will come- both more easily *and* eagerly. They will also be able to view their world with more detail, as well as decipher abstract concepts in other areas. Based on the abundance of multi-disciplinary programs being implemented across the country and their positive outcomes, coupled with the evolving nature of the students' environments and the need to improve curriculum, Fusing the Muses should become part of the school experience.

Basic Structure of Fusing the Muses

These exercises require very little financially, and therefore are easily considered. The curriculum design is a collaborative effort among educators, academicians, and artists, though implemented by the classroom teacher and any specialists who may be available. Fusing the

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Muses could even begin in an after school or summer camp program and after a trial basis, be incorporated around the bench marks of the full school year curriculum. As art is often cut because of funding issues, this is an important way to keep it as part of the learning experience. If additional funding could be found, the program could be greatly enhanced by artistically based field trips to museums, galleries, and cultural and performing arts centers.

Instructional Strategies for Fusing the Muses

Each of these steps should be completed in one meeting of the educators and artists involved, whether it is once a day or once a week. Discussion should be encouraged whenever time permits. The work, of course, can be appropriately geared for any grade level, though elementary school is the ideal place to start: the earlier the better. The selection of visual art and literature can easily be altered to accommodate a multi-cultural classroom, religious school, or current social issue, thus providing a forum during which students can share their heritages or express their concerns. In the wake of an unfortunate local or national tragedy, this type of cathartic work can be invaluable, as counselors are usually called in to answer questions and facilitate dialogue. One of the best things about Fusing the Muses is that it is easily adaptable to any special circumstances.

General Overview of Suggested Exercises

- 1. Start with concrete images such as the classroom or school yard. With a chosen medium, ask the students to draw something they see.
- In a paragraph they should then describe the picture as if they were trying to explain it to someone over the phone or to someone who could not see it. (As an additional exercise they could sit back to back in pairs and describe the picture to a classmate who then

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would be asked to draw from the description. The pictures could be compared and the importance of vivid, concrete language discussed.)

- They should then take the picture and the paragraph and compose a poem.
- They should be encouraged to share their work and a gallery should be set up in the classroom or hallway.
- 2. Starting with a story, the children should be asked to illustrate a scene. (They can do this individually or as group work.) The scenes could also be assigned to create a picture book.
- From this picture they can compose a poem which may or may not be based on the story.
- They could also be asked to write an alternate ending to the story.
- The opposite can also be effective: with an enlarged illustration from a story, ask them to discuss the relationship between the two. Discussion questions: Does it help explain what is going on? Did you see it that way? Why or why not? What could the artist have done differently? This can also be done with a poem.
- 3. Bring in a famous painting and ask the students to write a “scene” or short story based on it. This can also be set up as *ekphrasis* which is creating a poem based on an individual work of visual art. “It is a time-honored technique of poetry to draw inspiration from other art forms” (Sagan, 2005, p.41). This exercise is readily suggested in creative writing classes, as well as professional writer’s workshops.
- After completing the above exercise, show an abstract piece and ask for a scene or story.
- Younger grades could write simple sentences, while older grades can develop essays or short stories. Middle school and up can also incorporate literary analysis into some of

these exercises, and create a class presentation on a theoretical analysis inspired by the piece.

- 4. Self portraits are also instructive for classroom discussion and multi-cultural sharing.
- 5. If religion can be discussed, students can be asked to draw their ideas of “heaven” (this exercise can be used as an introduction to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*) (Cameron, 1997; Daniels, 2005; Ferris, 1995; Hausman, 2004; Kinzer, 1997; McCarthy, 1998; Sartorius, 2001; Wicks-Patnaude, 2004).

Incorporating the Other Muses

The other muses could be incorporated briefly by asking the students to act out a scene from a story and/or act out what might be transpiring based on an unfamiliar painting. Most kindergarten classrooms have “dramatic play” centers to help develop vocabulary, cooperation, role identification, and concepts. Since music is a universal language, students could draw pictures from song lyrics and discuss how the words and rhythm played into their ideas. They could even add a verse to a popular song, either individually or as a group. Sculpture is also a great genre to include and can be used much in the same way as visual art, though could be described while blind folded, as well. All pathways to inspire learning should be explored.

Assessment

The importance of assessment is demonstrated through an initiation of change, evaluation of student achievement which in turn identifies weaknesses, and evaluation of student achievement which leads to a continued initiation of change (Beattie, 1997a, 1997b). Educators base assessment upon standards which may be derived at the international, national, or local level(s). Ultimately, each classroom educator focuses on specific disciplines in which assessment is

developed and implemented. For example, the student's overall enthusiasm and progress can be noted by the teacher(s). They can even be asked to respond to the experiences as a record for evaluating the program. Third grade students who participated in FLARE (Fun with Language, Arts, and Reading) recognized progress in themselves as noted by their responses: "Before this program I used to write one paragraph and now I write five pages!"; "I learned how to concentrate better and how to be more detailed." Some teacher feedback for FLARE said that students were better able to express themselves and that pride in their work also increased. Another teacher noted "a greater tolerance for one another, resulting from the curriculum's emphasis on appreciation of individual differences and alternate approaches to problems" (Aschbacher, 1996, p. 43). Eisner (1994) has devised criteria that are appropriate to use in assessment. Assessment should reflect the nature of the tasks to be assessed, which in turn should reflect what students and the teacher(s) will be expected to do. The assessment should measure the process of problem formation and solving as well as the actual solution. Assessment should reflect the values of an intellectual community in the field of study. Group tasks and individual tasks should be included and related to the curriculum taught. Also, learners should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in situations that were not addressed in the curriculum, while understanding how something works as a whole rather than discrete parts. Lastly, the form of assessment should not be limited (Eisner, 1994). Eisner's (1994) concept of multiple forms of assessment relate to Gardner's (1991, 1999) Theory of Multiple Intelligences, in that student and teachers learn through a variety of methods. The assessment components can take many forms including written work, arts production, performance, journals, observation, inquiry, discussion, and reflection, all of which are criteria

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and objective based. Assessment can be completed by students, teachers, administrators, and peers in either group. Assessment should be continuous, embedded, and authentic (Glanz, 1999). The integrity of each discipline should be reflected in all aspects of assessment (Roucher & Lovano-Kerr, 1995).

Conclusion

Lavalais (1995) notes that the best way to secure any program is the establishment of a county wide curriculum and a resource center. She also reminds us that the current trend toward a global system means that we incorporate culture as integrated problem solving. This kind of education will assist today's students in successfully assimilating into the workplace, and society, of tomorrow. As research in this integrated approach to curriculum design continues, teaching practice will change. In this paper, the researchers provided information about one approach to an integrated curriculum. It is the researchers' hope that this information, although contextually specific, may assist other curriculum designers when developing future curriculum focusing on visual art and language arts.

Language and Visual Arts represent the intimate expression of a single human voice, but somehow speak for multitudes; they are a natural way of learning how to make connections, visualize ideas, express perspectives, and solve problems rationally through careful evaluation, rather than harsh reaction. For these reasons, among many others, the researchers are compelled to share information concerning the concept of Fusing the Muses.

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