



Nancy with her principal Dalton Gregory and assistant principal Zan Austin at W.S. Ryan Elementary School in Denton, Texas.

Integration

In these days of high stakes testing, no doubt your school expects you to integrate interdisciplinary concepts in your art curriculum, though likely without much guidance. The question is how to keep art central while making meaningful connections to other content areas.

In *Rethinking Curriculum in Art*, authors Marilyn Stewart and Sydney Walker suggest: "Meaningful integrated curriculum requires a focus, such as an enduring idea, theme, or issue. The importance of this connecting linkage cannot be overemphasized. Simply teaching a common topic with perspectives provided by various school subjects does not produce meaningful learning."

Art-based, integrated units of study are far-reaching, comprehensive, inclusive, and intellectually challenging and comprised of individual lessons linked together by a meaningful common theme. In the ten years I worked as a project coordinator for the North Texas Institute for Educators on the Visual Arts at the University of North Texas, we worked with art and classroom teachers and

museum educators to develop such units of study. We were one of six institutes across the country which formed the Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge (TETAC), initiated by the National Arts Education Consortium.

I have been fortunate to teach in schools where the administrators understood the value of an integrated curriculum. At my first elementary school we had school-wide themes each year and the principal's support of the themes certainly encouraged teachers to work together. We also use school-wide themes at my present school.

I much appreciate the understanding and support of Dalton Gregory and Zan


Austin, my administrators at W. S. Ryan Elementary. I am often able to meaningfully collaborate with the librarian, music teacher, and classroom teachers. It does seem easier to collaborate with other teachers at the elementary level than at secondary, due to scheduling factors and the number of different subjects, but it can be done to some degree, usually on a teacher to teacher basis.

What can you do, with or without such support? One approach is to offer to collaborate, and then

work with the teachers who express an interest. Become knowledgeable about the state standards your students are expected to meet. Which ones best correlate with concepts you already teach? Which concepts would best work in an art-based unit of study?

I'll close with an example. In my state, students from third grade up are tested on their knowledge of congruent shapes (in math, shapes that are exactly the same in size and shape). Art teachers know congruent shapes as the basic structures that make up designs called tessellations. Congruent shapes can be put together in different ways to make translations, reflections, and rotations. (How better to teach these than with engaging images such as those of M.C. Escher?)

Tessellations could meaningfully fit into a unit of study on Structure. Guiding questions could include: What is structure? Why are we as humans drawn to structure? How do tessellations express structure? Why were artists such as Escher so fascinated by mathematical concepts like congruent shape?

Whether you independently make meaningful connections through your art lessons or collaborate with other teachers, your efforts will lead to greater art understanding and better critical thinking skills for your students. 

Resources

Stewart, Marilyn G., and Sydney R. Walker. *Rethinking Curriculum in Art*. Davis Publications, 2005.
Stephens, Pamela and Nancy Walkup. *Bridging the Curriculum through Art*. Crystal Productions, 2000.

WEB LINKS

www.art.unt.edu/ntieva/pages/teaching/tea_currguide.html
arts.osu.edu/NAEC/

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