Lessons and Rubrics for Arts Integration

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Abstract

Seven teachers, part of an Arts Integration Community of Practice, used rubrics to measure student learning and artistic skills. Examples from five sites, across a variety of academic content areas and age levels, and with students of varying disabilities, are included in this article. Results suggest that rubrics may be a useful tool for measuring the impact of arts integration, facilitating teacher planning, supporting collaboration between artists and educators, and helping students conduct self-assessments.

Keywords
visual arts, arts integration, scoring rubrics

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Over the past two years, VSA arts (VSA) investigated the use of art to enhance academic, cognitive, social, and artistic skills of students with disabilities (Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, in press). VSA was interested in learning how teachers embedded the arts in lessons teaching academic content and skills and how teachers evaluated the impact of such lessons (Mason & Steedly, 2006). From its background investigation, VSA determined that educators might be able to use rubrics and Communities of Practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) to a) facilitate arts integration and b) improve our ability to understand the impact of arts integration on student social, academic, cognitive, and artistic skills (Mason & Steedly, 2006). Rubrics were chosen as the evaluation method due to the widespread understanding of their flexibility and usefulness within the educational community. With our research, discussions with and surveys of participants, student work samples, and samples of scored rubrics from seven sites substantiated that:

- Rubrics and the Community of Practice process helped teachers and teaching artists to plan, implement, and evaluate lessons that integrated art into academics.
- Arts integration helped to motivate students.
- Arts integration improved student understanding both of specific academic content and the bigger picture, including the contextual variables, related to that content.

In an article in *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, "Rubrics and an Arts Integration Community of Practice," we provided samples of teacher opinions of arts integration and the value of the arts, as well as specific examples of how the Arts Integration CoP was structured and how teachers and participating artists developed rubrics and lesson plans through participating in a Community of Practice (Mason & Steedly, 2006). Readers are referred to the article for background information and additional details regarding how the project was implemented.

In this article, we present three examples of arts integration lessons. In each example, the teacher found that rubrics were valuable in helping with both evaluation of learning, and just as importantly, with structuring the art activity. The rubrics that participants used to evaluate academic, cognitive, social, and artistic skills varied; however, each of them was based on the model VSA provided and included within one rubric components for measuring all three types of skills.

Using Clay with Social Studies and Science Lessons

Tiffany, an art teacher from Florida, implemented three separate lessons that demonstrated how easily students can use clay to show their comprehension of specific concepts. The lessons she presented were for students in 3rd through 5th grades and involved using clay slabs to create pictographs and fossils and to portray animal habitats.

For each of the lessons, students rolled out clay slabs and then, using blunt wood dowels and toothpicks, created symbols in the slab and painted them with tempera paint that they sometimes washed off to create an antique effect. The works of art were then fired in a kiln. Students were given pre and post tests on vocabulary words and filled out rubrics to describe their learning.

In each case, students first studied the academic content. For the lesson on Egyptian petroglyphs, for example, the teacher relied on the 3rd-grade social studies book, the video *If Rocks Could Talk* by Jane Bush, and a teacher-made handout on rock art glyphs. The class compared Egyptian writing signs

Figure 1. Student Petroglyphs

Figure 2. Animal Habitats

and symbols to pictograph writings found in Utah and Wyoming. The students studied how symbols were used to depict hunting, religion, special events, and the calendar year.

For the lesson on animal habitats, the teacher introduced Henri Rousseau's "Jungle Prints" during a discussion of different kinds of environments (oceans, deserts, swamps, forest, fields, etc.). The class discussed the wildlife and creatures that might live in various environments. The teacher next introduced 3-D and relief sculpture and provided instruction in how to attach two clay pieces together to form one solid piece. Students brainstormed possible components they could make out of clay to create an interesting environment. In this case, students painted their environments after the clay piece was fired.

For the unit on fossils, students (K–4th grade) created fossils out of clay that had an aged appearance. The teacher introduced the lesson by showing a range of real fossils and a class discussion about how fossils are made. Students then viewed the video, *Bill Nye the Science Guy: Dinosaurs*. After

this, the teacher explained how students could use plastic bugs and toy creatures such as snakes, frogs, and lizards, and leaves to create fossil-like impressions in the clay. For this project, students created fossil dishes, pendants, or magnets out of clay, this time curling up the edges of the clay slab rather than leaving them flat. After the projects were fired, students painted their pieces, and then, once again created an aged look by rubbing the paint off under running water in the sink.

Tiffany made several accommodations for students who needed them, including reading materials aloud, repeating instructions, presenting instructions in sequential steps, conducting question and answer drills, demonstrating and modeling how to create the clay projects, and providing art samples. In some cases, peer tutors were provided to help students, or one-to-one teaching was used.

Figure 3. Artwork Rubric

Project: Clay Pictographs Student name_____

Instructions: Circle the appropriate number
Creativity
5-exceptional idea, original
4-artwork shows development of idea
3-art reflects problem as given
2-artwork lacks original thought
1-artwork is a copy

Craftsmanship
5-excellent technique, no errors
4-good technique, few flaws
3-satisfactory, more than two flaws
2-weak/needs improvement
1-technique poor and haphazard

Following directions
5-excellent insight, project reflected all directions
4-strong insight and reflection of goals
3-project shows goals and objectives
2-project does not reflect goals
1-goals unrecognizable

Communication of message
5-artwork excels in its ability to communicate
4-artwork is strong and communicates well
3-artwork is satisfactory
2-artwork is hard to understand
1-no communication or understanding

What did you feel you did very well?

Would you change anything if you could? Why?

Figure 4. Student Work

Tiffany indicated that with these lessons, "Students learned quickly and retained more information if I continuously questioned and drilled students as they worked, lined up, and as I passed out materials. The students quickly picked up that I would be 'quizzing' them, so they paid attention more, and made a conscious effort to remember information." The majority of students with special needs demonstrated knowledge of factual information that was presented to them in the lessons through this type of teacher question and drill. Tiffany was also able to verify their comprehension through the individual student rubrics.

Tiffany reported that the 4th-graders with special needs "could explain information verbally about fossils better than actually writing about them and that most students have a better understanding of what fossils are from actually seeing and touching real fossils, and creating one of their own."

The rubric students used to measure their performance follows.

Figure 4. Student Rubric

	Incomplete, did not follow directions	Many mistakes and problems. Needs improvement.	Satisfactory. OK job. Few mistakes.	One or two mistakes. Very good.	The best. No mistakes.
Clay technique					
Paint technique					
Information recall					
Quality of final project					

Literature Circles Worksheet

Lee conducted several lessons over three weeks related to using literature circles with five reading choices in 4th-grade language arts classes. These lessons addressed six state standards, including expectations that students will:

- Identify specific personal preferences relative to fiction and nonfiction reading.
- Use knowledge of author's styles, themes, and genres to choose own reading.
- Read and organize information throughout a single source for a variety of purposes.
- Write for a variety of occasions, audiences, and purposes.
- Interact with peers in literature groups.
- Prepare for and give presentations for specific occasions, audiences, and purposes.

The state standards were reinforced in five books that Lee chose for this activity: *The Lost Flower Children*, *My Brother Made Me Do It*, *Williwaw*, and *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. Students read assignments aloud in their groups and each student completed his or her own worksheet. Next, they met in literature circles, discussed ideas, and chose a group project. A recorder wrote down a project description, and the groups broke projects into steps, assigned responsibilities, and developed a timeline of tasks to complete. Each student wrote a reflection of his or her experience with the literature circle (see worksheet).

Accommodations

Accommodations Lee offered included a sound amplification system for those with hearing impairments, reading in groups with peer and teacher support as needed for those with reading difficulties, posting major points on the board, priority seating for designated students, and frequent feedback and prompts for attention and focus. Microphones were available for student use for project presentations.

Figure 5. **Student Worksheet for *The Lost Flower Children***

Directions: After you read along with each part of the story, use this sheet to remind you of parts you want to discuss with your circle.

A favorite part My favorite part was when they set up the table so the countercharm would work.	My favorite word My favorite word is countercharm because I think it just rolls off the tongue.
My favorite picture My favorite picture is the table all set up all nice and pretty.	Something I didn't understand I didn't understand why a lot of people came to the garden and even people who Olivia didn't know.
My favorite character My favorite character was Olivia because she is just trying to figure everything out.	Something this story reminds me of This story reminds me of very, very confusing things that are very hard to figure out.

A student described how she prepared for a skit:

> *We picked this part because it was the story within the story and was the most important part of the story. We made the mask, the title, we got the table and flowers. We are doing the scene where the greenskins come to the party. They do the countercharm that turns the people at the party except one little girl, Kara, is being that girl. I (Courtney) will play the lead greenskin. Alexis will play the greenskin follower and Skyler will play one of the last flower children.*

The rubric Lee used to measure student outcomes is presented below. The completed example was for a student who was learning several of the concepts and skills presented in the lesson. The rubric indicates that this student could benefit from additional instruction with similar types of projects in the future.

Figure 6. Integration of Arts with English/Writing: Art used to Express Understanding with Final Product

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	Needs Improvement.	Followed directions with few errors.	Followed Directions; no mistakes.	Some interpretation; advanced knowledge; original thought.	Showed Appreciation of topic; thoughtful reflection; built on other work.
Adequate planning			**x**		
Quality of draft writing			**x**		
Originality, imagination, problem solving	**x**				
Demonstrated comprehension		**x**			
Completeness/ thoroughness			**x**		
Elaboration, addition of interesting detail	**x**				
Use of art to enhance or complement meaning				**x**	
Technical aspects of writing/art	**x**				
Quality of final product	**x**				
Total points		**x**			

An example of reflection from another student on this activity follows:

> *When I read the "Lost Flower Children" I think of the garden being soft and filled with rainbows of colors. As if the flowers them selves danced upon the stars at night. There beautiful petels float on a sea of livly green leaves. The book makes me imagine of all fantasy things….I feel like the book brings me to a place where I don't have to worry about anything or anyone. Sometimes I feel like a butterfly with gorous wings of many colors, flying over the magical garden.*

Acting and Pantomime to Teach Language Concepts and Clear Communication

Jill, a teacher of children who are deaf or severely hearing impaired in Montana, described how she used pantomime and acting to teach vocabulary and communication. The purpose of the activity was to teach improvisation, pantomime, and clear communication. The activity also provided an introduction to the skill of giving constructive criticism.

For this activity, Jill divided the class into groups of 2–3 students. She gave each group three words (e.g., why, sorry, and oh). Each small group, working independently, was tasked with preparing two different short scenes using only the three words they had been given. The scene could include other pantomimed communication - other words could be implied through pantomime, but the only audible words should be limited to those three. These should be very short scenes, and the two scenes should use the words in different ways. On the following page is one of the rubrics used with this lesson.

Jill indicated that within the mime lessons, she is "constantly aware of sequencing. Before the mime, sequencing was not my top priority. For students to be successful, they need to be organized and sequence their thoughts and ideas."

Conclusion

Rubrics appear to be a useful tool for measuring the impact of art integration on student learning, whether students are participating in drama, visual arts, writing, or music. As the examples from three of the seven VSA Arts Integration Community of Practice sites demonstrate, rubrics show promise in helping teachers evaluate the impact of the arts on social, cognitive, academic, and artistic learning. Participants in our project demonstrated several ways to design and use the rubrics, including teaching students to use rubrics to measure their own learning, performance, or product. Moreover, as one of the participants indicated, "Rubrics can be a useful tool for planning, increasing teacher awareness of student capabilities and needs, and also furthering collaboration among artists and teachers."

Figure 7. **Pantomime Performance**

	0-2 Missing criteria poor presentation.	3-5 Meets minimal criteria, fair presentation.	6-8 Acceptably meets all criteria, clear presentation.	9-10 Exceeds criteria superb presentation and creativity.
Inclusion of story elements w/plot points				
Facial expression intensity & variation				
Mime elements/ maintains shape & space				
Gesture/clarity				
Characterization/distinct, consistent				
Focus/maintains scene momentum				
Creativity/embellishes imagination				
Energy/intensity				
All movement, mood & mime match to theme				
Written task				

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