



Roy, D., Baker, W., & Hamilton, A. (2019). *Teaching the arts: Early childhood and primary education* (3rd ed.). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

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The collective wisdom has always been that in Early Childhood, the best way to engage and help a child learn is through physical play and movement. If such play and movement are structured as they are in the Arts, even better. Friedrich Froebel, who coined the word kindergarten (literally 'infant garden') in 1840, considered arts and crafts essential to stimulate the child's imagination and develop physical and motor skills. By stating right at the start that babies learn *through* and *with* the Arts, the authors establish the central role of Arts in human life and learning.

Authors David Roy, William Baker and Amy Hamilton focus on a topic that has been discussed in the education domain for several decades now, namely Arts Education in Early Childhood and Primary years. However, the role of early childhood and primary educators in Arts education is far more complex than you may at first expect. Moreover, any emphasis on 'fun' can also make a topic seem less serious but, in the field of Arts education, having fun becomes fundamental to achieving desired learning outcomes.

The book is divided into three parts covering the Why, What, and How of Arts Education. With a total of twelve chapters, the authors take a deep dive into the reasons why they believe Arts education is necessary and indeed fundamental in every aspect of education. While the authors do not delve into how Arts Integration is defined, they do focus on how teachers understand and experience it. They cover the influence of each of the five Art forms in the Australian Curriculum, where five different yet related art forms such as Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, and Visual Arts are used in teaching in interrelated ways. Arts are everywhere we look and it is clear that they are culturally determined. Each art form involves different approaches to arts practices and critical and creative thinking that reflect distinct bodies of knowledge, understanding and skills.

The authors draw upon the Early Years Framework along with Australian Curriculum information, with additional focus on what they call Indigenous histories and cultures, which addresses the requirements related to the teaching of the Arts. The Australian Curriculum studies past, current and future arts practices across a range of cultures and places.

There is also a distinct focus in each art form on its own practices, terminology and applicability. The authors are able to bring out the richness and diversity inherent in teaching the Arts and provide a virtual User Manual for teachers to bring in-depth understanding into their classroom practice. Arts education should go beyond being a standalone subject to be integrated throughout the Curriculum and used as a means to teach all the other subjects. This book shows teachers step by step how they can achieve such meaningful incorporation.

What I loved about this book was the structured way the authors have presented the information; with clear instructions on what each chapter hopes to achieve, making it a practical guidebook for all teachers to immediately put to use in their classrooms. *Teaching the Arts: Early Childhood and Primary Education*, is an easy to follow and practical book with illustrations to make ideas clear. The book covers all the elements of teaching Art, and the activities fit perfectly into any pre-school classroom setting. The authors remain focused on the practical aspects throughout.

All facets of Arts education discussed in the book have brief overviews, explanations supported by studies to back them up, as well as Teacher Tips, Lesson Plans, review questions and recommended reading. There are reflection activities interspersed throughout the book at regular intervals. Additionally, in this Third Edition, the information has been updated to include the latest theory, research, and understanding in the field of neuroscience. Specifically, this edition included updated and enhanced content in the five Art forms, and additional online resources including PowerPoints for Academics. The authors also explore the differences between policy and its delivery of a 'quality' Arts education in primary and early childhood settings in terms of equity and access. Although aimed primarily at Australian Curriculum schools and pre-service teachers, this book is nevertheless a wonderful resource to any Arts teacher anywhere in the world.

Included in the book are descriptions on how to support students of differing abilities as well as ways of using an inclusive approach. Several pedagogical approaches are

covered in great detail. The relationship between the Arts and the wider world, its benefits, implications and the various ways to integrate Arts into education to improve literacy and numeracy among other necessary capabilities is discussed as is the history of Curriculum ideologies. Part three includes a roadmap on how to achieve Art integration along with several practical examples. The chapters and sequence are well-thought-out and build upon each other. The organisation of the book brings you back to necessary prior concepts while explaining just how the Arts can be used as a pedagogical tool. While acknowledging the critical role Arts play in our lives, both educationally and socially, the authors consider Arts to be embedded in all aspects of education as well as in our daily lives and draw attention to the contradiction in the title which seems to indicate Arts as separate and distinct from real life.

Having observed several Early Childhood and Primary classes focused on the arts, my experience has been that often classroom teachers do not seem to have a clear understanding of the correlation between art and learning, in particular. Especially here in Asia, most schools have relegated Art to the side in order to focus more on literacy and numeracy which is deemed important for improvement in standardised test scores. Although most educators believe that there is a clear distinction between classrooms where arts is used as a resource and those that fully incorporate art in the planning as well as implementation of Curriculum, the distinction between the two is not at all clearly understood. Thus the Arts can help diverse learners and also contribute to good practice in teaching through reflective teaching and teaching that “sticks”.

Researchers know that certain activities and movements stimulate the inner ear. This in turn helps physical balance and coordination. Studies suggest that certain activities such as spinning lead to alertness, attention, and relaxation in the classroom. Students who tip back on two legs of their chairs in class often are stimulating their brain with a rocking, vestibular activating motion. While it is an unsafe activity, it happens to be good for the brain. We must give students activities that let them move safely more often like role plays, skits, stretching, or even games like musical chairs. I have seen this in action at our school in Singapore, where the furniture is selected to make such movements possible and to stimulate learning that stays with the child. Arts such as dance and drama achieve much the same thing.

Several studies have suggested that academic learning gets a definite boost from games and so-called “play” activities (Silverman, 1993, as quoted in Jensen, 2005). In fact, three countries near the top in rankings of math and science scores (Hungary, Japan, and the Netherlands) all have rigorous music and art teaching inbuilt in their elementary school curricula. In Japan, for example, every child is required to play a musical instrument or be involved in Art subjects such as Japanese calligraphy, sculpture, music, and crafts. In fact,

Art Education in Japan can be traced back to 1872 (Masuda, 2003).

The Arts will continue to be integrated into the classroom especially with the help of books such as this one, which give teachers the tools to fully assimilate Arts into their lessons. The book manages to treat Arts education with integrity, by taking it beyond the static implementation style of teaching/learning (e.g., colouring in worksheets) to promote dynamic pathways of interdisciplinary teaching/learning that not only connect the arts to other academic subjects, but also explore the Arts as a way to make meaning of students’ and teachers’ lives and the world in general.

The book’s advice matches my own beliefs about the Arts and their inclusion into all aspects of learning and allows for modifications based on the students in your classroom. The book includes guidance on assessment for the Arts which in turn permits teachers to explore the possibilities while still planning for specific learning outcomes by establishing criteria for assessments. I truly enjoyed the coherent and hands-on structure of this book enormously and the way it steers teachers towards opening their minds to the infinite possibilities that teaching the Arts can lead to.

Furthermore, the process of merging art with one or more other discipline(s) can result in opening up a space of inclusiveness in teaching, learning, and experiencing. Students can build or debate works of art that not only teach about art, but also about other subjects such as science or mathematics. In this way, integration of arts recognises the educational curriculum as a whole and celebrates the expansive, inclusive and overlapping qualities between subjects. The focus then is on the way the arts transcend school subject boundaries.

William Bennett, the Former US Secretary of Education said “Music, dance, painting, and theater are all keys that unlock profound human understanding and accomplishment” (Bennett, 1986, p. 35). With that in mind, every teacher (pre-service or not) should read this book and use it since it expands and deepens the understanding to enable teachers to teach not just the Arts, but almost any other subject.

Additional references

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