

The Role of Artistic Literacy in Teaching and Learning

Introduction

The quest for students to acquire literacy, or educational knowledge and competency, is a ubiquitous goal across all curricular disciplines. The fundamental skills and knowledge needed for basic literacy provide the foundation for more complex learning to occur. Acquisition of literacy in the arts is similarly developed when students can demonstrate and communicate their understanding of the basic concepts and principles of the art form. Artistic literacy is defined in the [*National Coalition for Core Arts Standards: A Conceptual Framework for Arts Learning*](#) (2014) as follows:

...artistic literacy is the knowledge and understanding required to participate authentically in the arts. While individuals can learn about dance, media, music, theatre, and visual arts through reading print texts, artistic literacy requires that they engage in artistic creation processes directly through the use of materials (such as charcoal or paint or clay, musical instruments or scores...) and in specific spaces (concert halls, stages, dance rehearsal spaces, arts studios and computer labs).¹

The writers of the NCCAS Conceptual Framework propose that students must experience the arts from diverse perspectives called *Artistic Processes* including creating, performing/presenting or producing, responding, and connecting. In the *2017 Program Guide for the Arts* each of the five arts disciplines' chapters includes a description of how the *Artistic Processes* are manifested in their art form: dance, media arts, music, theatre, or visual art. One purpose of this chapter is to explain effective teaching approaches that promote "authentic" arts participation. In other words, what does it mean to be *artistic* through the lens of an artist? Further questions to be explored include:

- How should arts learning be structured so that students can begin to think like an artist?
- What are some best practices in teaching that create an active or student-centered learning environment?
- How do we really know that students have learned?
- What factors promote self-regulation and intrinsic motivation in learning?
- Why are 21st century skills or personal dispositions important goals for students in arts education?
- What are some procedures for creating curriculum and assuring alignment between what happens in the classroom, school district and community expectations, and state and national standards?

Thinking like an Artist

Artistic thinking involves complex and sometimes contradictory interactions between internal curiosity or perspective and external environmental influence; symbolic or metaphoric interpretation and verbal or written explanation; creative problem solving and literal interpretation; and, self-regulatory discipline and external expectations. Indeed, the artist must often balance the internal

processes of creativity with conflicting forces of the world around them. Teaching students to think like an artist is challenging, indeed.

Arts educators were tasked in the 1994 National Standards for the Arts to foster students' acquisition of arts skills and knowledge. The nine content standards were the result of decades of discussions by arts educators who came to a general consensus regarding what was important to know and be able to do in the arts. This significant step in identifying the core knowledge and skills needed to understand and make art provided a framework for curriculum development and assessment practices for 20 years. Language from the standards document itself clarifies this:

Standards for arts education are important for two fundamental reasons. First, they help define what a good education in the arts should provide: a thorough grounding in a basic body of knowledge and the skills required both to make sense and to make use of each of the arts disciplines... An education in the arts means that students should know what is spelled out here, reach specified levels of attainment, and do both at defined points in their education. Put differently, arts standards provide a vision of both competence and educational effectiveness, but without creating a mold into which all arts programs must fit.²

The 1994 standards articulated the knowledge and skills that arts education should provide. In contrast, the 2014 National Core Arts Standards (adopted by Connecticut as the Connecticut Arts Standards) embed specific artistic knowledge and skills. The standards focus on the learning inherent in the Artistic Processes, then refined and defined by the *Process Components* from each of the five arts disciplines. The chart below lists many of the process components found in the arts standards.

Process Components in the Arts Standards

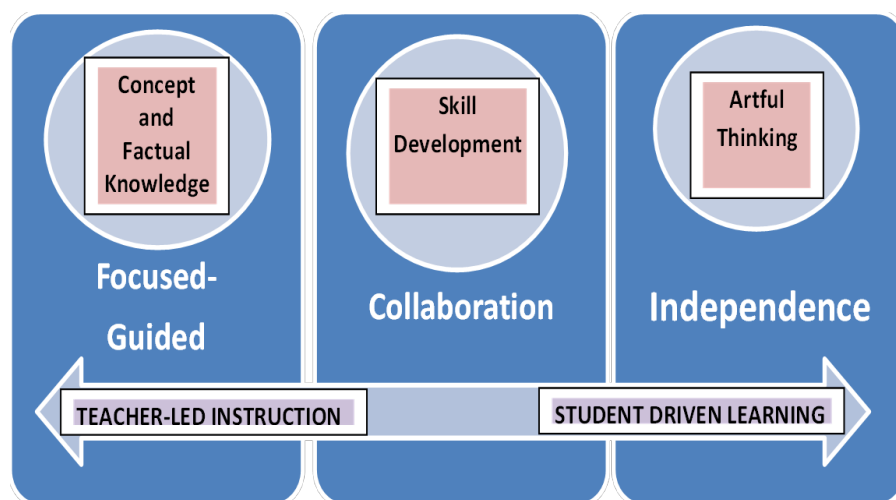
DANCE	MEDIA ARTS	MUSIC	THEATER	VISUAL ART
Explore	Imagine	Imagine	Envision	Perceive
Plan	Plan	Plan and Make	Conceptualize	Relate
Revise	Organize	Evaluate	Develop	Investigate
Express	Produce	Refine	Rehearse	Plan & Make
Embody	Construct	Present	Select	Classify
Present	Refine	Select	Prepare	Create
Analyze	Create	Analyze	Share-Present	Explore
Interpret	Innovate	Interpret	Interpret	Design
Critique	Contextualize	Rehearse	Evaluate	Refine
Synthesize	Relate	Refine	Empathize	Reflect
Relate	Convey	Present	Interrelate	Analyze
	Critique	Connect	Research	Interpret
				Elaborate
				Compare

Core arts knowledge and skills are implied in the 2014 National Core Arts Standards requiring teachers to now aim their learning goals toward the artistic processes that promote artistic thinking and ultimately artistic literacy. In reviewing the process components in the chart, it is clear that these verbs represent higher order thinking and are meant to develop 21st century dispositions and work place skills. The challenge for arts educators, often faced with restrictions of time and resources, is to provide the necessary support and guidance to help students achieve these goals. What are instructional practices that may help accomplish this?

Best Practices for Active/Student Centered Instruction

Arts classes by their nature are places where students are involved in active learning. Students perform music, create art, present a play, dance to music, or invent new media. Teachers often model or use direct instruction so that students receive explicit guidance in executing their art. Any arts educator will agree that their exemplar is critical to the students’ learning processes. However, this segment of the instruction represents just part of the instructional puzzle. Students may mimic what the teacher models, but true artistic literacy also involves artistic *thinking* on the part of the student. Looking back at the process components, we see that student self-regulation and independence is critical to addressing the artistic processes. As arts educators, it is necessary to teach the core knowledge and skills but also with an eye toward developing students’ personal dispositions. This student-centered instruction “encompasses a wide array of practices that bring students into the process of assessing their growth and learning. They gain a deeper sense of their progress and ultimately become more independent learners.”³ This idea of a three-pronged approach to teaching in an active or student-centered classroom may be represented by the following graphic:

Teaching for Artistic Literacy⁴



In active learning- or student-centered arts classrooms students not only engage in making the art, they are given time to make connections with their own cultural background, assess their technique and understanding, interact with peers, and participate in evaluating their own progress. The process is

cyclical as learning progresses. Teacher-led instruction is sometimes as necessary for advanced learners as it is for novice learners. Collaborative and independent learning opportunities often occur fluidly within a single lesson. The chart below provides some examples of active, student-centered learning in arts classrooms.

In a Student-Centered Arts Classroom, Students....
Set personal goals Plan and create their own work Self and peer evaluate Conduct student led rehearsals Write art or performance critiques Lead student-researched program or production notes Collaborate in developing artistic products, programs, plots, movement Collaborate in design/problem solving/analysis Actively engage in error detection & revising Assist in determining presentations, concerts, or shows And more....

The Role of Inquiry and Feedback

To accomplish these types of learner-centered activities in the arts classroom the teacher's role moves to that of facilitator of the learning rather than the distributor of knowledge. "When placed on a continuum of active student involvement, one end of the continuum represents little or some student involvement versus the opposing end that represents mostly student-driven learning. In other words, if the beliefs, theories, or perspectives of the instructor or governing bodies perceive that the student is at the center of the learning experience then those factors will serve as the center of how the curriculum is developed."⁵

If students have had little or no experiences in guiding their own learning, they must be given direction for learning to do so. Even young children may be asked to rate their own work indicated by marking symbols on a colorful check list or rubric, or raising hands. The ability to tactfully and respectfully peer evaluate or work in collaboration is a critical life skill that should begin early in their school lives and remain a standard throughout the school years. A few ideas for establishing meaningful collaboration and communication in arts classrooms include:

- Establishing classroom guidelines (developed with student input) and posted for reference;
- Creating key words or symbols as non-verbal reminders for students to maintain respectful behavior;
- Scaffolding and blending direct instruction, modeling, and student-led work; and
- Providing teacher-led and ultimately student-led questions that inspire students to think about, reflect, and articulate their perspectives on artistic work.

Productive and scaffolded questioning skills are keys to an active learning classroom. Well-formulated questions, cues, or prompts promote active learning, encourage diverse types of thinking including problem-solving and reasoning, foster collaboration and social skills, and help students think and reflect for themselves. The goal is for students to become self-regulated learners both at school and in life. Many types of questioning techniques exist in education:

- [Bloom's Taxonomy](#), the original published in 1956, and its revision in 2001, have traditionally provided a basis for evaluating levels of cognition. In the revision, the taxonomy ordered cognition levels and added different types of thinking.
- [The Depths of Knowledge \(DOK\)](#) model categorizes four levels of activities and question starters: *Recall*, *Skills/Concepts*, *Strategic Thinking*, and *Extended Thinking*.
- [Socratic Questions](#) challenge students in six areas: *Conceptual clarification questions* to help students probe their own thinking for deeper levels; *Probing assumptions* helps students think about their presuppositions and unquestioned beliefs; *Probing rational, reasons and evidence* challenges students to provide rationales and reasoning for their beliefs; *Questioning viewpoints and perspectives* asks students to consider other equally valid viewpoints than their own; *Probing implication and consequences* challenges students to consider the outcomes of their thinking or decisions; and, *Questioning the questions* requires students to consider what about their questions were important in the first place.
- [Question-Answer-Response](#) questions begin with *Right There* questions-fundamental, easy to identify through seeing or hearing (e.g. colors, lines, positions, tempos, symbols). *Think and Search* questions ask students to look through the music, script, artwork, or movement to find and describe arts elements and principles; *Author and Me* questions require some prerequisite knowledge. The questions deal with perceived emotional responses, interpretations, ideas that arise from the work itself; and, *On My Own* questions that ask students to “think outside of the box” by predicting, providing rationales, challenging reasons and evidence.

For arts educators, all of these techniques are usable in arts classrooms and studios, rehearsals, and productions. However, most of these techniques place more significance on cognitive rather than creative and affective thinking. David Krathwohl, co-author of *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, The Affective Domain* described the affective taxonomy as “...objectives which emphasize a feeling tone, an emotion, or a degree of acceptance or rejection. Affective objectives vary from simple attention to selected phenomena to complex but internally consistent qualities of character and conscience.”⁶ A statement in the 1994 National Standards for the Arts best summarizes what this means for arts education.

Standards identify what our children must know and be able to do. Thus, the vision embedded in these Standards insists that a mere nodding acquaintance with the arts is not enough to sustain our children’s interest or involvement in them. The Standards must usher each new generation onto the pathway of engagement, which opens in turn onto a lifetime of learning and growth through the arts. It is along this pathway that our children will find their personal directions and make their singular contributions. It is along this pathway, as well, that they will discover who they are, and even more, who they can become.⁷

“In this single statement, the writers of the 1994 National Standards for the Arts traveled the entire Affective Domain continuum from simple awareness and response to valuing, organizing, and crafting our children’s characters. As arts educators, our goal is to provide direction for the cognitive and physical skills that students need to make the arts integral to students’ personal character, philosophical outlook, and personal beliefs, thereby illustrating highest level of the Affective Domain.”⁸

While the arts necessarily foster rational and linear thought, they also primarily raise emotional responses that are important to explore. Offered below is a model that encourages the use of verbs from lower (*Emergent Thinking*) and higher (*Critical Thinking*) cognition levels and as well as *Creative Thinking* and *Affective Thinking*. The verbs in each category may be used as question starters, prompts, or cues for instruction.

Emergent Thinking			
Memorize	Recite	Identify	Imitate
Select	Recognize	Describe	Point to
Explore	Restate	Recall	Label
Choose	Report	Copy	List
Match	Define	Experience	Name
Share	Repeat	Say	State
-What instrument plays the melody? -Who is the main Character? -In what position is the dancer? -What color is most predominant?			
Critical Thinking			
Categorize	Clarify	Clarify	Appraise
Analyze	Compare	Critique	Balance
Deconstruct	Contrast	Differentiate	Classify
Decide	Explain	Distinguish	Critique
Demonstrate	Reflect	Evaluate	Discriminate
Infer	Probe	Investigate	Document
Organize	Translate	Observe	Document
Predict	Verify	Practice	Judge

<p>-Predict what will happen. -Explain what you mean. -Compare and contrast this piece to another. -Discuss with your group where the phrase starts and ends. Justify your response. What genre and style does this piece represent-why?</p>			
Creative Thinking			
Apply Create Construct Design Expand Imagine Invent Investigate Synthesize	Develop Explore Improvise Integrate Perform Predict Problem- Solve Refine	Compose Experiment Generate Integrate Practice Produce Present Sculpt Use	Conceptualize Choreograph Curate Envision Form Plan Redesign Repurpose Symbolize
<p>-How would you change or improve this? - Experiment with this and create a new piece. - What do you think would happen if...? - Using these materials and what you have learned make a new piece.</p>			
Affective Thinking			
Accept Empathize Reject Prefer Receive Respond to Self-Initiate	Convey Desire Express Initiate Reflect Seek Value	Believe Connect Defend Engage Feel Generate Persist	Adapt Imply Internalize Perceive Refine Relate Sense
<p>Describe how this work makes you feel. Why do you prefer the first one? How does this piece relate to your life? What do you perceive is the meaning of this work? How could you make more of an impact?</p>			

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Posing questions, prompts, and cues to students is how teachers instigate active learning. Rather than relying primarily on reciting information or imitating procedures, using these interactive verbs can help students personalize meaning and connect to prior or predictive knowledge. Used in a scaffolded manner, they may extend or deepen students thinking and understanding of concepts and other points of view. Most importantly, allowing students to express personal creative and affective

thoughts enables them opportunities to reflect their own beliefs yet disagree in a civil manner. Some excellent resources for questioning, cueing, and prompting are listed in the resources at the end of this chapter.

Using Formative and Summative Assessments in the Arts Classroom

Properly created questions, prompts and cues are also significant elements for developing assessments. Arts educators have become increasingly adept at creating summative assessment, in particular rubrics and check lists. Summative assessment is important for determining how well a student has mastered targeted skills and knowledge goals as well as helping teachers determine student growth.

Formative assessment in the arts is most often the predominant measurement of student learning, however. The term “formative assessment” originated in the late 1960s and was later clarified by Benjamin Bloom and associates in 1971.⁹ Popham defined formative assessment as “a planned process in which assessment-elicited evidence of students’ status is used by teachers to adjust their ongoing instructional procedures or by students to adjust their current learning tactics.”¹⁰ Cizek summarized numerous definitions of formative assessments through these characteristics:

Students will:

1. Be responsible for their own learning..
2. Use frequent peer and student self-assessments
3. Self-monitor progress toward agreed upon learning goals..
4. Revise and improve work related to their learning goals

Teachers will:

1. Identify and relay clearly stated learning goals to students.
2. Design learning goals that focus on specific classroom goals as well as goals beyond the classroom.
3. Identify and recognize in lessons students’ current and prior knowledge.
4. Assist students in planning, self-monitoring, and self-assessing learning goals.
5. Provide frequent, non-evaluative, and timely feedback.
6. Embed assessments with instruction.¹¹

These definitions and descriptions embody the spirit of a student-centered classroom. And, in relationship to arts education, they provide the framework for fostering artistic literacy. A truly masterful teacher using strong formative assessment approaches moves effortlessly from direct instruction and modeling with the goal of growing independent, self-regulated learners.

In the model lesson units that are posted on the CSDE website, formative assessment and student-centered learning techniques are embedded in the instructional strategies. Several sources for these techniques, which transcend curricular disciplines in many cases, are listed in the resources at the

end of this chapter. Some techniques, found in *Making Thinking Visible*¹² represent innovative ideas for checking student cognitive, creative, and affective understanding and include:

- **Plickers:** A free app for phones that quickly assesses T-F or Multi-Choice questions
- **Think-Pair-Share:** Generate and share criteria for quality or ponder a question
- **Exit Tickets:** Quick survey of students' understanding: Can be done with an app.
- **One Minute Writes:** Quick reflections; written on note cards or electronic devices
- **Think Out Loud Modeling:** Teacher talks through and models same procedures and thinking as the students will do
- **Chalk Talk:** The teacher generates a prompt with a statement or question about artistic processes or products and writes it in the center of a piece of chart paper. The class reads the prompt and responds in writing with pen or marker on the chart without talking. After writing their own comments, students can comment on other student's remarks but only the "chalk" talks. This procedure can be done on a Smart Board or other electronic device; and,
- **Glass, Bugs, Mud:** Students use these metaphors to relay their understanding of a skill, concept, or technique. Mud indicates confusion, Bugs indicates that they are unclear, and Glass indicates they understand.

Motivational aspects of teaching and learning

As arts educators we want our students to enjoy being creatively involved in the arts. It is motivating for us to observe student pride in their work and we hope the sense of accomplishment motivates students to pursue further artistic endeavors. But, as psychologist Csikszentmihayi wrote, "A person who has not learned how to mix pigments cannot enjoy painting for long; he or she will not be able to match goals with actions."¹³ Researchers who have investigated human motivation have long agreed that people are more motivated to persist with a task if they are able to incrementally master the knowledge and skills related to the task. We also know that as humans we are more interested in learning if they actively participate in the learning process. "Shared learning goals presented from the viewpoint of the student help students see, recognize, and understand the task at hand and promote self-determination and self-regulation."¹⁴ Accomplishing artistic literacy in schools today then requires teachers to serve as both the "sage" and the "guide" in structuring lessons, instructional strategies, and assessments.

Dispositions and 21st Century Skills

The goal of the National Core Standards for the Arts, as adopted by Connecticut, is for students to participate *authentically* in the arts. When arts educators are asked what their personal processes are for creating, performing, or responding to their art, their descriptions inevitably capture the process components found in the national standards. Every student will not ultimately be a professional musician or artist, but we desire for them to be supporters, participants, and consumers of the arts. Additionally, students should learn positive and productive work place skills from arts study. When we

compare the process components to a short list of 21st century skills the relationship between the lists is palpable. An excellent source to extend this information is on the [NAfME website](#).

Artistic Process and 21st Century Skills

Connect the dots.....

<u>Process Components</u>	<u>21st Century Skills</u>
Analyze	Creativity
Express	Critical Thinking
Embody	Collaboration
Evaluate	Communication
Interpret	Flexibility
Interrelate	Accountability
Investigate	Emotional Control
Plan and Make	Initiative
Demonstrate	Innovation
Present	Productivity
Rehearse	Problem-Solve
Refine	Responsibility
Reflect	Self- Direction
Research	

Time Tested Procedures

Creating curriculum and assuring alignment of school district and community expectations with state and national standards

Schools and school districts all over the country are pursuing the writing or revision of their curricular standards. This process is dynamic and never finished as educational institutes adjust and modify their learning goals, educational environments, and instructional practices to meet the needs of the future. Much has been written about the process of curricular design and many of those resources are listed at the end of this chapter. While each state, locality, and school district maintains its own curricular identity, there are several time-tested procedures that remain constant in the planning process.

1. Determine the most important and developmentally appropriate knowledge and skills, and related workforce skills that your students should know and be able to do for CREATING, PERFORMING, RESPONDING, CONNECTING. These may need to be prioritized or “powered.”
2. Identify WHY these things are important through your Philosophy, Mission, and/or Purpose statements.
 - **Philosophy:** What do we believe about arts education? What is the reason for arts education in our schools? Why do we exist?
 - **Mission:** What is our core purpose and how will we accomplish it? See an example from Darien in the resources at the end of this chapter.

- **Purpose:** Why is this document important? Who will it serve? Why is it needed? How will it be used?
- 3. Identify WHAT students will be able to know and do and HOW students will demonstrate that they have learned and can think about or evaluate their own learning. This may be communicated through a Curriculum Map, Scope and Sequence, and/or aligned through Enduring Understandings and/or Essential Questions.
- 4. IDENTIFY which 2014 Performance Standards or Artistic Processes represent your learning outcomes and the sequence. This process may also be part of Step One.
- 5. Using your existing standards, BLEND your district curriculum into your new curriculum or establish a new format and approach to your standards.
- 6. Throughout the process, consider instructional time, resources, professional development, and teacher evaluation.

Advocating for Arts Programs

Strong arts programs characteristically are led by strong teachers, communities and administrators that support the arts, excellent communication, resources, and a well-designed sequential curriculum. The arts are a profoundly human means of expression dating back to the beginnings of our existence and are a significant way in which we demonstrate our humanness. The arts as a curricular subject area are recognized as a core subject and are required in most states across the country. Still, advocacy for arts programs remains as relevant now as ever before. There are many outstanding sites that serve as resources for advocacy. In each chapter of this Program Guide the Resources section will provide links and publications. Most states have links to advocacy ideas and sites, and most national arts organizations include suggestions for advocacy. Listed below are other sites that contain excellent resources:

<http://www.americansforthearts.org/advocate>

<https://www.arts.gov/artistic-fields/arts-education>

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators>

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/quotes> (a link to arts advocacy quotes)

<http://ovationtv.com/advocacy/>

<http://www.artsforla.org/arts-advocacy-toolkit>

<http://performingartsconvention.org/advocacy/id=32>

<http://www.musicforall.org/who-we-are/advocacy>

http://www.risd.edu/About/STEM_to_STEAM/https://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.athe.org/resource/resmgr/imported/ArtsAdvocacyFundamentals.pdf

<http://www.theperformingartsalliance.org/issues/>

<http://performingartsconvention.org/advocacy/id=28> (includes useful arts advocacy quotes)

<http://www.nafme.org/advocacy/>

<https://toolkit.centerforartsed.org/sites/default/files/Arts-Education-Parent-Advocacy-Toolkit.pdf>

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Additional Resources

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Endnotes

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