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Preparing Teachers for Integrating Visual Arts for Academic Success of Elementary School Students

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**Preparing Teachers for Integrating Visual Arts for
Academic Success of Elementary School Students**

Abstract

The majority of people agree that students' education should provide them with the essential skills to be successful in the 21st century workforce. Although these same sets of skills are commonly practiced through the process of making art, art education continues to hold an inferior status in schools. This disconnection raises the question, what has led to the devaluation of art in academics? This senior capstone will explore how teachers are prepared to integrate visual arts into the classroom. Through the use of literature review, interviews with three in-service teachers, and survey of students majoring in Liberal Studies at CSUMB, the result findings indicate that there is a lack of adequate teacher preparation and professional development in visual art integration that has contributed to the academic success of elementary school students.

Introduction and Background

For 12 years, I worked with elementary school students at a before and after-school child care program. During this time, I taught several art lessons in which the final products were relatively similar in appearance and did not exhibit higher-level thinking. Although many parents made positive remarks about the artwork, they could rarely tell their child's work apart from others. While the cohesiveness of the art made the classroom esthetically pleasing, the work did not demonstrate the students' creativity, individuality, or connection with the real world. The 'look alike' artwork that the students were creating was a result of carefully constructed and detailed instructions to make sure everyone's end product would come out the same. Unfortunately, this process of making 'art' is not unusual among teachers. Since art education is not a subject evaluated in high-stakes testing, many educators look for art lessons that will look cute on the classroom walls and that can fill empty time in class. As LaJevic (2013) points out in her article, *Arts Integration: What is really happening in the elementary classroom*, "using art ... as decoration in the room...helps contribute to a devaluation of the arts in Art Integration" (p.6). Furthermore, this misuse of art leads to other issues such as "positioning art as an inferior status in education, making it seem insignificant with respect to students' academic success" (LaJevic, 2013, p.3).

Despite researchers having found evidence that "art [integration] promotes various positive cognitive habits and leads to positive effects on learning in other disciplines" (Roeger & Kim, 2013, p.122), art projects commonly produced in the classroom suggest a superficial level of thinking. So why doesn't art reflect the higher-level thinking it promises to deliver? According to LaJevic (2013), "teachers' schooling and life experiences are different [which makes the] understanding of Arts Integration widely different" (p.3). Moreover, since art education is not a

requirement for teachers, their understanding of art integration is limited. The lack of understanding of art integration is not the only issue that teachers face when implementing the arts into their lessons. Since the *No Child Left Behind* Legislature that passed in 2005, there has been increased pressure placed on teachers to raise their students' test scores. Since the schools' funding relies on these scores, the arts are being pushed out of the classroom to allow more time for core subjects. As schools continue to narrow their focus on scores of high-stakes testing, it is important to remember that the arts help students develop key skills for academic success. Even more so, it is crucial for teachers to be properly prepared in art integration to support their student's academic success which will help them long after they have left the class.

In this article, the primary question I will be addressing is how teachers are prepared for integrating visual arts for the academic success of elementary school students? Followed by several secondary or related research questions as following:

- (1) To what extent do in-service teachers think they are prepared to integrate visual arts to benefit the academic success of elementary school students?
- (2) What does research say about how integrating visual arts at the elementary school level benefits students academically?
- (3) After the enactment of NCLB, how have teachers integrated and implemented visual arts into the curriculum?
- (4) To what extent, do in-service and pre-service teachers think that integrating visual arts benefit the academic success of elementary school students? If so, in what ways?
- (5) Are there resources available for teachers to integrate visual arts into the classrooms to benefit elementary school students' success?

I argue that teachers are not adequately prepared through their schooling or training to integrate art in a manner that will lead to students' academic success. In addition to insufficient training, teachers are pressured to focus on core subjects tested in high-stakes testing which continues to move their focus away from the arts. Although there are direct correlations between

skills for career success and skills attained through the practice of arts, visual arts is not a high priority in the elementary classroom. Since teachers play a key role in their student's academic success, it is important to provide educators with adequate training for successful art integration.

I believe that this article will help teachers, both in service and preservice, understand the importance of art education so that they may help students develop skills for the 21st century. I hope to bring awareness of this issue not just to educators, but to government officials so that we may be able to see a positive change in schools. I also hope to inspire students' families to take a stand against the narrowing of curricula in schools. I also hope to educate everyone on the importance of art practices for the preparation for students' success in the world outside of school.

Before moving on, it is important to note what art is and what it constitutes. "Art is an essential form of expression and communication, an expansive and diverse language fundamentally connected to experiencing and engaging in the world around us" (Donahue & Stuart, 2010, p. 19). To put it simply, "... art is an expression, and art-making is the process of that expression" (Donahue & Stuart, 2010, p.20). For the sake of this study, I will be focusing on visual art which is defined as "creative art whose products are to be appreciated by sight..." (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023, p.1). "Visual Arts include traditional fine arts such as drawing, painting, ceramics, metals, printmaking, fiber arts, photography, sculpture, works in wood, and mixed media" (California Arts Standards for Public Schools, 2019, p.199). To ensure better access to art practices in schools, the National Art Education Association was created in 1994 (Arts in Action, 2018, p.1). These standards were readdressed in 2014 becoming the National Core Art Standards (Arts in Action, 2018, p.1). There are eleven visual art anchor standards that the California Arts Standards for Public Schools have identified as important skills

that students should develop through the process of making art. The standards are as follows, 1) Generate and Conceptualize Artistic Ideas and Work; 2) Organize and Develop Artistic Ideas and Work; 3) Organize and Develop Artistic Ideas and Work; 4) Select, Analyze, and Interpret Artistic Work for Presentation; 5) Develop and Refine Artistic Techniques and Work for Presentation; 6) Convey Meaning Through the Presentation of Artistic Work; 7) Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work; 8) Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work; 9) Apply Criteria to Evaluate Artistic Work; 10) Synthesize and Relate Knowledge and Personal Experiences to Make Art; 11) Relate Artistic Ideas and Works with Social, Cultural, and Historical Context to Deepen Understanding” (Arts in Action, 2018, p.1).

Through these practices, the California Arts Standards for Public Schools, hope that students will learn how to imagine, plan, create, investigate, reflect, revise, refine, select, analyze, prepare, present, perceive, interpret, evaluate, synthesize, and relate, as they engage in the practice of visual art making. Although these standards help give structure to the arts by addressing learning outcomes that will help guide teachers’ lessons, the standards are not enforced the same way that they are in core subjects like math and language arts. These “standards are voluntary” and therefore, public schools are not required to meet these standards (Arts in Action, 2018, p.1). In response to the lack of requirements to meet these standards, the California Arts Standards for Public Schools (2019) urges “...educators to utilize the art standards to update curriculum, instruction, and assessment.. [because] every child should have equitable access to high-quality, standard-based arts education to thrive in modern society...” (p.1).

Literature Review

When surveying several groups of people to understand the purpose of schooling and what constitutes quality education, Ritchhart (2021) found that many believe schools should prepare students to be successful in the 21st-century workforce (p.17). For this reason, it is no surprise that when “employers were asked to rank the skills they were looking for on potential applicants,..[these] applied skills” (Ritchhart, 2021, p.17) ranked the highest over academics. The emergence of a creative economy makes it important for students to develop entrepreneurial skills because companies increasingly rely on creative professionals to trigger business innovation (Roeger & Kim, 2013). For students to be prosperous outside of school, they should have a drive for learning, facilitate innovation, deal with complexities, work as a team, and situate [themselves] collectively in the world (Ritchhart, 2021). To elaborate, students’ skill set should include curiosity, inquisitiveness, creativity, problem-solving, imagination, collaboration, empathy, good listening, critical thinking, global citizenship, being a member of the community, and someone aware of their impact on the environment (Ritchhart, 2021). Many if not all these abilities, that we as a society find of great value, are commonly practiced in the process of art making and are essential to promoting the necessary 21st-century skills... (May & Robinson, 2016) making them a natural fit into the curriculum (LaJevic, 2013). These art skills are what Donahue and Stuart (2010) call “studio habits of mind” (p.3). They consist of 10 distinguished habits that the arts focus on and include (1) developing craft, (2) engaging and persisting, (3) envisioning, (4) expressing, (5) observing, (6) reflecting, (7) evaluating, (8) stretching and exploring, (9) understanding the world of art, and (10) communities (Donahue & Stuart, 2010). Each of these skills makes a direct correlation to 21st-century skills.

Since art is process-based, it helps students focus on the experience of learning and directs their focus away from the good/bad and right/wrong evaluation which in turn promotes

students' drive for learning (Davis, 2005). Students are encouraged to reflect on their observations, ask questions, and use their imagination to envision new ideas through the practice of evaluating art. This allows them to follow their curiosity and investigate new understandings. May and Robinson (2016) explain that the arts...provide students with meaningful learning experiences, which may enable students to construct their own informed perspectives. The process of arts helps to excite and engage both students and teachers, who are naturally bonded by the curiosity and quest for mastery that the arts invite (Davis, 2005). In addition, the arts promote active participation which helps effectively teach toward varying learning styles, they foster creativity and self-expression, stimulate critical thinking, help form knowledgeable citizens, and positively affect child development and learning (LaJevic, 2013). Since students are engaged in learning through the arts, the school climate is improved and teachers are more effective (Roeger & Kim, 2013).

In addition to developing a drive for learning, students who practice art facilitate innovation by engaging and persisting. Art students are encouraged to stretch and explore without a preconceived plan and embrace the opportunity to learn from their mistakes (Donahue & Stuart, 2010). These mistakes are seen as opportunities and an openness to unanticipated outcomes as viable places to begin the process anew (Davis, 2005). This creates a safe place for students to take risks because there is no fear of failing. The emphasis on the process and effort, rather than product and results is better for encouraging students' originality (Roeger & Kim, 2013). Even more so, the promotion of playful inquiry, mentoring models, and self-directed learning via art education can foster a creative climate, encouraging students to be more inquisitive and experimental (Roeger & Kim, 2013).

Another skill commonly addressed in the arts is the need to work with others. The non-threatening climate [that the arts offer] renders diverse ideas and competing viewpoints acceptable and allows explorations of alternative approaches (Roeger & Kim, 2013). Since the arts offer a chance for students to work in groups, this helps for recovering the lack of communication they face in interpersonal relations (Demirel, 2011). The group work commonly used in art also helps students learn how to empathize and show respect to others (Demirel, 2011). Students are taught how to reflect on their processes of art-making by sharing their thoughts and ideas with others which allows them to effectively collaborate ideas, problem-solve, and make connections as a group effort. In addition to expressing their views, students learn to become good listeners by hearing how their peers worked through the process.

Since art students are urged to evaluate their art process, they become more familiar with dealing with complexities. Through the process of art, students will make an analysis of their work and the works of others to explore themes and elements of the work. This process inspires students to think critically about what they are observing and make connections. According to Demirel (2011), students who practice the arts acquire several mental abilities such as critical perspective, learning to think, learning how to interpret, and discovering new ways of expression. This shows how arts education promotes various positive cognitive habits and leads to positive effects on learning in other disciplines...which include improved academics (Roeger & Kim, 2013).

Lastly, one of the most fundamental efforts behind making art is how it connects to the real world. Since art is a “transformative practice that arises from people's struggles to make sense of the world,” it allows students to naturally form an understanding of global citizenship and empathy (Donahue & Stuart, 2010, p.39). Furthermore, by “building meaningful connections

between preexisting knowledge and understanding of the world through new information, students cultivate active thinking...” (Zhbanova & Rule, 2022, p.5). Many artists use their work to help raise awareness of issues involving social justice and equity, making art a logical way to help students become aware of their impact on the environment and society.

Although society has deemed these five qualities essential for success, our schools reflect a different set of goals for education. Since 2005, "the passage of No Child Left Behind, large-scale assessments have come to play a central role in federal and state education accountability systems” (Wei et al., 2015, p.8). For schools to show that they are meeting the standards of No Child Left Behind, NCLB, “...teachers are evaluated on the basis of their ability to raise test scores for students from year to year” (Wei et al., 2015, p.8). This has led to “accountability measures [being] increased and the pressures to perform well against predetermined criteria are ratcheted up...” (Hall & Thomson, 2017, p.5). As a direct result, Teacher C explains that “art is not practiced in schools the same way it used to be because, “expectations are so high now, and that falls on you, it falls on your district, it falls on your principal” (Teacher C, personal communication, March 10, 2023). With the increased pressures of high-stake testing, schools are “narrow[ing] the curriculum to focus on the tested subjects at the expense of subjects like...art” (Wei et. al., 2015, p.8). “The continued NCLB emphasis on accountability in the United States, [not only] neglects crucial basic needs for students, [but] siphons much of the enthusiasm from teachers’ efforts to nurture creativity in their students...” (Roegel & Kim, 2013, p.126). Moreover, as Demirel (2011) points out, that the “visual arts lessons provided in elementary education are to help children develop themselves emotionally and mentally so that they can actively participate in the socialization process” (p.1972). This makes “elementary education a crucial period” (p.1972) for students to acquire skills practiced in

the process of making art. Despite the push for teaching core subjects these [academic skills] do not adequately define the kind of students we collectively hope to see in the world” (Ritchhart, 2021, p.17).

Although across the board, experts agree that there is significant value in teaching the arts in school, there has been some disagreement on how to properly implement it. While some researchers argue the practice of art for art's sake, others point out how integrating arts into the curriculum can help support students' understanding of other disciplines. Although Donahue and Stuart (2010) have a strong belief that the arts foster improved learning...,they address how “arts in the curriculum as an aid to learning something else is problematic because it can reduce art to a ‘handmaiden’...[and suggest] that art integration should be few and explicit” (p.3). Part of their concern is derived from teachers' misunderstanding of how to incorporate art into their lesson plans. Commonly teachers will “tag on art projects” at the end of a unit instead of “making art central to the lesson's purpose” (Donahue & Stuart, 2010, p.5). However, if teachers make art central to the lesson’s purpose, students are more likely to see how thinking in the art connects, furthers, and challenges thinking in [other] disciplines (Donahue & Stuart, 2010, p.5). Being aware of art integration critics, LaJevic (2013) explains that because arts have such a profound effect on students' understanding of other academic subjects, “they will continue to be implemented into the classroom” (p.2). For this reason, LaJevic (2013) strongly suggests that primary teachers need more support and training in art integration. She argues that “it is necessary to reevaluate the position of art in teacher education, so a deeper knowledge of the arts can be developed” (LaJevic, 2013, p.2). Roege and Kim (2013) have also expressed connections between the “arts and improved academic performance” (p.122). Through their studies, they have found that students who practice arts routinely score higher on SAT and the development of

entrepreneurial-type skills (Roeger & Kim, 2013, p.122). While they support the practice of art integration, they agree that because arts education “falls primarily on classroom teachers who do not have training in the arts” (Roeger & Kim, 2013, p.125), it is necessary for them to establish partnerships with creative professionals. As a firm believer in the importance of art integration, Davis (2005) believes that the arts are “not divorced from the day-to-day substance of living and learning in the world” (p.17). She explains that “teachers may need to argue strongly for the time, resources, and respect to maintain a reflective culture of artful learning, and it is essential they do so, for teachers are the keepers of such opportunity of the youth” (Davis, 2005, p.17). Although May and Robinson (2016) understand the expressed concerns that researchers have about the art’s maintaining integrity and validity of arts subjects in integrated lessons, they believe that with careful planning and collaboration, art integration is very beneficial. May and Robinson (2016) also agree that the “key component to arts integration is teacher collaboration, which should include teachers with complementary skills who will share equal responsibility for planning collective goals and objectives to provide meaningful integrated lessons” (p. 21).

Methods and Procedures

The main research question for my study was: How does preparing teachers for integrating visual arts benefit the academic success of elementary school students? For the purpose of this study, I will be focusing on visual arts “since art teachers, or specialists, in K-12 U.S. schools, primarily teach visual arts” (LaJevic, 2013, p.4). My study was composed of three different parts including (1) interviews with in-service teachers to understand how they have prepared to integrate arts into their curriculum, what they know about art integration, and how they are currently integrating art into the curricula (See Appendix A for In-Service Teacher

Interview Questions); (2) observation of an ‘art integration’ lesson to see how an in-service teacher implements art into the curriculum (See Appendix B for Art Integration Lesson Observation); (3) survey of preservice teachers to understand their familiarity with art integration, if they felt prepared to integrate art into their curriculum, and if they planned to integrate art into their curricula (See Appendix C for Pre-Service Teacher Survey).

In total, I interviewed three in-service elementary school teachers. The criteria for the teacher participants were as follows (1) certified elementary school teacher, (2) currently working as a teacher, (3) each teacher works in a different district, (4) each teacher works with a different grade level, and (5) willing to participate in the study. To produce a wide range of in-service teacher perspectives for the interviews, I chose teacher participants from different districts that served different populations. My first participant was Teacher A, who has been an in-service teacher for 5 years. She works in the Bay Area district as a 2nd and 3rd-grade combination primary teacher. Teacher B has been working as a teacher for 25 + years. She currently works at Silicon Valley District as a primary first-grade teacher. Teacher C has been working as an in-service teacher for 21+ years. She currently works at Rural District as a primary kindergarten teacher. Each of the three participants was individually interviewed for about 45 minutes using the same set of questions (See Appendix A for In-Service Teacher Interview Questions). To make sure none of their responses were missed, each subject was recorded upon permission. The first interview was with participant Teacher A, which was conducted on February 28th, 2023 over Zoom. The second interview took place on March 4th, 2023 with Teacher B. Teacher B was also interviewed over Zoom due to being a great distance away. The third interview was in-person with Teacher C on March 10th, 2023. The interview took place in Teacher C’s classroom after observing an art integration lesson.

In addition to interviewing Teacher C, I did an observation of her teaching an ‘art integration’ lesson (See Appendix B for Art Integration Lesson Observation). The observation of the lesson was about 15 minutes in length. The lesson took place Friday afternoon on March 10th, 2023 between 1:45 p.m. to 2 p.m. During the lesson, there were 15 student participants between the ages of 5 and 6 years of age. At least 6 of the students were English Language Learners, ELL. Teacher C’s lesson aimed to integrate two subjects which were language arts and visual arts. Teacher C’s classroom aide was present during the duration of the lesson to assist both Teacher C and the students.

Additionally, I surveyed pre-service teachers (See Appendix C for Pre-Service Teacher Survey). The survey consisted of 5 questions which included (1) Do you have any formal art education? (2) How much do you know about art education? (3) How confident do you feel teaching an art integration lesson? (4) In the future, how often do you plan on integrating art into your curriculum? (5) Would you be interested in learning more about art integration? Each of the five questions was multiple choice, making it easier for participants to answer. Each of the survey questions was aligned to help me understand how pre-service teachers are prepared to integrate visual arts to benefit the academic success of elementary school students. To make the process of collecting data more sufficient, I created a QR code using the Flowcode Program and linked it to a Google Form survey (See Appendix D for QR code for Pre-Service Teacher Survey). This allowed me to give multiple professors the code so that they could share the survey with the students in each of their classes. The use of digital technology to collect data, also allowed me to receive instant feedback from participants. As participants submitted their responses, Google Forms organized the responses in graphs and charts allowing me to see accurate calculations of the feedback. To share the survey, I emailed all three professors that

work in the Liberal Studies department at California State University Monterey Bay. Out of the three professors that I contacted, two of them responded back and were willing to share the information. This allowed me to get enough student responses to support and form reliable data. In total, I surveyed 26 students, and each of them is currently enrolled at California State University Monterey Bay as a Liberal Studies major.

Results, Findings, and Discussion

After receiving feedback from the interview process, I was able to see how each of the teacher participants understood arts integration, as well as their experiences and beliefs about the matter (See Appendix E for Responses to Interview Questions). To help gain a better understanding of how art integration is currently addressed in schools, I asked each participant a series of 15 questions that are aligned with my three secondary research questions (See Appendix A for In-Service Teacher Interview Questions). My secondary research questions were as follows;

(1) To what extent do in-service teachers think they are prepared to integrate visual arts to benefit the academic success of elementary school students?

In-service Teacher Preparedness

To help me understand the level of preparedness each teacher had for integrating visual art into the curriculum, I asked a number of related questions. The first question was (A) Do you have any art education? And (B) What kind of experience do you have in art education? These questions allowed me to gain some background information on each participant's history with art education. To understand how they felt about their art education in terms of preparing them to integrate art into their curriculum, I asked (C) Did you find your art education helpful in your profession as a teacher? In connection with question (C), I asked participants to give me the

corresponding level of how confident they felt integrating art into the curriculum. For this question, participants were given a range of predetermined levels including none, little, medium, high, and professional.

In response to question (A), Teacher A said that she had very little experience with art education and explained that her only experience in art education was half of a semester-long course on art integration. When asked if she found this course helpful, she said “absolutely not” and explained that “the class was a joke and [she] did not learn anything” (Personal Communications, 2023). When asked to give a confidence level in teaching art integration, she responded with none but explained that she would like to learn more about integrating art into her curriculum.

Teacher B’s responses to the questions were widely different than Teacher A’s. When Teacher B was asked about her art education she shared that she took several college-level art courses but explained that all except for one were in pursuit of her own interest in art. The only art education class that she took for teaching was during her credential program but also felt that the course was not helpful in understanding art integration. However, Teacher B did explain that classes outside the credential program were helpful to her as a teacher. Overall, Teacher B had a high confidence level in integrating art into her lessons.

Teacher C responded to question (A) by saying that she had very little art education and could only recall a semester-long course she took in junior college as well as some training she received from the county after she became a teacher. Teacher C did not find her art education sufficient for helping her understand art integration and therefore had only a little confidence in teaching art integration.

(2) After the enactment of No Child Left Behind, how have teachers integrated and implemented visual arts into the curriculum?

How is art integrated into the curriculum?

To help me understand how art is currently being integrated into the curriculum, I asked each teacher the following questions; (D) Do you currently integrate art into your curriculum? (E) In what ways do you use art in the classroom? And (F) How often do you integrate art into the curriculum? The questions helped to illustrate how a typical art integration lesson would look in the average elementary classroom.

Teacher A responded to question (D) by disclosing that she does not currently practice “true art integration” in her classroom (Teacher A, personal communication, February 28, 2023). She continued to express that because she “does not have the proper training in art integration, [she does] not know how to implement it into [her] curriculum” (Teacher A, personal Communication, February 28, 2023). In response to question (E), Teacher A clarifies that, in place of art integration, she tries to find “fun crafts for her students to make”(Teacher A, personal communication, February 28, 2023). She shares that these crafts are typically thematic to seasons and holidays. In response to question (F), Teacher A states that she tries to make Fridays their “fun days” in which students can participate in art activities (Teacher A, personal communication, February 28, 2023).

Alternatively, Teacher B responded to question (D) by saying that “[she] enjoys integrating art into [her] curriculum” and added that “[she] like[s] to add an art element into as many lessons as possible to help teach to different learning styles and engage [her] students” (Teacher B, personal communication, March 4, 2023). In response to question (E), Teacher B explained that she uses art for “geography, social studies, literature, English, and graphic design” (Teacher B, personal communication, March 10, 2023). When asked for some examples of lessons, Teacher B shared that the “students are prompted to color in different countries on the

map, color in images of historical figures, and make books” (Teacher B, personal communication, March 10, 2023). When asked question (F) Teacher B replied that she tries to integrate art into her curriculum as often as possible, which was on average more than three times a week.

Teacher C responded to questions (D) and (F) by explaining that she tries to fit in an art project once a week. She disclosed that “because the district is at high risk, there is more pressure to teach literacy and mathematic skills” (Teacher C, personal communication, March 10, 2023). In response to question (E), Teacher C also noted that the art projects she does with the students are thematic and “do not follow the guidelines of true art integration” (Teacher C, personal communication, March 10, 2023). She shares that the art that is done in the class is mostly to address fine motor skills like using scissors to cut and how to color in the lines. Teacher C also reflected that students in kindergarten no longer have the option to do “free art exploration” and that art practices such as “finger painting, using large paint brushes, and practicing mixing paint is no longer a part of the curriculum” (Teacher C, personal communication, March 10, 2023). Teacher C also mentioned that because of limited funding, getting materials other than paper, crayons, scissors, and paste, was “very difficult”(Teacher C, personal communication, March 10, 2023). In combination with the pressure she feels to focus her curriculum on core subjects and the limited funding for supplies.

(3) How does integrating visual arts at the elementary school level benefit student success?

Benefits of arts integration

To allow me some insights into the benefits of art that the teacher participants have seen firsthand with their own students, I asked a couple of related questions. The first question in relation to the benefits of art integration was (G) How did your students respond to the art

integration lessons? For this question, the teacher participants were given five options to choose from which included didn't like it, kind of liked it, liked it, enjoyed it, and really enjoyed it. The second question related to the benefits was (H) Which of these skills have you seen your students display during an art integration lesson? Their options were as follows; increase students' participation/ or focus, increase students' creativity, stimulate students' critical thinking skills, increase self-expression in students, increase students' cultural awareness, and increase effectiveness towards different learning styles.

When asked question (G) all three teacher participants shared that their students really liked it when they integrated art into their lessons. Each of the teachers agreed that when they added an art element, their students were eager to participate and stayed focused. Teacher A shared that “[her] class loved it, [she] could tell from the energy in the room” (Teacher A, personal communication, February 28, 2023). Teacher B exclaimed that “[her] students would spend more time on their work” (Teacher B, personal communications, March 4, 2023). Teacher C shared that “[her] students had more pride in their work and wanted to share with others” (Teacher C, personal communications, March 10, 2023). Each of the teachers also noticed that their students were more creative. Teacher C explained that “some of their artwork was better than what [she] could do” (Teacher C, personal communications, March 10, 2023). In addition, each of the teachers noticed that the art integration lessons stimulated their students' critical thinking skills. Teacher B shared that “during some of their lessons learning about ancient rulers, the students were able to connect what they learned with symbols” (Teacher B, personal communications, March 4, 2023). All three teachers also noticed that during art integration lessons, their students had an increase in self-expression. Teacher B commented that “art integration allowed [her] students to put their own personal touch on the projects” (Teacher B,

personal communication, March 4, 2023). When it came to cultural awareness in the classroom, each of the teachers agreed that art integration was the best way to teach it. Teacher B expressed that “all of [her] social studies lessons involved art integration and [she] felt it was very effective because her students seemed to get more out of it (Teacher B, personal communication, March 4, 2023). When asked about the increased level of effectiveness towards learning styles, each of the teacher participants shared that art integration was a tool that they commonly used to help teach students that had a difficult time understanding the lesson. Teacher A was especially eager to share that “when [she] is working with English language learners, [she] like[s] to have the students draw pictures to help them identify key elements in the lesson” (Teacher A, personal communication, February 28, 2023).

(4) To what extent, do pre-service teachers think that integrating visual arts benefits the academic success of elementary school students? If so, in what ways?

Survey Results

Once I received the survey results from the 26 pre-service teacher participants, I was able to identify how the participants understood and felt about teaching art integration in the future. Their responses were graphed out and calculated so that I could see any correlations between responses (See Appendix F for Pre-Service Teacher Survey Responses). When asked if they had any formal art education, 3 of the participants said that they did not have any. The majority of the participants, 13, said that they had a low amount of art education. Additionally, 8 of them said that they felt they had a medium amount of art education and 2 said that they had a high amount of art education. For question two, how much do you know about art integration, 3 of the students said that they did not have any knowledge of it. A total of 9 participants said that they had a low understanding of art integration. The majority, 10 participants, said that their knowledge of art integration was at a medium level. Of the participants, 3 of them felt that they

had a high level of understanding of art integration. In the third question, participants were asked to rate their confidence level in teaching art integration. Out of 26, 4 of them said that they did not have any confidence in teaching art integration. Nine (9) participants said they had a low confidence level when it came to teaching an art integration lesson. In relation, 9 of the participants had a medium level of confidence in teaching art integration. The remaining 4 participants felt highly confident in teaching art integration. When asked if they planned on integrating art into their curriculum in the future 9 participants said sometimes, while 17 said they planned to integrate art often. None of the participants said they would not integrate art into their lesson plans. In the final question, when participants were asked if they would be interested in learning more about art integration, all 26 participants responded yes.

(5) Are there resources available for teachers to integrate visual arts into the classrooms to benefit elementary school students' success?

When I asked each of the teacher participants if they used any resources to help them integrate visual arts in the classroom, the only source that was mentioned was a website called Pinterest. Teacher C explained that this site allowed her to find “cute and fun ideas that the kids can do” (Teacher C, personal communication, March 10, 2023). Teacher A also shared that Pinterest had helped her find age appropriate activities for her students. Teacher B mentioned using Pinterest for inspiration, but explained “it is not a reliable source for finding true art ideas” (Teacher B, personal communication, March 4, 2023).

Discussion

Through the process of my research, I was hoping to identify the key issues that are leading to the disconnection between art integration and students' academic success. I found that teachers are not given accurate art integration training that would allow them to be successful

and confident in implementing art into their curriculum. In support of this finding, May and Robinson (2016) express that, “Universities do not adequately prepare their graduates, be they arts-based, in being able to integrate traditional core with art cores” (p.25). After analyzing the results from the interviews and surveys, I found a strong correlation between teachers’ art education background, their level of preparedness for integrating art, and how they integrate art into their curriculum. When each teacher participant reflected on their educational history of art, all three said that there was only one required course in art. None of them felt that the class sufficiently prepared them to teach art integration. The survey responses supported these correlations with more than 60% of the pre-service teacher participants indicating that they had very minimal art education if any at all (See Appendix F Figure 1 for Pre-Service Teacher Survey Responses). The results also indicated that half of the participants did not currently feel confident teaching an art integration lesson (See Appendix F Figure 2 for Pre-Service Teacher Survey Responses). Although it is not uncommon for teachers to encounter one art integration class during their educational journey, the design of the course, the duration of the class, and the number of required classes have a huge impact on how teachers feel about art in the curriculum. In regards to her art course, Teacher A explained that “the class was more of an introduction to the art” (Teacher A, personal communication, February 28, 2023). “It was only half of a semester-long, about 6 weeks, and was split with P.E.” (Teacher A, personal communication, February 28, 2023). She continued to express how she felt that this experience was “a waste of time [because] we didn’t learn how to teach art or incorporate it into the classroom” (Teacher A, Personal Communications, February 28, 2023). In addition, Teacher C also had a negative experience in her art class, which was only “a required class at the junior college level” (Teacher C, personal communications, March 10, 2023). Since Teacher C had not received any formal art

education in the last 24+ years, this made her understanding of art out of date. When it came to integrating art into their curriculum, both teachers, A and C, had little to no confidence in teaching art education. Teacher A expressed that she didn't feel comfortable teaching art because "[she hadn't] had quality training regarding how to [integrate art] in an efficient way" (Teacher A, personal communications, February 28, 2023). In connection to how teachers feel about art LaJevic (2013) states that due to insufficient training in art, "feelings of uncertainty about teaching with the arts can arise, making Arts Integration a scary place for teachers" (p.3). This was particularly accurate in Teacher A's case who was so concerned about her own shortcomings in understanding the arts, that she was unwilling to take the risk of making mistakes.

Alternatively, to Teachers A and C, Teacher B shared that she had above-average knowledge in art integration. Her higher level of experience was because the majority of her education in the arts was in pursuit of her own passion and not a requirement for her teaching profession. She stated that the extra classes she took in college were "very helpful" and helped her have a higher level of confidence integrating art than her counterparts (Teacher B, personal communication, March 4, 2023).

Although their overall schooling in art education was minimal, I wanted to know how each teacher understood art integration by asking how they implement it into their curriculum. Being only five years out of the credential program, Teacher A was more aware that what she called 'art' was actually crafts. She claimed that "[she was] more crafty than artsy" and therefore integrated crafts into her curriculum instead of art (Teacher A, personal communication, February 28, 2023). These craft projects were usually connected with seasons and holidays, but rarely to common core subjects, making them inferior lessons that students did during spare time in class. In relation to this practice, LaJevic (2013) shares that teachers commonly use "Art

Integration [as a way] to fill up extra time in the schedule and was viewed as fun busy doings” (p.10). Since Teacher A was also conscious that her experience with art did not provide her with enough understanding to support her integrating art into the lesson, she stayed within her own comfort level. To address these feelings, LaJevic (2013) notes that it is important for teachers to engage in “self-reflection and critical examination of why they choose to cling onto old instructional practices, [so they] become empowered to move beyond what they encountered in their schooling” (p.14).

Unlike Teacher A, Teacher C was less aware of the differences between arts and crafts. Hanging on her classroom wall, was what LaJevic (2013) referred to as “cookie-cutter art which [she explains] is a common practice in the classroom” (p.7). Each student’s artwork looked exactly the same and “had no personal or unique attributes” (LaJevic, 2013, p.7) (See Appendix G for Artifacts 2-4). Since the project guidelines did not leave the students room for creative expression and a chance to demonstrate individuality, these lessons can not be considered art. In addition to not teaching any art elements, these projects did not connect to another subject. May and Robinson (2016) explain that “... for true art integration to take place students need to combine at least one core subject (e.g., math, science, social studies) with an arts subject...to create a consolidated curriculum where both subject areas receive equal priority as a blended unit” (May & Robinson, 2016, pp.13-14). Although Teacher C mentioned that these art lessons help to teach students skills like “cutting on the lines, coloring within the lines, filling up the whole space with color” these are not art practices (Teacher C, personal communications, March 10, 2023). In fact, in her study LaJevic (2013) found that “coloring in the lines is more detrimental than no art activities at all, because it forces children into imitative behavior that hinders their creative expressions” (p.10). Unfortunately, during the observation of Teacher C’s

art integration lesson, I witnessed her leading the students in a reminder chant about coloring rules. She shared that she begins every art lesson this way to help the students. If they forget the rules she has them refer to a poster she made in the back of the room that has a short list of rules with pictures (See Appendix G, Artifact 1). Since Teacher C was primarily relying on unreliable websites like Pinterest to find art activities for her class, she continued to perpetuate that misunderstanding of true art practices. This shows a clear need for more art programs that teachers can easily access so that the art practiced in their classrooms meets the California Art Standards. Not only were the lessons a misguided practice of art, but they were working against the benefits of art practices. Another issue Teacher C faced when trying to implement art into her curriculum was time and resources. Teacher C shared that because her district was high-risk, there was more emphasis to teach core subjects like math and literacy skills. When I asked what would happen if she chose to focus more on art, Teacher C looked away and hesitantly said that “You would not be a chosen one, I guess” (Teacher C, personal communication, March 10, 2023). From her body language, I could tell that the question or idea made her uncomfortable, so I did not pursue any more information on the matter. It was clear to me that not only did Teacher C suffer from a lack of art training, but the pressures of high-stakes testing limited her freedom in the classroom. Having “constraints regarding time, space, materials, expectations, and knowledge and comfort levels” (LaJevic, 2013, p.3) was something that sat heavily with Teacher C. Although her understanding of art was inaccurate, Teacher C was aware of the importance of art practices for teaching the “whole child” but in her eyes, times have changed and there is no longer room for that.

Out of the three teachers, Teacher B had the most background in art education. She spoke highly of her art practices in the classroom. She illustrated how she used art to help students

create covers for the stories they read and draw pictures to accompany the poems they created. While the majority of the lessons reflected the art practices we hope to see in art integration, there were still some misunderstandings of true art. One example of this misunderstanding is having students fill in indicated areas of a worksheet with a particular color. As mentioned before, calling these lessons artworks against the practices of real art by eliminating creativity.

Problems and Limitations

While conducting the study there were a few limitations and problems I faced that would have helped make my research more reliable. One of the issues I noticed was the lack of teacher interview participants. This made it hard to get a more generalized idea of how teachers experienced art integration. Another limitation I faced was not surveying students currently enrolled in a credential program. Surveying this population would have given me a more accurate understanding of the level of preparedness that pre-service teachers felt to teach art integration. Another problem I faced during my research was the number of students that participated in the survey. Although I emailed three professors asking them to share the survey, only two of them responded.

Recommendations

For art to benefit students' academic success, we need to re-evaluate the way we see art in schools. To raise art from its inferior state, we need to properly educate our teachers in art integration the same way we educate them in core subjects. To keep teachers current on their art integration techniques, they need to receive training every few years throughout their teaching careers. The courses for art integration need to be at minimum a semester long and train teachers how to integrate art for a variety of subjects. Teachers need to be aware of not only what art is

but what it is not, so they do not fall into the trap of ‘crafty arts’. Teachers should reflect and address their own discomforts in art, so that they feel more confident in their ability to teach art. In addition, the art standards need to be applied to every art integration lesson and evaluated in the same manner as other core subjects. Art Integration resources, such as online programs and teacher guidebooks, should be made available to every school, so teachers can reference them instead of websites like Pinterest, which are unreliable. This will help bring about a strong push to incorporate arts effectively.

Conclusion

Years ago, an art integration course helped me realize how I, and so many other teachers, misuse art in the classroom. Since teachers are not expected to take in-depth courses on art, their minimal experience can lead to poor art practices giving art an inferior status to other disciplines. In addition to teachers not being properly prepared to integrate art into their curriculum, the No Child Left Behind Act has increased performance pressure on teachers evoking their creativity in art lessons. This awareness sparked my curiosity and led me on a journey to discover how art should be used in the class to promote higher-level thinking.

The result finding is that when practiced correctly, the arts support the 5 essential skills for academic success in the 21st century. These skills include a passion for learning, the ability to think creatively, the ability to handle complex situations, collaborate effectively, and understand how they can impact the world. Not only do the arts offer important skills for the workforce, research shows that students who practice arts do better in school, score higher on tests, and have improved social and emotional well-being. With so many benefits from the process of making art, it is puzzling that society has not put more effort into making sure that our students receive

equal access to proper art practices in schools. In acknowledgment of these problems, teachers should get the proper training in art, all schools should partner with an art program to make sure art is being properly taught, and art should be held to the same standards as other disciplines through evaluation. Teachers need to reflect on their own understanding of the arts in order to push past any barriers keeping them from using art in the classroom. To support teachers, schools need to supply their teachers with reliable art programs and training so they become confident in integrating art into their lessons. As Hall and Thomson (2017) stated, “the requirement to change is a constant feature of school life in developed countries (p.3). Schools need to prepare young people better for the futures they will face, engage them more effectively in learning things that matter, and promote social justice (Hall & Thomson, 2017). If these areas of concern are targeted, we will see the positive change that the education system so desperately needs.

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Appendix A

In-Service Teacher Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What grade level do you currently teach?
3. Do you have any art education?
4. What kind of experience do you have in art education?
5. Did you find your experience in art education helpful in your profession as a teacher?
6. Do you know what art integration is?
7. How confident do you feel integrating art into your curriculum?

| | | | | |
|------|--------|--------|------|--------------|
| none | little | medium | high | professional |
|------|--------|--------|------|--------------|

8. Do you currently integrate art into your curriculum?

9. In what ways do you use art in the classroom?

10. Can you tell me a time that you successfully integrated art into your curriculum?

11. On a scale of 0-4, how did the students respond to the integration of art into the curriculum?

| | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Didn't like it 0 | Kind of liked it 1 | Liked it 2 | Enjoyed it 3 | Really enjoyed it 4 |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------------|

12. How often do you integrate art into the curriculum?

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------|
| Less than once a week | Once a week | 2x a week | 3x a week | More than 3x a week |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------|

13. Which of the following skills have you seen your students display during an art integration lesson?

increase students' participation/ or focus

increase students' creativity

stimulate students' critical thinking skills

___ increase self-expression in students

___ increase students' cultural awareness

___ increase effectiveness towards different learning styles (helps students that are different types of learners)

14. Do you use a program that implements art into the curriculum?

15. Would you be interested in learning more about art integration?

16. Would you like to add anything about art integration?

Appendix B

Art Integration Lesson Observation

Date: Friday, March 11, 2023

Time: 1:45 p.m.- 2:00 p.m.

Location: Primary Classroom at Elementary School in Rural District

Participants: Teacher C (Primary Teacher)
Teacher Aid
15 Kindergarten students (ages 5-6)

1:45- Enter

The kindergarteners enter the classroom. Most of them are breathing hard and seem exhausted. Teacher C walks over and tells me they just got back from playing outside. She tells me that she needs to try and squeeze in one more activity before the students are released for the day at 2 p.m.

Meanwhile, students are walking to their desks. Some are sitting with their head down. Some are running around the classroom and playing with the other students. One boy runs out of the classroom and returns with a water bottle. Teacher C redirects him outside. The teacher's aide walks in and Teacher C exclaims to her aide that the students are out of control and ready to go home.

Teacher C to Students: She yells CLASS, CLASS!

Students to Teacher: They yell, YES, YES!

1:50- Start

Teacher C tells the class that they need to write five sentences using the words on the board. She explains that they are going to write a story about The Lorax. Each student grabs their journal and begins writing a story. Some of the students are sitting at their desks watching others. Teacher C notices and reminds the student that they are getting out in 10 minutes. She remarks that they should hurry up or they won't finish. The teacher's aide is sitting with a student in the back of the room. The aide is speaking Spanish to the student. Teacher C walks over to me and tells me that the student is an English Language Learner and does not speak English.

1:52- Start Drawing

After a couple of minutes, Teacher C asks the students to stop writing and look up at the TV. The teacher mirrors a video of a youtube drawing tutorial on the TV. She tells the students to grab a pencil and follow along. The teacher plays the video. A man starts talking and explaining the process of drawing. The students sit at their desks and follow along with the man in the video. The man explains that they will be drawing the Lorax. He asks the students to start at the middle of the paper, then tells them shapes to make. Each step includes a different location and shape. The teacher sits at her desk and stops the video from time to time and asks the students if they need more time to draw. After 3 minutes the drawing is done. The teacher tells the students that they need to color in their drawings. She reminds them of the rules of coloring. She directs their attention to the back of the room where a paper poster has coloring rules on it. The students repeat after her, "When we color we stay in the lines, make the white go away, and use the right colors." The teacher smiles at their response and then walks around to see each of the drawings. She sees a drawing and begins to raise her voice.

1:55 p.m.- Walking Around

Teacher C to student: Does this look right to you? What did you do wrong here?

Student: looks down at the paper, he appears to be frowning.

Teacher C to student: That doesn't look right, does it? Look at how he looks. (Then she points to the professional drawing on the screen). Fix it!

The teacher looks at me and tells me that some of her students' skills are not good because the parents don't help them work on them at home. She tells me that it is up to her to teach them basic skills like coloring.

Teacher C sees another student's work.

Teacher C to student: Is that how we color? Look how messy that looks. You might as well throw it away if you are going to color it like that.

Teacher C walks away rolling her eyes and shaking her head back and forth.

2:00 p.m.- End of Lesson

Teacher C looks up at the clock.

Teacher C: Oh my gosh, look at the time!

Teacher C to Students: She yells CLASS, CLASS!

Students to Teacher: They yell, YES, YES!

Teacher C: It's time to clean up. Leave your papers on your desks. Even if they're not finished. I'll call you to get your things.

Appendix C

Pre-service Teacher Survey

1. Do you have any formal art education experience?
 - None
 - Low
 - Medium
 - High

2. How much do you know about art integration?
 - None
 - Low
 - Medium
 - High

3. How confident do you feel teaching an art integration lesson?
 - None
 - Low
 - Medium
 - High

4. In the future, how often do you plan on integrating art into your curriculum?
 - Never
 - Sometimes

- Often

5. Would you be interested in learning more about art integration?

- Yes

- No

Appendix D

QR Code for Preservice Teacher Survey



Appendix E

Responses to Interview Questions

| | Teacher A | Teacher B | Teacher C |
|---|--|--|--|
| Years Teaching & Grade level | 5 Years 2nd & 3rd Grade (Combination) | 25+ years 1st Grade | 21+ years Kindergarten |
| Level of Art experience/type of experience | One college course on art integration | Multiple art classes in college Most classes taken were in pursuit of own interest | One required class in junior college A few classes offered by the county |
| Was the art experience helpful? | No | Yes | No |
| Level of confidence teaching art integration | None | High | Very Little |
| How often do you integrate art into the curriculum? | Once a week | More than 3x a week | Once a week |
| How did students respond to the art integration lesson? | Really enjoyed it | Really enjoyed it | Really enjoyed it |
| Skills observed in art integration lesson | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased students' participation ● Increased students' creativity ● Stimulate students' critical thinking skills ● Increased self-expression ● Increased students' cultural awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased students' participation ● Increased students' creativity ● Stimulate students' critical thinking skills ● Increased self-expression ● Increased students' cultural awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased students' participation ● Increased students' creativity ● Stimulate students' critical thinking skills ● Increased self-expression ● Increased students' cultural awareness |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased effectiveness toward learning styles | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased effectiveness toward learning styles | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased effectiveness toward learning styles |
| Art programs used | None | None | None |
| Would you like to learn more about art integration? | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Appendix F

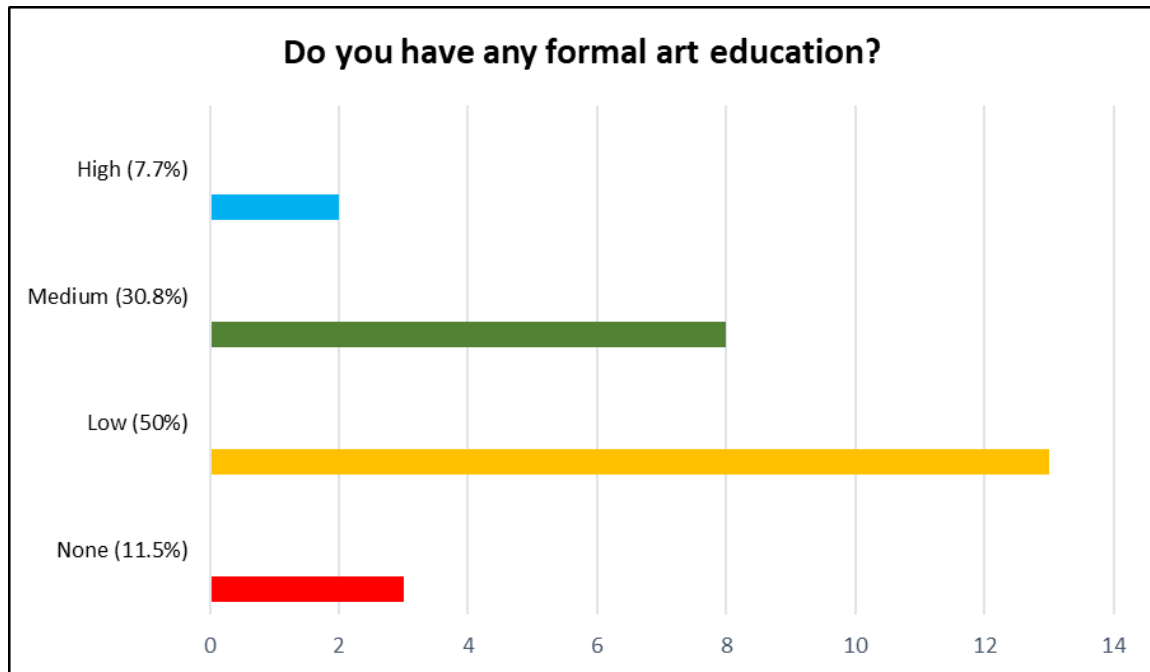
Pre-service Teacher Survey Responses

Figure 1: Result from survey question 1

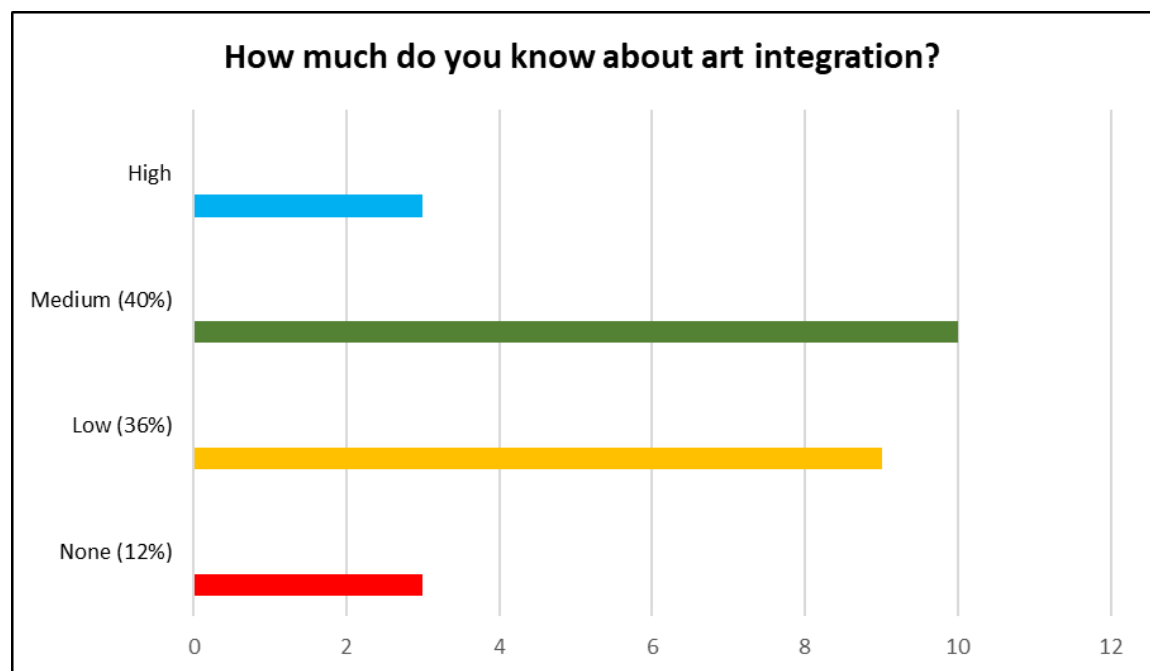


Figure 2: Results from survey question 2

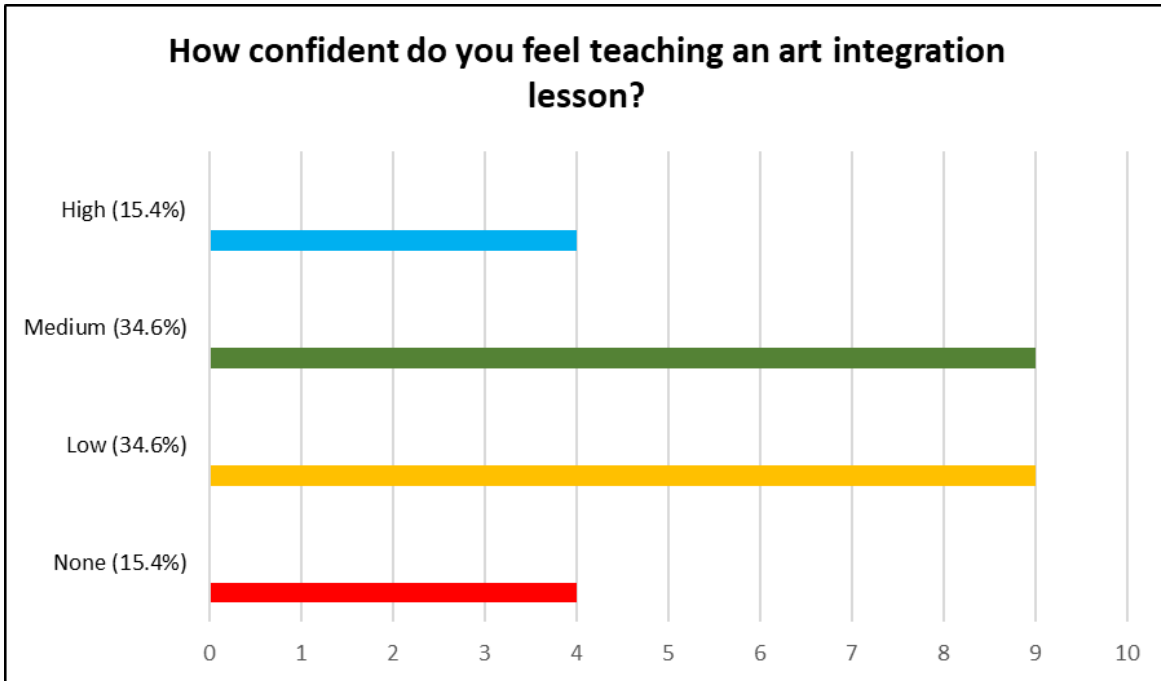


Figure 3: Results from survey question 3.

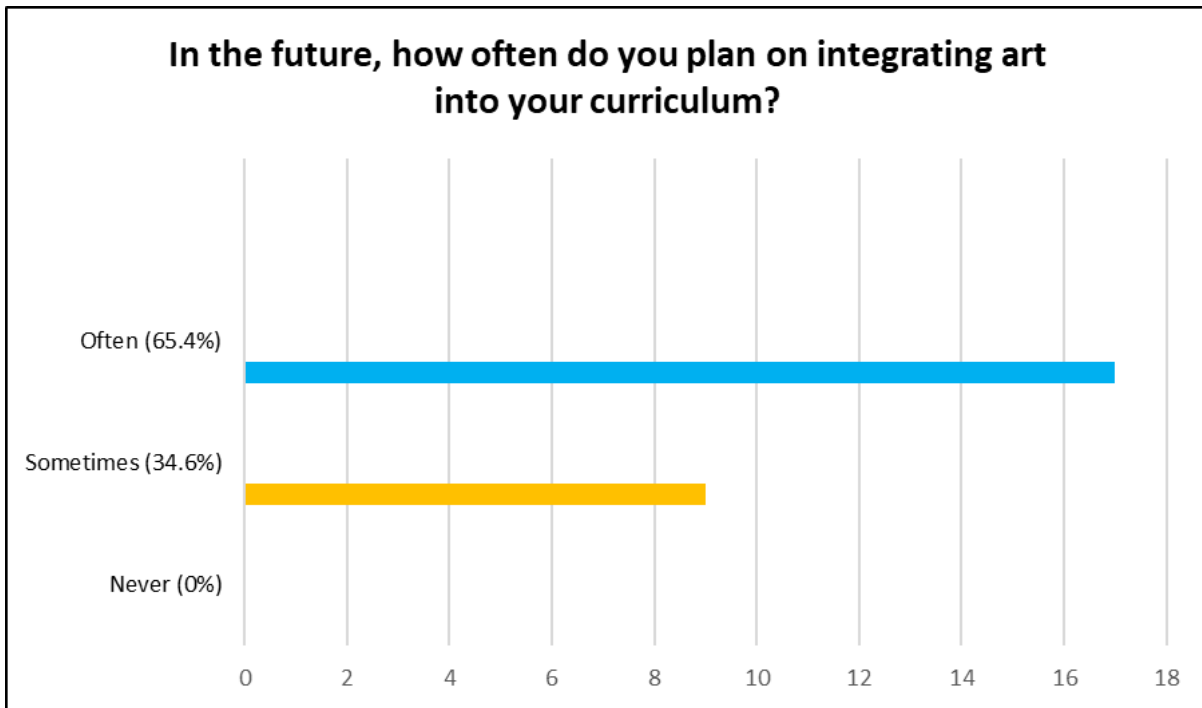


Figure 4: Results from survey question 4.

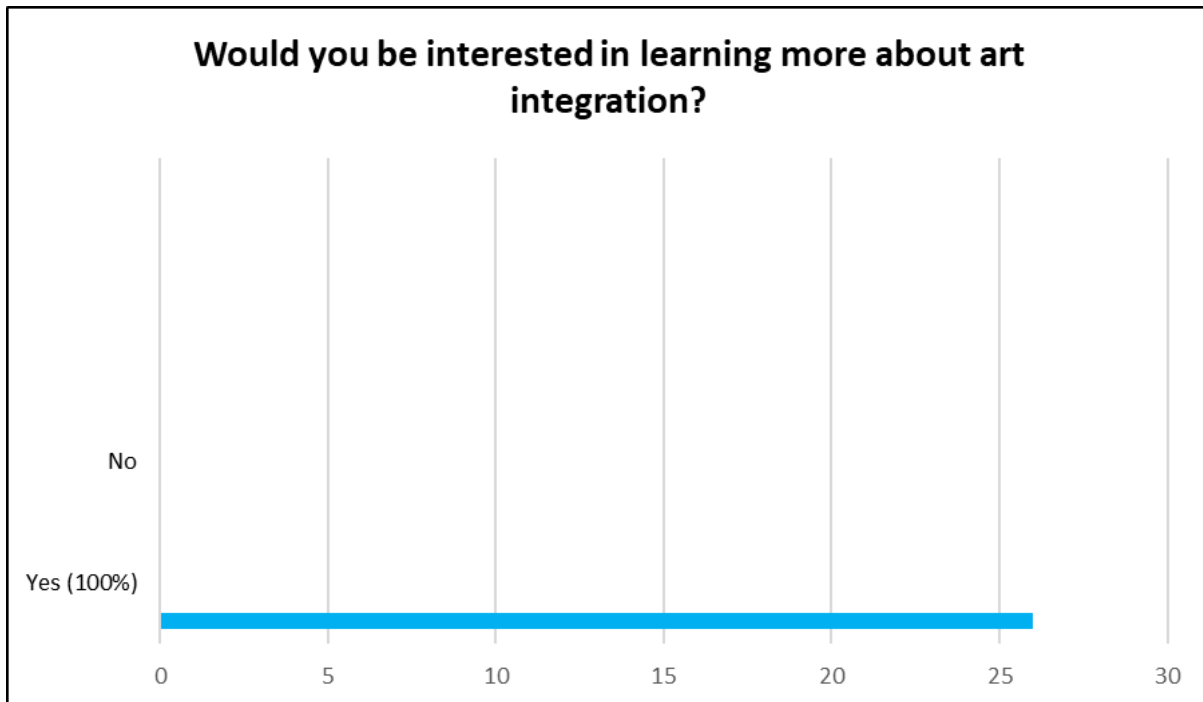
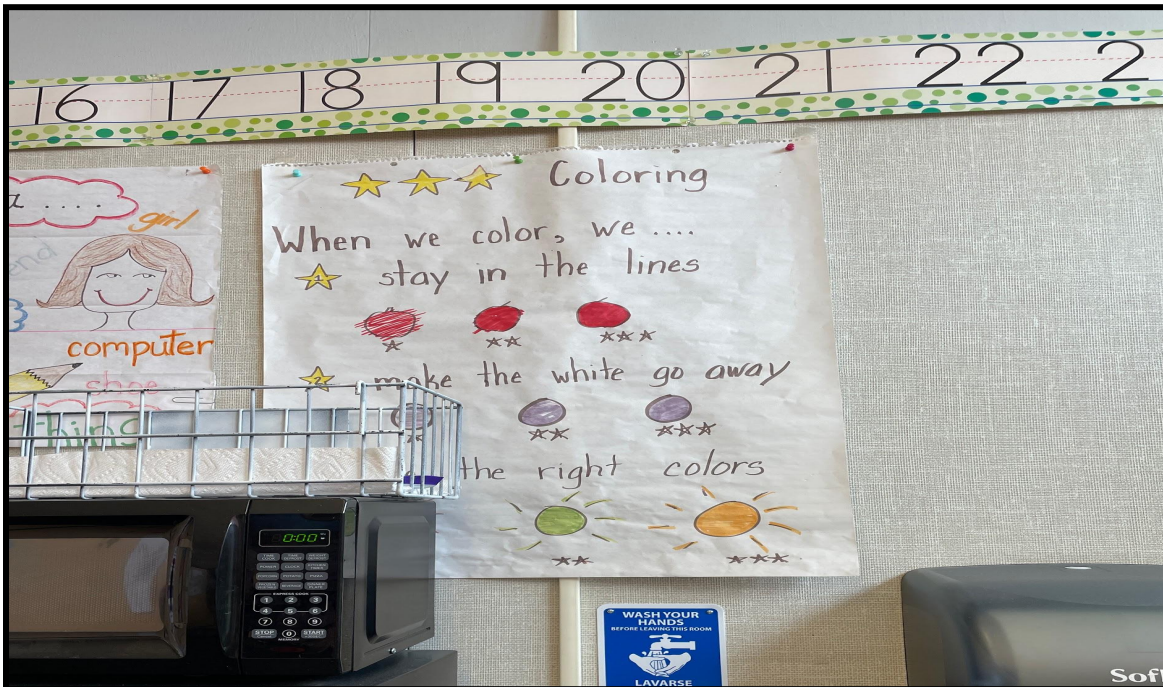


Figure 5: Results from survey question 5.

Appendix G

Teacher C Artifacts

Artifact 1: How to Color Reminder Poster (Teacher C). Photo taken by author.



Artifact 2: Self-Portrait for 100th Day of School (Teacher C). Photo taken by author.



Artifact 3: George Washington Art for President's Day (Teacher C). Photo taken by author.



Artifact 4: Fox in Socks Art for Dr. Seuss Week (Teacher C). Photo taken by author.