Interdisciplinary Curricular Conversations Examining Arts and Academics: Teacher Implementation and Student Outcomes

Angela Miller
College of Mount Saint Joseph

Delane Bender-Slack
Xavier University

Robert Burroughs
University of Cincinnati

Interdisciplinary Curricular Conversations Examining Arts and Academics: Teacher Implementation and Student Outcomes

Angela Miller
College of Mount Saint Joseph

Delane Bender-Slack
Xavier University

Robert Burroughs
University of Cincinnati

Abstract

This qualitative study examined the integration of arts and academic curricula at a performing arts school by focusing on the curriculum as it is understood and perceived by the students. The study centered on five students at a performing arts magnet school who were chosen based upon contrasts in their arts classes in order to represent a range of participation in the various performing arts. Findings indicated that students were unable to recognize the integration of arts in the teaching materials, strategies, and interaction in academic courses. Results also indicated that the more teacher-centered instructional materials and pedagogical strategies utilized in the arts courses, although less cohesive to the students, allowed the students to perceive the integration of more academic activities and behaviors in those art classes. The authors argue that the students' familiarity with scholastic behaviors, understood by students as "doing school," impacted the students' capacity to perceive the cohesiveness of the academic curricula and recognize the integration of these behaviors and activities in the arts courses.

The mission of the Midwestern Arts Academy (pseudonym) is to "connect the arts, humanities, and sciences to today's real world success." In stating such a mission, this urban school in a mid-size city hoped to contribute to what Seidel and Castaneda-Emanaker (2006) called the promise of aesthetic education:

> The arts can transform education not because they 'reach' [an urban] student and assimilate him or her into the majority culture, but because they *connect* a student (and adults) to the knowledge and traditions of the larger community in a way that also encourages participation and expression of individual voice. (p. 146)

Consequently, such a mission placed the school within the tradition of curricular integration, although on an admittedly grand scale.

Through an exploration of student perceptions, this study examined the integration of arts and academic curricula at a performing arts school in which many of the students are artistically gifted. In previous classroom research on integrating curriculum, we found that distinct content area subjects did not necessarily mesh easily in the planning and enacting of integrated, or interdisciplinary, curriculum (Applebee, Burroughs, & Cruz, 2000). What would we find when an entire *school* attempted the integration of arts and academics? Would students recognize such integration in the specific classes? Would the interdisciplinary curriculum reflect a cohesive curricular conversation within the classroom context?

Literature Review

Integration of curriculum, or interdisciplinary curriculum, has a long tradition, stretching back at least to the Progressive Era (Dewey, 1913). Dewey placed great value on considering the ways in which curricula could be unified, both in terms of establishing relationships among its seemingly disparate disciplines, as well as connecting schools to the wider society in which they existed. Like Dewey, many advocates of interdisciplinary curricula have stressed the ability of integrated curriculum to address research and practical problems in ways that are not bounded by traditional content areas and disciplines (Adler & Flihan, 1997). Moreover, advocates have argued that integrated curriculum can have a positive effect on teacher working conditions, as planning for integrated curriculum often brings teachers of disparate disciplines together (Kain, 1996). Finally, advocates have often argued that integrated curriculum can make education and schooling more relevant to students' lives and experiences (Hargreaves & Moore, 2000) by giving direction to educational activities and helping students understand more clearly what their efforts in learning are about (Dewey, 1916, p. 119).

Although there have been many theoretical books, articles, and reports advocating the advantages of integrating curriculum, the empirical research literature on the topic is not large (Czerniak, Weber, Sandman & Ahern, 1999; Ellis & Fouts, 2001; Vars, 1996). For example, Vars argued that "more than 100 studies" have shown that interdisciplinary curricula offer students a program at least as effective as con-

ventional programs. Vars' review of the research, however, offers primarily a synthesis of findings, rather than a critical examination of the empirical studies, and some researchers advise caution (Ellis & Fouts). When reviewing research concerning integration of math and science curricula, for example, Czerniak et al. noted that "there is little existing empirical research supporting the notion that it is more effective than traditional, discipline-based curriculum" (p. 422). Reviewing interdisciplinary research in which music is correlated with other disciplines, Ellis and Fouts concluded that "it is difficult to find strong empirical evidence that the integration of music instruction with other content areas produces more positive results than does a traditional approach" (p. 22).

What empirical research exists tends to focus on the teacher and the individual classroom as the unit of analysis (Adler & Flihan, 1997). As such, the research focuses primarily on the planned and sometimes the enacted curriculum, i.e., the curriculum as developed and implemented by the educator, rather than the effects of curriculum on students (cf. Hargreaves & Moore, 2000).

Burroughs and Smagorinsky (2009) assert that there is a shortage of studies that investigate the effects of curricular organization and how students perceive those effects. These authors assert that, without empirical research that documents the outcomes of various curricular contents and configurations, arguments about the effectiveness of particular curricular designs, including interdisciplinary curricula, will remain primarily theoretical and unsubstantiated. One potential reason for the lack of empirical studies that consider the effects of curricular organization, specifically students' reception and understanding of the curriculum, is that the complexities of implementing an interdisciplinary curriculum can present significant problems. Researchers, for example, have found that in implementing an interdisciplinary curriculum, disciplinary knowledge may clash (Applebee, Burroughs, & Cruz 2000; Weinberg & Grossman, 2000). For example, Weinberg and Grossman (2000) studied the integration of a high school English and history program. Over the two and a half years of the collaboration, researchers concluded that conflicts arose at a deep level of disciplinary differences.

Determining how interdisciplinary curriculum is implemented is a crucial aspect of determining how students receive such a curriculum (Applebee, Burroughs, & Stevens, 2000). The implicit disciplinary traditions that teachers draw upon in constructing curricula are central to how students receive instruction. Being explicit about the curricular decisions—whether it is the criteria for text selection or organization of content—can guide students to make relevant connections (Burroughs, 1999). By examining the "conversational domains" supported by the curricula, we can discover to what extent one discipline is used to support or enrich another (Applebee, Burroughs, & Cruz, 2000). In the case of the present study, we sought to discover the impact of art and academic integration on students' perception of curricular cohesiveness. Specifically, we looked at the ways in which disciplinary activities and behaviors were incorporated in the classroom contexts, and then considered if, how, and to what degree the students perceived integration of arts and academics in their performing arts magnet school.

Curricular Conversations

In teacher education programs, pre-service teachers are often taught curricular planning with a part-to-whole approach. For example, education students are taught to create a single lesson plan, then multiple lesson plans, and finally a unit plan. Rarely do they learn to construct or examine long-term curriculum maps. This is due, at least in part, to the fact that curriculum is often defined as a course of study or a program of learning that ultimately leads to a certificate or degree. It is also a result of the fact that curriculum, so defined, appears to be organized and dictated by administrators and policy-makers, and not determined by the educators themselves. This narrow definition of curriculum, however, does not highlight the decision-making power of the educator in the planning and implementation of the course of study (Applebee, 1996).

Additionally, the notion of what exactly constitutes a curriculum and what its purpose might be varies. In curriculum theory, for example, Schiro (2008) describes four types of curricular ideology, each with its own strengths and limitations: Scholar Academic, Social Efficiency, Learner-Centered, and Social Reconstruction. The purpose of the education from the Scholar Academic perspective is to help children learn the accumulated knowledge of our culture, where understanding involves learning its content, conceptual frameworks, and ways of thinking. For the Social Efficiency Ideologue, the purpose of schooling is to efficiently meet the needs of society by training youth in skills and procedures needed for the workplace. In that case, the essence of learners lies in their competencies and activities they are capable of performing. With a focus on the needs and concerns of the individual, the Learner Centered teacher believes that real growth occurs as students construct meaning by interacting with their physical, intellectual and social environments, and the result of learning (the construction of meaning) is unique to the individual. Lastly, the purpose of education for the Social Reconstruction Ideologue is to facilitate the construction of a more just society that offers maximum satisfaction to all members; education is a social process through which society is reconstructed. Additionally, Schiro (2008) asserts that student beliefs as well as content areas can influence the classroom, and teachers can position themselves in more than one ideology. Clearly, this is just one conception of curriculum.

While there are multiple ways of conceiving of curriculum, we chose to utilize the conception of curriculum as conversation for this study. Curriculum, as we use it here, is the sense of purpose and direction that is established by teachers around which all texts, classroom discussions, and pedagogical activities are centered (Applebee, 1994, 2002).

In utilizing a curriculum so defined, we were able to consider curriculum as it exists at three levels: the planned, the enacted, and the received. The *planned curriculum* includes the materials and texts that are chosen, along with the methods and activities selected by the teacher intended for classroom instruction (Applebee, 1996). The *enacted curriculum* is the planned curriculum as it is implemented—the utilization of materials, texts, methods, and activities in the classroom as it occurs and unfolds. Because teachers may capitalize on teachable moments or find that lesson plans may not work the planned curriculum is not an infallible predictor of what is actually enacted. Lastly, *the received curriculum* centers on the students' perception and understanding of the enacted curriculum. What the student actually perceives as occurring in the classroom may or may not be consistent with either the planned or enacted curricula.

In addition to highlighting the levels of curricula, utilizing Applebee's (1996) theory of "curriculum as conversation" as a theoretical basis provided a way to inform our data collection across multiple classrooms of both artistic and academic content. Applebee (1996) argued that conceiving of curriculum as "domains for culturally significant conversations" can provide a way of conceiving curriculum that is more consistent with the constructivist pedagogy that has been the focus of much research on instruction over the past two decades:[1]

> Through such conversations, students will be helped to enter *culturally significant traditions of knowledge-in-action.* In most schools, these traditions will reflect major academic disciplines—language, history, literature, science, the arts—though they can just as easily be interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary, or be based on traditions of the home, community, or workplace. (p. 37, emphasis added)

Such a notion of curriculum takes as its starting point that curriculum involves more than just what is learned, but how it is learned as well. Classroom constructs themselves, along with the pedagogical practices that are implemented within them, define what are acceptable or unacceptable ways of knowing and doing (Gallas & Smagorinsky, 2002). Applebee (1994) has stated that successful teachers are effective because they "have a sense of where they are going and why, and they create within their classrooms a sense of coherence and direction that students recognize" (p. 46). By entering into culturally significant conversations (Applebee, 1996), students are entering into traditions of discourse that implicitly represent various ways of knowing and doing. That is, knowledge is not only knowing *what*, but also knowing *how*.

It is these "ways of knowing, thinking, and doing" that form the boundaries of disciplines, as well as the criteria for legitimate participation in the discipline. What are acceptable topics, reliable methods of inquiry, compelling evidence, or persuasive modes of argument are all examples of features that define aspects of disciplinary knowledge (Bazerman, 1994a; Herrington, 1985; Langer, 1992). Educators in their respective disciplines, guide students in meaningful conversations and implement engaging activities that are supported by an appropriate amount of quality materials.

A curriculum in which students are drawn into the domains of culturally significant conversation is inherently "lively" and engaging, and such instruction creates spaces for students to explore, investigate and consider all manner of interpretive possibility (Applebee, 1997). Although traditions of discourse within disciplines change and evolve, what one often learns in school are often the codified notions of disciplinary traditions. Consequently, in contrast to Applebee's (1996) notion of a curriculum of "knowledge-in-action" that encourages students to enter into current conversations within living traditions of discourse, many curricula present "knowledge-out-of-context" for students to learn *about* disembodied content. A decontextualized curriculum "may enable students to do well on multiple choice items…[but] it does not enable them to enter on their own into our vital academic traditions of knowing and doing" (Applebee, 1996, p. 33). The content in such a curriculum does not encourage or induce student participation or appeal to the development of further conversation because it is "dead as well as deadly, certain to bring the curricular conversation to a halt rather than leading it forward" (Applebee, 1994, p. 47).

In the teaching of literature, for example, Williams (1961) has shown how the lived culture of an historical record gets distilled into a "selected tradition." These selected traditions often become "deadly" traditions, as students are marched through a list of classic texts, focusing on "right" answers, with few explicit reasons for why the texts were chosen or what connections there might be among them. Such deadly traditions often express themselves in classrooms through highly codified classroom discourse and rigid genres (Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, 1995; Mehan, 1979) that students often recognize as "doing school."

When various disciplines meet in interdisciplinary curricula, traditions may conflict in their ways of knowing (Applebee, Burroughs & Cruz, 2000; Weinberg & Grossman, 2000). In a typical correlated curriculum in which subject matters are paired—as in a secondary course pairing American literature and American history—one discipline often dominates the approach. For example, a correlated literature and history course may use historical ways of knowing as the basis for the curricular conversation. In such a conversation, the literature read and discussed is used to address historical topics and issues. For example, *Huck Finn* might be approached as an historical artifact, an illustration of historical attitudes toward slavery rather than as a literary artifact (Weinberg & Grossman, 2000). Similarly,

---

1   Applebee is working in a tradition of seeing education as an entering into cultural and disciplinary conversations. See also (Burke, 1941, pp. 110-111) and (Graff, 1992, p. 77). For a conception of "instruction as conversation" see (Yinger, 1990). While Burke and Graff use "conversation" as a passing metaphor for instruction and curriculum, Applebee has sought to create a theory of curriculum, drawing upon the theoretical work of language philosopher H.P. Grice {, 1975 #102}.

when school disciplines meet in interdisciplinary designs, they may conflict in their degrees of "liveliness" as well. A social studies and language arts curriculum, for example, might conflict in its approach to primary sources such that students are actively interpreting documents in pursuing open questions in social studies, while answering more predictable questions concerning the literature they are reading. As we approached an integrated arts and academic curriculum, we were interested in identifying and understanding the ways in which the teachers attempted to amalgamate content area subjects in an interdisciplinary curriculum. We considered this integration by looking at the students' perception and understanding of the curricular conversation.

Methods

This research project took place in an urban performing arts magnet school. It employed naturalistic inquiry (Patton, 2002) in which the setting was observed in its natural state; neither the setting nor the outcomes were manipulated or constrained in any way. The participants, a small sample of students who represented a wide range of artistic majors, were a direct source of data. We focused on students as our unit of analysis because so few studies of integrated curriculum have analyzed or emphasized student outcomes within integrated curricula (Lake, 1994; Morrow, Pressley, Smith, & Smith, 1995; Vars, 1996). Specifically, we used an observation and interview method of qualitative research in order to capture the students' personal perspectives and experiences regarding their understanding of the curricular conversations in arts and academic classes and how these conversations were integrated into their classroom activities and understandings.

Context

In 1973, the performing arts school was established as one of five magnate schools in a Midwestern urban school district. With approximately 150 students in grades four, five, and six, the school shared space with an elementary school. In 1976, after a year spent in a temporary space outside of the city, the performing arts school moved into an historic 1906 building that it occupied downtown. The numbers of students continued to grow, and in 1979, the first class of seniors graduated.

All students auditioned for a place in the school. The performing arts school attracted students from within the urban school district in which it was located, as well as nationally and internationally. The school was free to students who resided in the public school district, while tuition was accepted from students outside the district. More than 90 percent of graduating seniors continued on to colleges and universities each year. The school offered a full college-preparatory curriculum for grades 4 through 12, which included challenging work in language arts, foreign language, mathematics, science, and social studies. Moreover, it provided a comprehensive study in the arts, including creative writing, dance, drama, instrumental music, technical theater, visual arts, and vocal music, preparing students to professionally pursue their arts majors. The school boasted a regularly high academic ranking where students consistently scored above the average on national achievement tests. The school was dedicated to providing an environment that facilitated the development of each student's artistic and academic potential.

Participant Selection

Participants were recruited through an academic class, with the help of teacher recommendations. Specifically, fifth grade students were recruited by the research team through their science class; eleventh grade students through their English class. Because the study focused on students' perceptions of arts and academics integration, we searched for students who were perceived by their teachers as well motivated in arts classes. Consent from parents for student participants and assent from students were obtained through signed consent/assent forms. Confidentiality of participants was preserved through the use of initials or pseudonyms throughout the study.

Originally, 16 students agreed to participate in the study. After conducting initial interviews, we narrowed participants down to six because of scheduling conflicts in classes, demands on students in their performances, and difficulties in scheduling interviews. While we attempted to focus on students who were the most articulate and appeared able and willing to provide most data, our primary concern was diversity in arts classes. While there was an attempt to allow for equal representation of grade levels, gender, and race, the students were chosen based upon contrasts in their arts classes; that is, students were meant to represent a wide range of participation in the various visual and performing arts classes offered at the school. Due to scheduling problems and illness, complete data was collected on only five of the six chosen participants. A complete table of the attributes of willing participants can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection

Data included student interviews, classroom observations, and an analysis of classroom artifacts. The sources included the student participants, and through observations of classroom conversations, activities, and interactions.

Because this study was concerned with two of the three aspects of curricular organization (Applebee, 1996)—the enacted and the received—classroom observations during instruction in both the arts and academic classes were both appropriate and necessary. The research team conducted overt observations of classroom instruction in order to gather data on the curriculum enacted in every course in which each of the five students were enrolled. These observations entailed a holistic focus that included the topics and content of curricular conversations, the activities in which students engaged, the types of assignments that were given, the explicit (or implicit) interdisciplinary links suggested by the topics, the teacher, or the activities, and, finally, student engagement in classroom activities. Observations of students in academic and arts classes were recorded in field notes (see Appendix B).

Additionally, student participants were interviewed and tape recorded twice during the academic year. Open-ended semi-structured interviews focused on how students made sense of the curriculum; the coherence they perceived in the curriculum; the integration they perceived of the arts and academic curricula; and discussion of classroom artifacts like tests or arts events such as recitals (Appendix C). The main objective of these interviews was to find out things not easily observable in the classroom. Internal facets of the participants, such as thoughts, feelings, and intentions were sought through a general interview guide approach (Patton, 2002).

Finally, student artifacts, such as written assignments, tests, homework, papers, and visual depictions were analyzed for evidence of cross-curricular connections. Copies were made of the student artifacts; originals were returned to the students.

Data Analysis

Patton (2002) indicated that the "fluid and emergent nature" of naturalistic inquiry makes the line between data gathering and data analysis "far less absolute" (p. 436). Even while in the field, ideas about the direction of analysis, the emergence of patterns, and the surfacing of themes occurred. Furthermore, naturalistic inquiry required a holistic perspective, such that the complex system of curricular conversation was viewed as more than the sum of its individual parts. Thus, all of the data gathered from this study were analyzed with the ultimate goal of discerning patterns and variations within and across sources.

Data from the student interviews and observational field notes were initially analyzed using analytic induction, a process by which initial coding categories were discerned from patterns within transcripts and field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Multiple readings of the data sources and regular meetings of the researchers helped complete this first phase of data analysis. Based on the three data sources, two discrete categories emerged. On one hand, there was "traditional" teaching that consisted primarily of teacher-centered discourse, paper-and-pencil textbook tasks, memorization, and questioning that elicited "correct" student responses (i.e., answers consistent with what the teacher wanted). On the other hand existed the less traditional instruction that included student-driven classroom conversation, classroom discourse that did not utilize typical classroom protocol (e.g., turn-taking and hand-raising), fluid collaboration between and among students and teacher, performance-oriented tasks, and open-ended questioning.

Student interviews were also analyzed using Grice's conversational maxim of relevance, which was used to classify the classroom curricular conversations. Applebee (1996) utilized this axiom to derive the five curricular organizations of continuity and coherence (Applebee, Burroughs & Stevens, 2000). Specifically, researchers categorized the curricular structures (Applebee, 1996) as catalog, collection, sequential, episodic, or integrated.

On one end of the continuum are *catalog* curricula. Some curricula are organized with no explicit topic or domain of conversation, and simply log or list experiences or activities. An English course designed in this manner might, for example, might include a variety of texts that are disparate and have no thematic connection to one another. Such curricula is completely lacking in continuity or coherence. A second type of curricular organization is a *collection*, where texts and activities are grouped as a "set" and taught separately, without an overriding premise to connect them. A biology course planned in such a way might present instruction around the different body systems, each of which are explored separately before progressing to the next. *Sequential* curricula have an internal organization based on chronology. These courses result in a well-structured scope that covers a wide breadth of material, but, like the collection, result in little support for connections between and among the individual parts. Many literature courses are developed in such a way, allowing teachers and students to sample text from different time periods, but in such a way that there is no relationship among them, other than the fact that texts are all part of the survey course.

When a stronger purpose or theme is added to a sequential curriculum, the curricular structure moves toward the other end of the continuum and becomes *episodic*. If, for example, the survey of literature course above adds a governing principle, such as the impact of an author's life on his work, it presents an opportunity for larger conversational domains to develop, in addition to allowing the students to return to and deepen their understanding of the organizing principle. Episodic curricula, however, are limited in that, while the conversations may elucidate the organizing principle, they do not illuminate one another. When students are afforded a chance to discover the interrelationships across all of the content "so that parallel but independent discussions of an episodic curriculum begin to echo back on one another" (Applebee, 1996, p. 77), an *integrated* curriculum has been achieved. As new information and elements enter the conversational domain, students have opportunity to revisit and reconstruct their understanding old material and skills, as well as develop new proficiencies and explore new content. Thus, curricular conversations observed in this study were analyzed in order to determine their level of coherence and continuity.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the parallel term for rigor in traditional social science and is essential to assuring readers that the research is worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A valid inquiry, conducted through qualitative analyses, addresses for areas: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The credibility of qualitative analysis is dependent on rigorous methods and the credibility of the researcher (Patton, 2002). It is, essentially, the extent to which the representations of the study reflect the student participants' realities.

This was accomplished, first and foremost, by achieving triangulation during data collection. The variety of sources (interviews, observations, and student artifacts) assured that the data was diverse and allowed the researchers to elicit differing constructions of reality and a range of perspectives.

Because this study was rooted in a qualitative paradigm, generalizability of findings would not be considered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, researchers looked at the specific contexts in which events occurred in order that those considering the results of this study would be able to make judgments concerning applicability in other contexts. This was accomplished by collecting detailed descriptions and direct quotations of participants in order to capture and reflect the participants' personal perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), the researchers sought to maximize the information that could be obtained from the study's participants and context.

Moreover, there can be no credibility without dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is a methodical process that is systematically followed (Patton, 2002). First, all participants were recruited in person with the same recruitment script. Next, we followed the same field note collection too and interview protocol with every participant. Since all participants were asked the same questions in the same order, this increased comparability of responses. Lastly, during the final interview, all participants were asked to engage in reflection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Authenticity pertains to the researcher's reflexivity, appreciation of multiple perspectives, and fairness in depicting constructions in values that support them (Patton, 2002). The research team achieved this by dialoguing about the data collection and analysis during monthly meetings. Additionally, direct quotations taken from the participants' interview transcripts assured authenticity during the reporting of findings.

Findings

Although the mission of the urban performing arts magnate school at which this research occurred was the integration of arts and academics, our findings showed that this was not the case. For example, the organization of the faculty did not reflect integration. Two separate faculty meetings were regularly scheduled, one for the arts faculty and one for the teachers of academic courses. Moreover, the class schedule also reflected that division; students clearly understood when they were attending an arts class and an academics class. In order to demonstrate this art and academic division, what follows is a description of researchers' observations.

Academic Classes

Academic classes reflected conventional teaching materials, instructional strategies, and student-teacher interaction. In the mathematics, history, language arts, and science courses, classroom organization was situated around established routines that were often teacher-driven and teacher-

centered. For example, an instructional lecture on World War II in United States history was accompanied by silent student note-taking and outlining (history classroom observation, March 31, 2005). Additionally, a round robin read-aloud from the history text with teacher-facilitated questioning, was observed. In mathematics, students participated daily in a problem-of-the-day that was copied from an overhead into student notebooks (math classroom observation, March 31, 2005). The problem was then independently solved by each student, after which one student was called upon to reveal the answer and the method used to solve it. Classroom instruction in mathematics consisted primarily of an introduction of a skill, a teacher-driven discussion of that skill, followed by silent and independent practice by the students. In one particular science class, students spent no time at all interacting with either the teacher or one another (science classroom observation, March 17, 2005). The entire fifty-minute bell was devoted to the copying of definitions from the class textbook onto paper and the answering of end-of-chapter questions in a science text.

In language arts classes, more student involvement was noted, but there students were still clearly *doing school.* Students engaged in paired reading of a text, but teaching remained an activity facilitated by the educator, with a review of setting, plot, and characterization occurring largely as a whole class activity (Language Arts classroom observation, March 30, 2005). This instructional classroom conversation was dominated by the teacher asking close-ended questions with the students providing correct responses. There was also a daily language practice similar to problem-of-the-day in mathematics. Students were expected to copy sentences into a notebook, paying particular attention to correct capitalization, punctuation, and grammatical mistakes in those sentences. This was done independently by each student, after which one or more students were called upon to talk about the errors found and the changes made.

One exception to the little arts integration into academic classes occurred in a language arts class during the reading of *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh* (O'Brien, 1971). After the students read and discussed the text, the teacher guided the students through a visualization activity (Language Arts classroom observation, March 30, 2005). During this activity, the students closed their eyes while the teacher read aloud selected sections of the text that were particularly descriptive of the underground rat home. Next, the students making pictorial representations of what they had envisioned while the teacher was reading. This activity was particularly well-received, with one of the focus students, SD, asking, "How should we draw the view—should it be a side view, an aerial view, or a frontal view?" to which the teacher responded that they could do whatever they wanted based on how they had visualized it.

These exceptions to established ways of doing school were few, and the majority of classroom time in academic classes was spent in dead-end curricular conversations, i.e. the type of discourse that focuses on correct responses to

close-ended questions where only one answer is perceived as appropriate because it revolves around classic texts and conventional academic activity (Applebee, 1996). The focus on conventional academic activity did not often include arts integration.

Art Classes

In opposition to academic classes, the arts classes demonstrated a more lively interaction between teacher and students, while at times incorporating conventional academic activity. In the visual arts, music, and dance courses, classroom organization was situated around more flexible routines that were often student-initiated and task, project, or performance-oriented. An instructional lecture, for example, in a visual arts class consisted primarily of the teacher engaging in artistic criticism with individual students in a voice loud enough for other students in the classroom to hear (visual arts classroom observation, January 27, 2005). Moving about the room looking at student compositions, she discussed blending and coloring techniques, tint choice, shading, light sources, and visual perspectives that were both specific to a particular to a student's work and general enough to be informative to the entire class. She responded pleasantly and thoroughly to questions presented to her without hand-raising or turn-taking. Throughout the class, the teacher made broad statements regarding art in the real world, which consisted of telling the students that when drawing, they should "rely on what they already know about the world to think about and fix mistakes" in their artwork, to use natural coloring so that the compositions would have a real world perception. Students, as both artists and art critics, were expected to work on their own compositions, but were also encouraged to look at and appraise the work of their peers, offering suggestions and encouragement in a manner similar to the teacher.

Likewise, in a string ensemble course, the class was a flurry of activity (string ensemble classroom observation, January 27, 2005). The students tuned their instruments and did warm-ups independently, by instruments (violins, violas, bass, etc.), and by section, while the teacher reminded, instructed, and encouraged students to watch their arm position, their sitting stance, and the compositional tempo. Teaching took place in the context of a performance task—the students were playing the *Brandenburg Concerto*—while the teacher concurrently focused on and corrected students on their intonation, rhythm, and playing technique. Skills were introduced then, in a larger context, and like the visual art teacher mentioned above, the ensemble teacher fielded questions from students who had not been acknowledged by being called upon in a traditional manner. The teacher would find identifiable problems in the compositions and point out to the students what to work on at home so that the vast majority of class time was spent on a collaborative activity.

In the spirit of knowledge-in-action, toward the end of this particular class, the teacher heard a couple of violinists trying to play the theme song from *Star Wars*. Instead of correcting these students for engaging in an activity unrelated to the class project, he stopped the class and helped these violinists find the notes they were looking for in a difficult section of the piece, and then returned to the concerto on which the class had been working. In doing so, the teacher kept music relevant to students' lives, allowing them voices in the construction of the curricular conversation.

Integration

While there were few examples of academic classes integrating fine arts activities into daily planning, there were examples of fine arts classes that utilized conventional academic activities in their coursework. Traditional pen-and-paper tests were observed in music, visual art, performance theater, and dance courses. Students reported taking vocabulary tests of "lots of hard French words" in dance and musical terms and symbols in instrumental and vocal classes (interview with KD, January 27, 2005). Additionally, students were expected to learn how to "sight read and understand" written music parts, including the melody and up to eight separate harmony parts. BD suggested that his orchestra class utilized mathematics because the teacher "like says you have to count this beat, like we have like two quarter notes is equal to like a half note…like a quarter note times two equals a half note" (interview, January 27, 2005). BD also reported "learning the history of acting and drama," as well as studying and writing biographical sketches of the lives and works famous artists, actors, and musicians.

This was significant in that, through this use of traditional activity, students employed more than just the *doing* aspects of the fine arts. By engaging in receptive and expressive vocabulary development, contributing to the curricular conversation in the classroom, and receiving constant and positive feedback from the teacher and one another, students also learned ways of knowing and thinking about their art. Students were able to participate not only in the community of *practice* of their art form, but also became members of the *discourse* community that knew, reflected, and talked about that art form. In this way, students were encouraged to enter into contemporary conversations about the learning in which they were currently involved, rather than learning *about* issues, trends, past events, or acquiring information that was not within the context of their lived experience.

Students' Curricular Perceptions

Despite some observational evidence of integration of arts and academics, students themselves were limited in their perception of that integration. Perhaps this is related to their inability to recognize the arts curriculum as an ongoing and cohesive course of study while they were able to identify cohesiveness in their academic classes. For example, the students seemed to have no idea how the teacher chooses topics or plans lessons, and rarely had a sense of what is coming next. Unlike the academic curriculum, which was often guided by a course text and one unit of study in that text follows another, the arts curriculum was, from the students' perspective, more random. Students were often unable to

anticipate the direction of curricular topics and activities, and had difficulty making sense of a cohesive curriculum. As KC, a fifth grader, stated in her initial interview: "I have no idea [how the teacher decides what to teach in her arts class] because nothing has one thing in common because it's just kind of confusing because we learn one thing, then another. I'm not really sure how she does it" (interview, December 7, 2005). KC further indicated that the teacher often "surprises" the students with what materials, activities, and assignments follow one another, and that she had "no clue" how the teacher determined what would come next in the planning of arts lessons.

This inability to recognize a cohesive curriculum in arts courses was also evident in talking to LZ, an eleventh grader (interview, May 20, 2005). Regarding her drama course:

DBS: Do you have a sense of what [material or arts activity] is coming next?

LZ: Not really.

DBS: How do you think the teacher decides what is coming next?

LZ: No clue.

The same was true for her chorus class:

DBS: How do you think the teacher decides what to teach?

LZ: Uh, she, sometimes she'll pick something and we'll sing it for about a week and she'll say, OK, I don't like it and it's basically, she picks a bunch of songs that are hard enough for us and we'll learn something from it but if we get to a point where we're not getting it or our voices aren't blending the right way, she'll throw it out.

DBS: Do you have a sense of what [material or arts activity] is coming next?

LZ: No idea.

DBS: How do you think the teacher decides what is coming next?

LZ: She just thinks what would be the next step up, I guess.

On the other hand, BD, a fifth grader, could see cohesiveness in his academic classes (interview, May 20, 2005). He explains his Language Arts class:

DBS: How do you think your teacher decides what to teach?

BD: Oooohhh….I think they like send her a list of things she has to teach and like she gets to pick which order she wants to teach 'em.

DBS: Do you have a sense of what's coming next in the class? Like what she's going to teach next?

BD: Yeah because like sometimes it's like she like to say the vocabulary… first you do synonyms and then antonyms and then completing the sentences.

And then next week we do synonyms and antonyms and completing the sentence (laughs)

BD had similar ideas of cohesiveness regarding his math class:

DBS: How do you think the teacher decides what to teach?

BD: Well by probably she has like a schedule like what she's going to teach next like she like this week we'll work on measurement and then next week we'll work on a review of what we learned before in the quarter.

DBS: Do you have a sense of what material is coming next?

BD: Oh, yes, cause she likes gives a strip, a planning strip and having our planning in it like what we're going to do that week and everything.

DBS: So each week you get one of those?

BD: Yes, it tells us what we're going to do that week.

Students tended to see cohesiveness in the curriculum in academic classes but did not perceive it in their arts classes.

Discussion

The implications of our findings are relevant to educators interested in making the most of interdisciplinary curricula. For example, while academic classes rarely integrated arts activities, art classes were more likely to assimilate conventional academic activities. Because the integration of academic behaviors into arts classrooms appears to impact how students perceive the cohesiveness of the curriculum, it is important for educators to be transparent about the organization of their curricula, so that students know how and why it is organized. In doing so, students will be more likely to engage in the larger curricular conversations with an awareness of where it is going and from whence it came.

Second, whereas Seidel & Castaneda-Emanaker (2006) suggests that the arts and academic integration can connect a student to the knowledge and traditions of the larger community in a way that promotes participation in that community, in the eyes of the students at Midwestern Arts Academy, this was not that clear. Our intention was not to characterize the whole school, but to glimpse how students might experience integration of arts and academic classes. Our informants were all motivated students, who we reasoned might have the best chance to experience and recognition such integration. As previously mentioned, students perceived some integration (interview with KC, May 25, 2005):

DBS: Do you ever do any kinds of arts activities in your history class?

KC: Uhhh—no.

DBS: OK, do you remember doing arts activities in any of your academic classes?

KC: Yes.

DBS: Which one?

KC: Language Arts. We had to do a scrapbook about something we learned from a book, ummm…that… was…about it.

DBS :All right. Did you do any academic activities in your art classes?

KC: (responds immediately) Yes. We had to...

KC was then able to cite, quite easily, examples of her arts classes that had utilized traditional academic activities, but failed to initially recall even one example of arts activities incorporated into academic classes. Even though earlier in that same interview she had communicated the experience of using musical instruments in a science class involving a discussion of sound, she did not perceive that event as an example of curricular integration when asked about doing arts activities in academic classes. Other student interviews indicated that students in arts classes showed some ability to recognize the integration of traditional academic activities within the context of the more lively arts classroom setting. This suggests that teachers may have to be explicit with students regarding curricular integration (Burroughs, 1999). We assert that one way teachers can be explicit is by listing objectives and rationales for classroom activities, noting the integration as it is taking place in order to make education and schooling more relevant to students' lives.

Third, the organization of the school plays a role in integration. We suggest that arts and academic faculty collaborate in conducting faculty meetings, designing curricula, instructing students, choosing materials, and interacting with students. School structures and educators can model the type of integration we want students to perceive.

Conclusion

Although Midwestern Arts Academy held as its mission the integration of academics and arts, it was extremely complex to implement. The examples of integration that were evidenced within the classroom context were primarily initiated by teachers in the arts classes, such as vocabulary tests in dance classes, the historical study of acting and drama, and the support of music sight reading using mathematical concepts. Even within this context, educators in the arts classes utilized these traditional teaching activities and approaches as strategies to supplement and reinforce concepts. The arts classes remained, primarily, examples of "culturally significant traditions of knowledge-in-action" (Applebee, 1996, p. 37) where students concurrently learned, thought, knew, did, talked, and reflected upon the content area.

Why is this relevant? Integration and students' perceptions of the curricula are clearly intertwined. We believe that students' perceptions of the cohesiveness of the various curricula impacted whether or not they recognized integration. For example, the nature of the curricular conversation in the fine arts classes was different from the types of instruction and learning that occurred in the academic classes. Perhaps

students perceived a slight amount of arts integration in their academic classes because they saw cohesiveness in the academic curricula, but little cohesiveness to the arts curricula. The academic courses employed teaching strategies, classroom routines, and student assignments that were conventional and teacher-centered, leaving fewer opportunities for students to engage in the type of "thinking" and "doing" necessary for student participation in the discourse community. However, we believe that students' familiarity with scholastic behavior impacted the students' capacity to perceive the cohesiveness of the academic curricula and recognize the integration of these behaviors and activities in the arts courses.

The differences in the nature of curricular conversations in arts and academics classes and students' understanding of "doing school" may help explain why curricular integration is so hard to do. Of course, school scheduling, school organization, and the demands of state standards may also contribute to the difficulty of integration as well. School scheduling often precludes opportunities for teachers to develop cross-curricular units or even share ideas; school organization, with separate arts and academic faculties, mean that teachers are hired for their perceived and enacted expertise in a field; state standards, especially in reading, mathematics, and science, make greater demands on the teachers and students with regard to mastering content, leaving less time for activities perceived as "unnecessary" or superfluous to that mastery.

But within the classrooms, the differences between the livelier conversations of arts classes and the "life-threatening," if not "dead" traditional exchanges in the academic classes were evident. Still, we are hopeful. We believe that with further research and practice, it will be possible to effectively mitigate the organizational and political factors so that integration is easier for teachers to negotiate and students to perceive.

References

Adler, M., & Flihan, S. (1997). *The interdisciplinary continuum: Reconciling theory, research and practice.* Albany, NY: Center for English Language Achievement (CELA).

Applebee, A. N. (1994). Toward thoughtful curriculum: Fostering discipline-based conversation. *The English Journal, 83*(3), 45-52.

Applebee, A. N. (1996). *Curriculum as conversation.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Applebee, A. N. (1997). Rethinking curriculum in the English language arts. *The English Journal, 86*(5), 25-31.

Applebee, A. N. (2002). Engaging students in the disciplines of English: What are effective schools doing? *The English Journal, 91*(6), 30-36.

Applebee, A. N., Burroughs, R., & Cruz, G. (2000). Curricular conversations in elementary school classrooms: Case studies of interdisciplinary instruction. In P. Grossman & S. Weinberg (Eds.), *Interdisciplinary curriculum: Challenges to implementation* (pp. 93-111). New York: Teachers College Press.

Applebee, A. N., Burroughs, R., & Stevens, A. (2000). Shaping conversations: A study of devices that create continuity and coherence in the high school literature curriculum. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *34*, 396-429.

Bazerman, C. (1994). The interpretation of disciplinary writing (Ch. 8). In *Constructing Experience* (pp. 83-90. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Burke, K. (1941). *The philosophy of literary form: Studies in symbolic action*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press.

Burroughs, R. S. (1999). From the margins to the center: Integrating multicultural literature into the secondary English curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, *14*(2), 136-155.

Burroughs, R. S., & Smagorinsky, P. (2009). The secondary English curriculum and adolescent literacy. In L. Christenbury, R. Bomer, & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *The handbook of adolescent literacy*. Guilford, CT: Guilford Press.

Czerniak, C. M., Weber, W. B., Jr., Sandman, A., & Ahern, J. (1999). A literature review of science and mathematics integration. *School Science and Mathematics*, *99*, 421-30.

Dewey, J. (1913). *Interest and effort in education*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: The MacMillan Company.

Ellis, A. K., & Fouts, J. T. (2001). Interdisciplinary curriculum: The research base. *Music Educators Journal*, *87*(5), 22-26.

Gallas, K., & Smagorinsky, P. (2002). Approaching texts in school: Students understand texts in many ways that may not match the "standard." *Reading Teacher*, *56*(1), 54-63.

Graff, G. (1992). *Beyond the culture wars: How teaching the conflicts can revitalize American education*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: Speech acts* (Vol. 3). New York: Academic Press.

Hargreaves, A., & Moore, S. (2000). Curriculum integration and classroom relevance: A study of teacher practice. *Journal of Curriculum & Supervision*, *15*, 89-112.

Herrington, A. (1985). Writing in academic settings: A study of the contexts for writing in two college chemical engineering courses. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *19*, 331-361.

Kain, D. L. (1996). Recipes or dialogue? A middle school team conceptualizes "curricular integration." *Journal of Curriculum & Supervision*, *11*, 163-187.

Lake, K. (1994). *School improvement research series VIII: Integrated curriculum*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Education Laboratory.

Langer, J. A. (1992). Speaking of knowing: Conceptions of understanding in the academic disciplines. In J. Mangieri & K. Collins (Eds.), *Teaching thinking: An agenda for the twenty-first century* (pp. 69-85). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Marshall, J. D., Smagorinsky, P., & Smith, M. W. (1995). *The language of interpretation: Patterns of discourse in discussions of literature*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Mehan, H. (1979). *Learning lessons.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Morrow, L. M., Pressley, M., Smith, J. K., & Smith, M. (1995). *The effect of a literature-based program integrated into literacy and science instruction on achievement, use, and attitudes toward literacy and science.* Athens, GA: National Reading Research Center.

O'Brien, R. C. (1971). *Mrs. Frisby and the rats of Nimh*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Schiro, M. (2008). *Curriculum theory: Conflicting visions and enduring concerns*. London: Sage Publications.

Seidel, K., & Castañeda-Emanaker, I. (2006). Aesthetics and urban education: Urban learners' affirmation and transformation through arts and human development education. In P. M. Anderson, K. Hayes, K. Rose, & J. L. Kincheloe (Eds.), *Praeger handbook of urban education* (pp. 496-508). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedure and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Vars, G. (1996). The effects of interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction. In P. Hlebowitsh & W. Wraga (Eds.), *Annual review of research for school leaders* (pp. 147-164). Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals and Scholastic Publishing Company.

Williams, R. (1961). *The long revolution*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Weinberg, S., & Grossman, P. (2000). Scenes from a courtship: Some theoretical and practical implications of interdisciplinary humanities curricula in the comprehensive high school. In S. Weinberg & P. Grossman (Eds.), *Interdisciplinary curriculum: Challenges to implementation* (pp. 57-73). New York: Teachers College Press.

Yinger, R. (1990). The conversation of practice. In R. Clift, R. Houston, & M. Pugach (Eds.), *Encouraging reflective practice in education* (pp. 73-94). New York: Teachers College Press.

Angela M. Miller is an Assistant Professor at the College of Mount St. Joseph. Her research interests include teacher education, reader response and curriculum theory, specifically the integration of fine arts activities in literacy classrooms. E-mail: Angela_Miller@mail.msj.edu.

Delane A. Bender-Slack is an Assistant Professor at Xavier University in Cincinnati. Her research interests include content area literacy, teacher education, curriculum theory, and teaching for social justice. E-mail: benderslackd@xavier.edu.

Robert S. Burroughs is a Field Service Associate Professor at the University of Cincinnati. His current research focuses on curriculum theory, specifically the subject matter knowledge that secondary teachers bring to teaching and how that knowledge is shaped by their teaching contexts. Email: bob.burroughs@uc.edu.

Appendix A: Attributes of Willing Participants

Student	Grade	Gender	Arts Majors						
			Vocal	Instrumental	Drama	Creative Writing	Visual Arts	Dance	Music Theater
LB	5	F	X	X					
AS	5	F	X						
KG	5	F			X	X			
AA	5	F	X		X				
RP	5	F		X			X		
SS	5	F	X	X					
AL	5	F				X		X	
KC	5	F				X		X	
DA	5	F						X	X
JW	5	M	X				X		
BD	5	M		X				X	
SD	5	M					X		
JL	11	F			X				X
KF	11	F						X	
LZ	11	F	X		X				
KSC	11	F		X				X	

Appendix B: Fieldnote Template

TOPICS	ACTIVITIES	CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Date of Observation:
Teacher name:
Primary content area:
Bell:
Student participant:

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

So what different kinds of things do you do in your [academic] class?

Which of these seems most important?

Which of these things seem least important?

How do you think the activities related to one another?

What do you like best about this [academic] class?

What do you like least about the class?

How is this different than last year's [academic] class?

What kinds of questions does your teacher ask?

What kinds of discussions does your class have?

What kind of tests do you have?

What does it take to do well in this class?

How does the teacher decide the grades are going to be?

What matters most in giving grades?

Why do you think you have to study [this academic subject]?

How do you think your teacher decides what to teach?

Do you have a sense of what's coming next in the class? What she's going to teach next?

How do you think the teacher decides what's coming next?

Imagine that you could change what is studied in you class. What would you change and what would you keep?

What is your favorite subject in school? Why?

What's your least favorite subject in school? Why?

What's your least/most favorite performing arts class? Do you take more than one?

So we're going to talk about [your performing arts class]. What different kinds of things do you do in this class?

Which of these seem most important?

Which of these seem least important?

How are the activities related to one another, the activities that you do in your [performing arts] class?

(repeat questions above for performing arts class)