

Introduction

“Thinking deeply about what we are doing leads us to ask better questions, break out of fruitless routines, make unexpected connections and experiment with fresh ideas.”

—Ron Brandt

Ask art teachers if they ever think about their curricula and you will most likely find that they all do. Daily. Curriculum is necessarily dynamic. Curriculum documents tend to be static, but our day-to-day course of action shifts dynamically as we make choices about content, instruction, and assessment and as we reflect upon what seems to be working with our students and what needs to be rethought. Such choices reflect basic assumptions about what counts as important content in art, what kinds of instructional strategies are most effective, and how we can best assess how our students are achieving. We draw upon these deeply embedded notions as we make shifts in our plans and, in the process, the curriculum changes. In this sense, most teachers consistently rethink curriculum in art.

The focus of this book, however is not the planning shifts often required in teaching a given course but, rather, the deeply embedded assumptions that stand at the heart of general curriculum decision making. Our hope is that as art educators read this book, they will seriously examine their basic, foundational ideas about what is important for students to learn and how this learning can best be accomplished. The ideas put forward are in response to more than a decade of school reform efforts in education regarding teaching for understanding, accountability, student relevance, and the information and visual explosion stemming from the continued growth of media and technology. We believe that the research, theory, and new practice around these developments warrant a careful examination by those who care about the art education of today's children and youth. We also believe that today's teachers can benefit from assistance in their efforts—collaborative or alone—to construct or revise their art programs and curricula. The approaches outlined in this book represent the authors' attempt to address this need.

What's the "Big Idea"?

In our attempt to highlight connections between recent developments in educational theory, research, and new practice with art education content and purposes, we introduce the reader to a process for creating curricula in art. We show how the use of enduring ideas can serve as a foundation for art curricula and how the study of art can be linked, in substantive ways, to other subjects in general education. We focus on ways that enduring ideas can guide curriculum writers in meeting local, state, and national standards in art and, when appropriate, other relevant subject areas. We offer guidelines for selecting content, designing instruction, and creating various forms of assessment. Throughout the book, the reader will

encounter numerous examples from actual units of study designed by teachers involved in a project entitled "Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge" (TETAC), a five-year project completed in 2001 and funded, in part, by The Annenberg Foundation and the J. Paul Getty Trust.* Consistent with the approaches used in other books in the Art Education in Practice series, we include theoretical foundations, but primarily focus upon ways in which theory informs practice. Parts of the book guide the reader through step-by-step processes to follow in designing curriculum.

The work of the TETAC project was influenced by and built upon a decade of theory and practice in art education that focused on discipline-based art education (DBAE). In addition, the increasing attention in general education to interdisciplinary teaching and learning and other ideas consistent with recent school reform efforts influenced the project. The project included six major sites, each of which had served as a Getty Regional Institute during the decade of funding by the Getty Education Institute for the Arts. The six sites, located in California, Florida, Nebraska, Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas, formed the National Arts Education Consortium. As part of the TETAC project, each site selected five or six partner schools—including elementary, middle, and high schools—to serve as demonstration sites for implementing a comprehensive approach to arts education linked to whole school reform strategies to improve student achievement.

* Starting in the fall of 1996, the National Arts Education Consortium embarked on a five-year national educational reform initiative, the Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge, to link comprehensive arts education with national and local efforts to reform our nation's schools. Information about this project can be found in the National Arts Education Consortium, Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge: Final Project Report (Columbus, OH: Department of Art Education, Ohio State University), and at The Annenberg Challenge Archive Site (<http://www.annenberginstitute.org/Challenge/sites/tetac.html>).

Teachers in these partner schools worked with site mentors on a regular basis, providing feedback and designing units of instruction. Each school submitted two such units per year for evaluation and feedback.

The TETAC Curriculum Guidelines Committee, consisting of one representative from each of the six regional sites and a content consultant to the TETAC project, designed curriculum guidelines that provided the basis for curriculum design within the project. These guidelines also have provided the foundation for this book, along with examples from units of study submitted by teams of teachers in TETAC schools over the years. Although this book describes, and thus reports to the field, the important curriculum work of the TETAC project, it is primarily intended as a practical guide to developing curriculum for a comprehensive approach to the study of art within the framework of whole school reform.

Who Should Read This Book?

The primary audience for this book is in-service, or practicing, teachers and pre-service teachers—individuals studying in teacher preparation programs. Because of its relevance to interdisciplinary teaching and learning, it will also be useful for non-art teachers interested in ways to include the visual arts in substantive interdisciplinary curricula. In addition, we hope that the book will be useful for arts curriculum supervisors, museum educators, and arts administrators.

For pre-service art teachers, the contents of this book will introduce important concepts in curriculum design. Pre-service teachers can use these concepts to inform the curricula they plan as part of their study and training.

As teachers who are experienced in developing curricula for their own programs encounter the approaches outlined in this book, we hope they will



1.1 Teachers in the TETAC project worked together to plan units of study and strategies to help their students respond to artworks.

reconsider what they routinely do as they plan. The introduction of curriculum foundations, for example, with its emphasis on identifying enduring ideas, key concepts, and essential questions upon which units of study, lessons, activities, and assessment can be based, requires that even experienced teachers reflect more carefully upon why they do what they do in their own classrooms.

The so-called standards movement has resulted in increasing instances in which teachers are asked to create district-wide documents to address local, state, and/or national standards. To align curricula with standards and to provide broad frameworks for local curriculum development, school districts routinely engage groups of teachers in curriculum writing projects. For most teachers, this task is daunting. While art teachers often are very clear about what they do with their own students and how they plan individual lessons to address standards, they often



1.2 In a comprehensive approach to art education, students are provided a range of opportunities to view and interpret artworks.

seek assistance in envisioning the larger picture—ways in which a range of art-teaching components work together as a curricular whole. To recognize the demand for this kind of assistance, one need only review e-mail requests to the discussion group ArtsEdnet Talk in recent years. Novice and seasoned teachers regularly ask for examples, templates, and other forms of assistance in district curriculum writing. This book will provide assistance for these efforts.

In addition to providing practical suggestions for curriculum writing, we draw heavily upon recent research findings. As such, we provide curriculum writers the necessary information to create substantive curricula consistent with current educational research. Because we include an extensive selection of

examples from actual practice, those who use this book will be better equipped to implement the content and strategies suggested by the research.

Rethinking Curriculum in Art is meant to supplement, not replace, college-level curriculum texts that focus on the history and philosophy of curriculum and instruction. Such textbooks rarely enter into practical suggestions for curriculum design as we do here. In addition, throughout this book, we delineate important notions about curriculum planning in art education, which we hope will assist teachers in selecting and adopting art textbooks for their programs and districts. Such notions will provide those seeking to incorporate textbooks into their programs with the theoretical foundations necessary to make informed adoption decisions.

How This Book Is Organized

Chapter 2 begins with an overview of the theoretical context and school reform efforts within which the TETAC project and its curriculum guidelines were conceived and implemented. This chapter provides a conceptual context for developing curriculum to improve education and advance the arts as a part of the basic core learning in K–12 education. Here we examine ideas about art content and teaching that have emerged within education in general and arts education in particular. We review developments that have had an impact upon art curricula and look to current and emerging ideas about teaching and learning and, again, make connections between the ideas and arts curricula. Finally, drawing upon the work of those involved with the TETAC project, we introduce five key components of the curriculum design process.

Chapter 3 introduces the notion of “unit foundations”—the enduring ideas, key concepts, objectives, and plans for assessment and alignment with standards that need to be in place prior to designing

instructional strategies and specific assessments. Units of study from TETAC project sites figure prominently here and in subsequent chapters.

We fully recognize the importance of making choices about artists, artworks, artifacts, cultures, and artmaking experiences, and in Chapter 4 we show how these significant decisions can be made in light of a larger conceptual framework, allowing teachers to identify and develop content consistent with the established unit foundations. In Chapter 5 we feature current and emerging ideas related to instruction and the ways in which students best learn. This material will help planners develop strategies to help students understand the enduring ideas and key concepts of their study units while developing proficiency in important inquiry processes.

Throughout the book we put forward the importance of planning assessment in the early, rather than later, stages of curriculum planning. Chapter 6 outlines specific approaches to conceiving and implementing assessment strategies to address the important ideas and skills established within unit foundations. Chapter 7 focuses on integrated, or interdisciplinary, curriculum planning, one of the important directions within the TETAC project and also in recent school reform efforts. We address integration among the arts as well as between art and other subject areas in the curriculum.

Finally, because we believe that any attempt to rethink curriculum in art must include attention to the impact of visual imagery in contemporary culture, Chapter 8 addresses visual culture, a focus of curriculum reform efforts that has received considerable attention since the conclusion of the TETAC project. Although the TETAC project did not directly address the importance of this subject area, we show how the approach to curriculum planning can accommodate an emphasis on visual culture. Our inclusion of this

chapter is consistent with our belief in the dynamic nature of curriculum. As new ideas take hold, we consider their relevance to our basic assumptions and make informed judgments regarding their inclusion within our curricula. While we recognize that some of the ideas in this text may one day surrender to new educational and social contexts that require different emphases and approaches, we trust that we have put forward, in this text and for today's readers, a compelling and useful approach for successfully rethinking curriculum in art.



1.3 Children take pride in the artworks they make. An important goal is to provide meaningful artmaking experiences for all students.