

## Final Article, Series Wrap-up

This is the final article in a series that has provided a brief overview of the long history and rich benefits of using arts integration as an approach to teaching. Because this was simply an overview, the intent has been to provide a *starting point* for individual research and advocacy efforts related to arts integration.

In this final installment, I propose to do something quite daring. I am going to discuss JOY in the classroom. Yikes! Are we allowed to discuss and create joyful experiences for students in the highly politicized, accountability atmosphere in which public education currently exists? Of course, most teachers know that if we don't, both student achievement and teacher resiliency will suffer. And yet, the literature doesn't talk about joy in education much at all. When discussed, it is often in a superficial way (telling teachers to 'smile more, decorate your classroom, and give out tickets as positive reinforcement') without ever defining what real joy in the classroom looks like.

We may be tempted to claim a relationship between student engagement and joy but this would be a mistake. Those who have taken the time to define student engagement describe it simply as involvement with a subject area; the time and energy students invest in educationally effective practices (Axelson and Flick, 2011). It does not necessarily equate to excitement, interest, or joy. For instance, practicing the piano, certainly an educationally effective way to learn to play it, was not a joyful activity for me growing up. I engaged in it because I was told I had to for 30 minutes each day. Any joy that came from the activity belonged to my mother, not me (Sorry, Ken and Nathan).

Perhaps one of the most intriguing ways to view joy in the classroom is through the lens of "student spark," discussed by Peter Scales (2010). Scales describes spark as one or two of "the interests and passions young people have within them that light a fire in their lives and express the essence of who they are and what they offer to the world" (p1). Scales found that students who had the opportunity to pursue their own spark and who received support from teachers in exploring and developing their spark reported stronger academic outcomes *and better overall well-being*. (Clearly, the piano was not my spark.)

Wolk (2008) argues that joy is a feeling of happiness that is caused by something good or satisfying; something that activates the mind, heart, and soul in a positive ways. He differentiates between fun and joy: fun can bring joy but joy doesn't need fun. Joy, including the joy of thinking and learning, is deeper and more gratifying. As Bertolt Brecht wrote in the *Life of Galileo*, "Thinking is one of the greatest pleasures of the human race." It is the kind of experience that leads to what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described as *flow*, that feeling that nothing else matters in this moment but this challenge.

Wolk goes on to suggest that teachers inspire students—mind, heart, and soul—through the joys of learning, having choice, moving, playing, creating, getting outside, etc. In other words, many of the exact same integrative activities you have heard and seen emphasized by ArtsCore presenters over and over again.

As this series comes to an end, I hope that adding arts integration to your teaching practice has allowed you to see sparks where you hadn't before and that exploring those sparks have brought classroom joy to both you and your students.

Axelson, R. D & Flick, A. (January/February, 2011). "Defining student engagement." *Change*, 43, 38-43.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Scales, P.C. (2010, December). "Finding the student spark: Missed opportunities in school engagement." *Search Institute Insights and Evidence*, 5(1) 1-13.

Wolk, S. (2008). "Joy in school". *Educational Leadership*, 66(1) 8-15.