

## **Integrated Arts Education in Hong Kong**

CHEUNG YUNG, Wai Yee Jane

Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong

**Abstract:** This paper presents an outline of the arts education reform in Hong Kong at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It introduces the Government's policy of attaining an all-round development, the expanded arts curriculum to include other art forms and an emphasis to connect knowledge in and through the arts. It discusses how schools and tertiary institutions such as the Hong Kong Institute of Education respond through joint ventures with the community resources. The rationale of the integrated curriculum is argued, illustrated by project ventures. The paper highlights some good practices that students have benefited from the integrated curriculum, including better motivation and understanding of the arts and acquisition of generic skills to facilitate the whole-person development. However, it also exposes some problems and issues facing music and visual arts educators when implementing the integrated curriculum in schools. In order that students' holistic development to face challenges in the new millennium is achieved, insights are recommended into the scope and direction of future arts education policy to implement the integrated arts curriculum.

**Keywords:** integrated arts; arts understanding; generic skills; motivation; interdisciplinary

### **Background and aims of the new arts education curriculum**

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the Education Commission made a holistic review of the primary and secondary education system of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, so that school leavers can possess the necessary breadth and depth of knowledge, skills and attitude to meet new challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Commission drafted a set of reform proposals to improve the education system in Hong Kong (2000). The overall aims were to enable every student to attain all-round development in the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics according to his/her own attributes, so that s/he is capable of life-long learning, critical and exploratory thinking, innovative and adaptable to change, and contribute to the future well-being of the nation and the world at large (p.4). To realize these, the vision was to build a life-long learning society; to raise the overall quality of students; to construct a diverse school system; to create an inspiring learning environment; to acknowledge the importance of moral education and to develop an education system that is rich in tradition but cosmopolitan and culturally diverse (p.5). All the school subjects were grouped into eight Key Learning Areas (KLA): Chinese Language Education; English Language Education; Mathematics Education; Technology Education; Science Education; Personal Social and Humanities Education; Arts Education and Physical Education, in order to implement the education reform effectively.

The Arts Education KLA facilitates the achievement of the overall aims of enabling students to attain all-round development, including the aesthetics, to lead a healthy lifestyle, and to develop an interest in, an appreciation of, aesthetic and physical activities (CDC, 2001, p.18). It contributes significantly to the development of generic skills, values and attitudes. Life-long learning can be facilitated through enjoyable artistic experiences. The aims of developing Arts Education in school are to nurture students' creativity and flexibility; to provide diversified learning experiences within the arts and a balanced arts curriculum with other art forms such as Drama, Media Arts and Dances besides Music and Visual Arts; to develop an approach which

integrates students' learning in the arts, so that they acquire a holistic and deeper understanding across the arts and other KLAs; to adopt a student-centred approach to support students to construct knowledge and skills; to widen their arts learning experiences through life-wide learning activities and to foster learning to learn skills and life-long learning attitudes in the arts (CDC, 2002, p.13-14).

In the Arts Education curriculum guide, four learning targets and learning objectives are set to achieve the overall aims of the arts education (p. 25): i) to develop creativity and imagination –generate ideas through imagination and creativity by participating in creative or performing arts activities; ii) to develop skills and processes –use different materials, elements and resources to experience and express the arts; iii) to cultivate critical responses –appraise and respond to issues in the arts; and iv) to understand arts in context –understand the cultural contexts in which the arts are placed and their relationship to people's lives and societies at large. It is advised that all students are to be exposed to different art forms as active observers and practitioners. School-based arts education policy should be formulated to emphasise the intrinsic value of arts education and its contribution to the whole-person development of students. In order to provide a balanced and comprehensive arts curriculum, schools are advised to review and restructure their arts curriculum holistically to allow for broader learning space, diversified arts learning experiences, more flexible provision of creativity, introducing new art forms and life-wide learning activities outside the classroom to complement learning. Generic skills are promoted and integrative arts learning is encouraged to enable students to make associations and apply artistic concepts and skills with other arts. In addition, arts education enables students to develop a broader understanding of historical, technological, cultural and social context, hence interdisciplinary learning across other KLAs enables students to examine and critique culture through the arts, integrate their learning experiences and gain deeper insights into the subjects they are studying. This helps break down the barrier between different subject areas and enhance cross-curricular links (CDC, 2002, p. 52-54, CDC, 2003, p. 32-33).

The education reform in Hong Kong addresses both curriculum design and learning strategies. The grouping of subjects into eight Key Learning Areas with a student-centred approach allows subjects of related nature to be studied in an open, flexible manner, so that students can explore and investigate through multiple perspectives and environment. Bernstein in his book *Pedagogy, symbolic control, and identity: theory, research, critique*, has made explicit distinction of the nature, strengths and weaknesses between separate subjects learning and integrated subjects learning (Bernstein, 2000). Strong classification describes curriculum structure where each subject is strongly insulated and isolated from one another, and the subjects are designed where knowledge is learned separately and independently without relating to each other. Teachers tend to work within their own subject areas with few common topics for discussion or research work. There are insufficient opportunities for academic exchange and students often find it hard to connect their knowledge across the curriculum. In contrast, weak classification describes curriculum design that is more flexible, where content of a subject can be combined freely with other subjects of related nature. There is less emphasis on subject distinction and uniqueness, but the integrated curriculum provides students with multiple perspectives to examine issues, topics and concepts. Teachers communicate with each other more frequently to develop new curriculum and strategies, which aims to bring students' knowledge closer to their daily life with enriched learning experience. The use of information technology, community-based resources,

and interactive learning all aims to enhance active construction of knowledge and a whole-person development.

### **Implementation of the integrated arts curriculum in tertiary institution and schools**

The Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd), being the largest tertiary institute to provide school educators, has revised its music and visual arts modules in the Full-time and Part-time programmes to address the integrated arts curriculum. Those modules in the Full-time and Part-time Bachelor of Education Secondary and Primary programmes that incorporate the integrated arts curriculum include “Curriculum Studies in Visual Arts Education”, “Advanced Studies in Visual Arts Curriculum and Approaches”, “Teaching through Arts Infusion”, “Integrative Arts” and “Advanced Secondary Methods for Teaching Music”. Having studied the rationale and integrated models, students are given the opportunity to design integrated arts activities and curricular with their second teaching subjects. Apart from these modules, which are offered to the music and visual arts elective students, other integrative modules are designed in the General Education Domain for any elective students. This provides opportunities for all students to get acquainted with the rationale and designs of the integrative curriculum and to experiment them during the teaching practice in schools. Moreover, two specially developed modules, “The Integrative Learning of the Arts” and “Integrating Arts into Cross-curricular Activities”, are offered to the in-service primary school teachers of the five-week Profession Development Course commissioned by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB). They provide practical experience for teachers to explore each of the four art forms: visual arts, music, dance and drama. They also recommend strategies on how the arts can be integrated within themselves and through the arts with other subject areas. The in-service teachers are expected to design a school-based integrative curriculum and implement it with their pupils accordingly. Some of the better cases have been documented and compiled as good practices, to be published as exemplars and distributed to schools.

Apart from exploring innovative strategies in integrating the arts, arts educators in the HKIEd have been engaged rigorously in research work since 2000 to investigate the effects of the integrative arts curriculum design and the integrated approaches on student learning and teachers’ professional development. Research and teaching development grants were sought to examine relevant issues concerning the evaluation of the integrative curriculum; possible integrative models; effects of student learning through the integrated approach; professional development of teachers and the relationship between teachers and artists. Findings are compiled while recommendations are put forward in publication as useful resources for school teachers. Besides the education sectors, artists and arts organisations also help to promote the integration of the arts in local schools and the community. From 2000-2003, the Hong Kong Bank Foundation sponsored artists and arts organisations to collaborate closely with schools to develop the integrative curriculum in and through the arts, and explore various integrative approaches through the Arts-in-Education programme. This programme, which was organized by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC), co-organised by the HKIEd and the EMB, encouraged artists to participate in local schools during the formal hours to integrate the arts with other KLAs (HKADC, 2005). Other projects on integrative arts include The Seeds Project with primary schools conducted by HKIEd and sponsored by EMB. Furthermore, schools are encouraged to implement new initiatives of the education reform through applying for the Quality Education Fund.

**Good practices and problems identified**

The Arts-in-Education programme (AiE) received a donation of four million Hong Kong dollars. The aims of the programme were to use the arts as a means of integrative learning in the formal curriculum, to establish and initiate collaboration between schools and artists, to raise students' interest in the arts so as to improve their learning in the arts and other subject areas, to provide professional development for teachers working with artists and peers as a means for improving the overall quality of teaching in Hong Kong schools. The AiE programme included sixteen projects participated by 32 schools, with over 50 artists, 260 teachers and more than 3800 students. A team of five academics from the Creative Arts and Physical Education Department, HKIEd evaluated the entire three-year programme. The large source of data included school visit reports, lesson observation, interview with artists, teachers and students, focus group meeting with school principals, teachers and artists, school documents, reports, student attitude inventory and the projects' final products.

*Good practices*

Some patterns of subject integration were identified, which include the use of thematic approach and common concepts that linked different subjects together to facilitate a holistic understanding of the theme or concepts (Cheung, 2005b, p. 234). The most striking outcome in most of the projects was a noticeable change in student motivation and interest to learn. One reason for this was the active participation and greater involvement of the students in various kinds of activity, which was utilised as a pedagogical strategy to achieve teaching objectives. Students were actively engaged in highly interactive learning activities, creative work, group discussion and role-play. The integration of different subjects provided a more meaningful and coherent learning experience, where a cheerful atmosphere was often sustained (Cheung, 2005a, p. 202). While some arts teachers worried that the interdisciplinary approach would dilute artistic knowledge and skills to make way for other subject knowledge and skills, findings from the AiE programme showed that students' knowledge and skills in visual, media and performing arts were actually enhanced (p. 204). Many of the projects required the students to work in groups, to collaborate and present their findings in front of the class; consequently their ability to co-operate, their communication skills and their self-confidence have increased. Some projects promoted initiative and creative thoughts by allowing space for the students to participate actively and room for subject integration. During the creative process, the students made critical judgments of their own performances; they developed meta-cognitive skills, self-guidance and consideration for others. The interdisciplinary approach of integrating the arts with other subject areas in AiE weakened subject boundaries, which allowed students to seek connections between the knowledge and skills of related subjects. This approach, known as weak classification by educators (Bernstein, 2000; Swanwick, 1988), aims at bringing separate pieces of knowledge together and facilitating more meaningful and coherent learning across the curriculum. It concerns the integration of differences, and allows the staff to be part of a strong social network by working together to solve problems. Common themes were used to allow knowledge belonging to different subjects to form new relationships. Simply juxtaposing individual subjects as separate entities, rather than integrating them together, could not normally enhance understanding during the learning process. In the AiE programme, students found learning across the arts and learning languages with the arts extremely meaningful. Some projects allowed students to add choices to the content of the curriculum (in-depth learning of an art form) as well

as to suggest ways of performing or presenting it, which provided more scope for creative work. In order to implement the project successfully, the teachers met more often to share ideas of implementing and delivery of the integration, which resulted in teachers' professional development of a deeper understanding of the holistic curriculum.

### *Problems*

Although advantages of learning within the arts and across other KLAs are being emphasised (CDC, 2002, p. 54), the EMB has only provided very brief exemplars on how learning in the arts can be connected with other KLAs (p. 55). Over the years, it has failed to provide possible models and strategies to combine different art forms, or integrate the Arts KLA with other KLAs. In the case of the music curriculum, resources and attention are mostly focused on the music creativity workshops and preparation for the new Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education music papers, commencing in 2012. The majority of the practicing primary and secondary school music and visual arts teachers receive little guidelines or hands-on training on how to implement curriculum integration in/through the arts. As a result, they feel dubious and are unable to design or implement the integrative arts curriculum. Furthermore, some recent editions of primary and secondary text books still focus on single subject knowledge and skills acquisition, despite the call for connecting knowledge and skills across the curriculum to enhance students' lateral coherence of linking knowledge and skills to their daily life experience. This inconsistency further encourages the visual arts and music teachers to cling onto their traditional teaching methods without the need for change to implement the education reform.

Despite the advantages and strengths that the integrated curriculum and approaches have brought about to student learning, teachers have often identified difficulties when implementing the integrated arts curriculum. This requires music and visual arts teachers to jointly develop a unit or series of units together. It is not an easy task to achieve when both teachers are either fully occupied with routine teaching in their special rooms or they have extra-curricular activities to conduct, or their free time does not always fall onto the same periods. Integrating their subjects with another art form which they are not familiar with means that the school will need to hire an artist from outside to work together, and this has financial and value implications (Cheung, 2005b p. 236), apart from risking uncertainties and having to provide adequate justifications to the school authority. Although the multidisciplinary approach requires teachers of various subjects to expose students to related content knowledge at different time of the week, so that they can make a connection eventually, it is not always clear if the students have actually grasped the concept, or made the connection without an assessment. It is idealistic if two or more teachers can group together, discuss relevant common topics or coherent information they can link, and design interdisciplinary content knowledge together, so that students can undergo meaningful and interconnected learning experience. The integrated approach requires innovative, cooperative, self-motivated and open-minded teachers, who are willing to try new approaches to facilitate student learning. These approaches may incorporate the use of internet search, working collaboratively with arts and non-arts staff, a more interactive strategy with students, or working closely with an artist. The teacher has to be very flexible, tolerant and adaptable in dealing with different situations and experimenting with new approaches.

Teaching resources are also problematic, as there are very few text books and relevant teaching aids which address the integrative curriculum and integrated approaches. Hence, music

and visual arts teachers are often left feeling frustrated and helpless to fight their own battles in schools. In this respect, Hong Kong is much behind mainland China, where the government has set up expert teams to pilot the curriculum, and incomparable to Taiwan, where full sets of integrated arts text books are published for use in the primary and secondary schools. There, the teachers can get technical guide and advice easily, where resources are allocated through the central pool to support schools. Here, it is found that some schools do not have a clear vision to support the arts. Resources are largely allocated to languages, while the arts are treated only as a showcase during celebration and speech days. Music and visual arts teachers often want to pass the language bench mark examination, to be able to teach languages besides music or visual arts, in order to get a more secured post in schools. The value of the arts definitely needs recognition and promotion.

### **The way forward**

While the integration in / through the arts is recommended in the curriculum guides of both the Arts KLA (2002) and Music (2003), it has not been receiving sufficient and systematic attention by the Hong Kong Government. It is found that students tend to learn the arts with better motivation and understanding under the integrative approach. It facilitates the whole person development through acquiring various generic skills. In order to promote teaching and learning in a more coherent and holistic manner, it is hoped that the government could provide more training opportunities and subsidies for in-service arts and non-arts teachers in both primary and secondary schools to explore and integrate the arts, so that they can implement this in their curriculum planning and implementation. There is a lack of teaching materials and aids for the integrated curriculum, hence more resources should be produced and experimented on. Good practices should be promoted with the collaborative efforts from the artists and the community, so that students can enrich their daily life experience. Integrative curriculum and approaches should be explored through research and findings should be disseminated to schools for application. The government is advised to provide a web site for teachers to share and disseminate good practices, and a problem solving corner for them to offer strategies to solve each other's problems. Action research can be undertaken by educators and practitioners to examine the strengths and weaknesses of implementing the integrated curriculum. Seminars can be conducted for international arts educators to share current practices of the integrated curriculum, and to help students learn effectively. It is only through collaborative effort from the EMB, tertiary institution, schools and the community that the integrated arts education can be fully implemented in Hong Kong for the benefit of the whole-person development of our students.

### **References**

- Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control, and identity: theory, research, critique*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC.
- Cheung, J. (2005a). The effects of the arts-in-education programme on student learning. In *Joyful Learning: the Arts-in-Education Programme*. Hong Kong Arts Development Council: Hong Kong.
- Cheung, J. (2005b). Summary and recommendations. In *Joyful Learning: the Arts-in-Education Programme*. Hong Kong Arts Development Council: Hong Kong.
- Curriculum Development Council. (2001). *Learning to learn: the way forward in curriculum development, consultation document*. Hong Kong: the council.

- Curriculum Development Council. (2002). *Arts Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1-Secondary 3)*. Hong Kong: the council.
- Curriculum Development Council. (2003). *Arts Education Key Learning Area Music Curriculum Guide (Primary 1-Secondary 3)*. Hong Kong: Government Logistics Department.
- Education Commission. (2000). *Learning for Life, learning through life: reform proposals for the education system in Hong Kong*. (The printer: Hong Kong).
- Hong Kong Arts Development Council. (2005). *Joyful Learning: the Arts-in-Education programme*. Hong Kong: HKADC.
- Swanwick, K. (1988). *Music, mind and education*. London: Routledge.