

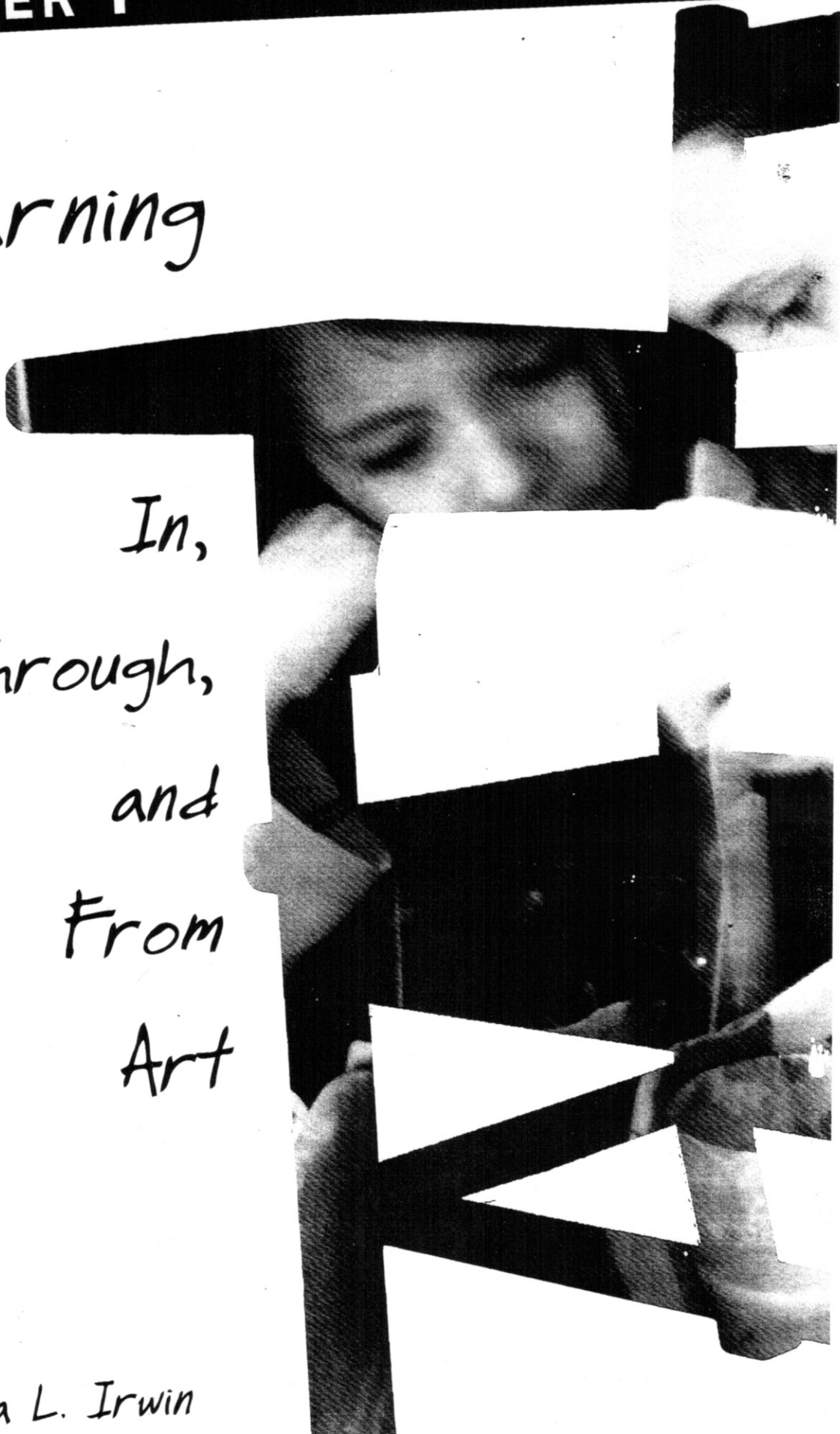
want my classroom to be a black a

CHAPTER 1

Learning

In,
Through,
and
From
Art

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What are your experiences in art space

When I visit galleries, museums, or concert halls, I know I will have particular kinds of experiences. These venues are designed and maintained in ways that inspire particular qualities of experience: we enter each place knowing we are going to pay attention to something. I know when I venture into one of these environments I am bringing my unique set of attitudes, beliefs and knowledge with me as I experience the features of the event or object. I enter these environments also knowing, perhaps expecting, to be enriched. Once inside, my senses are recharged, my imagination is ignited, my emotions are revealed, and my soul often finds meaning in unexpected ways.

Whereas venues for the arts call us to experience the fullness of our humanity, schools are often limited to, or defined by, reaching the cognitive potential of students at the expense of realizing our full potential as human beings. Unfortunately, less attention is often given to knowing through our bodies, emotions, and spirits than the attention given to our minds where testing and rankings are used to measure intellectual rigour, competencies, and ultimately, one's abilities in narrowly defined ways.

As I reflect upon my learning experiences in each of the earlier mentioned venues I am struck by a fairly obvious revelation, one that so many of us know but gradually disregard under societal pressures. Being in environments rich with artistic activity, whether as a spectator or creator, calls me into experiencing the world in holistic ways. I am instantly transported into a space and time that causes me to feel, to perceive, to move, and to contemplate. I am thrust into the wholeness of my being. I am no longer objectifying knowledge rather I am experiencing knowing. For instance, why is it that most of us cannot retain facts we have memorized for an exam? I suspect it is because we did not experience that knowledge (see Dewey, 1934). When I have allowed myself to experience meaning-making through movement, emotional response, and soulful attachments, as well as perceptual engagement, I have always retained my new found knowing. It stays with me. It means something to me. I understand it in very concrete ways. Schools, and the curriculum found within our schools, have something to learn from the arts and from venues that celebrate and challenge the arts. Holistic learning is essential for learning (see for instance Hocking, Haskell, & Linds, 2001; Miller, 1988; Nava, 2001) and the easiest way to ensure that learning is holistic is to embrace learning in and through the arts (see for instance Burnaford, Aprill, & Weiss, 2001; Grauer, Irwin, de Cosson & Wilson, 2002; Krug & Cohen-Evron, 1999).

feeling • meaning • vision • touch • learning

A number of the authors in this volume talk about the importance of the arts to the rest of the curriculum. Recent research shows when students are involved in learning activities that include the arts, their mathematics achievement scores increase (Upitis & Smithrim, 2003). This is but one small reminder that a holistic education that includes the arts is not provided at the expense of mathematics. In fact, more mathematics instruction does not necessarily yield higher mathematics scores. Research suggests the opposite: a balanced curriculum, which includes the arts, actually strengthens *all* learning. Students should be engaged with their own learning, find their own passion, and create their own minds (Eisner, 2002).

What can we learn from the arts? A number of educators have written extensively on the importance of the arts (e.g. Chalmers 1996; Eisner 2002; Greene, 1995; Lankford 1992; McFee & Degge, 1980). If you were to read their work you would see that people value the arts for a wide range of reasons. For instance, the arts provide pleasurable, sentimental, inspirational, informative, and surprising experiences; the arts provide economic, social and political influences; and the arts provide insight into society through skillful accomplishments, historical interpretations, and cultural characterizations. Art communicates by generating, recording and transmitting ideas. Art acts as a cultural source and resource by helping people form identities and recognize accomplishments while also destabilizing practices that are problematic. Art enhances our lives by making the ineffable tangible. In very general terms, the arts contribute to our personal efficacy as well as our interconnectedness with all living and spiritual entities.

What do the arts provide?



Photo by: Julia Freeman-Woolpert

Learning in Art

provides a rich base from which to explore ideas, sensory qualities, penetrating questions, and personal feelings

Learning in art provides a rich base from which to explore ideas, sensory qualities, penetrating questions, and personal feelings through the use of materials, in the case of studio-based art, or through the use of texts (highlighting art history, criticism, or aesthetics), in the case of discourse-based art. Nothing can replace learning in art. Just as I recognize learning to play the piano offers me greater scope in appreciating the work of great pianists, so too does my learning in art offer me greater understanding of the work of those who spend their lives committed to the discipline of their art. As I paint, I understand the work of painters even more. I appreciate the work of artists whose ideas and styles are similar to, yet different from, my own. Recently, I experienced an artist-in-residence program in which an African drummer visited a school. He created simple drums for his students and together they played impressive rhythms. Excited to keep their new skills, students requested drums for their holiday gifts later in the year. Drumming became an important expressive and creative activity for his students.

While the arts are important for many reasons, one might wonder what principles should guide educators as they design curricula. Eisner (2002), a foremost art educator and curriculum specialist, articulates five principles that can guide our practices. He states: "In justifying its case, art education should give pride of place to what is distinctive about the arts ... foster the growth of artistic intelligence ... help students learn how to create satisfying visual images ... help students recognize what is personal, distinctive, and even unique about themselves and their work ... [and] make special efforts to enable students to secure aesthetic forms of experience in everyday life (pp. 42-45)." Keeping these principles for designing curricula in mind, several authors in this volume elaborate upon how a teacher might go about planning for quality art instruction. **Boyd White** discusses how human values are central to art education: to do so, he emphasizes values, feelings, and visual distinction as the basis for aesthetic response. **Patti Pente** provides an overview of child development research and argues for a holistic approach to working with children. **Robert Kelly** invites teachers and students to consider the virtues of living life with a disposition to creativity. **Miriam Cooley** explores creativity and what it means to be an art teacher or a teacher of art, and provides a range of strategies for teaching art in K-12 settings. **Kit Grauer** draws our attention to how art making and writing share similar yet different processes. By understanding this teachers may be able to strengthen their planning practices in both language arts and art instruction. **Harold Pearse** illustrates cross-curricular connections through his daily drawing practice and provides an example for how teachers may develop similar experiences. **Fiona Blaikie** discusses art assessment practices in BC, Ontario and Nova Scotia. Though many practices are similar a few differences exist. This comparison should help teachers analyze the best assessment practices for their classroom. While many authors help us consider how to plan for art teaching and learning, **Anita Sinner** takes us one step further and details how an ecologically-aware art classroom is one in which art educators are informed by legislation, safety, and a holistic teaching philosophy.

Learning through Art

stresses a holistic education by infusing the arts throughout intended learning experiences

Learning through art stresses a holistic education by infusing the arts throughout intended learning experiences. The arts force us to address learning in a holistic manner. *Learning through art* provides the basis for experiential learning to take place: learning that is durable in and through time. Many authors in this volume explore *learning through art*. For instance, **Michael Emme** and **Karen Taylor** discuss, and illustrate, how arts educators can use sequential art as way to develop literacy across the curriculum. **Mary Blatherwick** elaborates on how student art exhibitions are an important part of an art education curriculum as those involved learn to talk about art, appreciate it and learn from it in ways that are only accomplished through the display of ongoing art making experiences. **Stephen Elliott** guides teachers through discussions on the nature of art and details how one might help students talk about art using notions of art criticism. **Sharon McCoubrey** continues along this same line by providing in-depth examples of image development sources, strategies, and skills as well as a rich array of image development activities. These chapters have helped us understand how to make image development both personally and socially meaningful. **Heather Pastro** outlines the elements of design in great detail, not only for their basic properties, but also for their use within a range of studio-based activities. This listing of ideas should serve to introduce the design elements to teachers in very practical ways. **Aileen Pugliese Castro** and **Juan Carlos Castro** help us understand how to rethink celebrating holidays so that art lessons are meaningful, for all students, despite cultural, religious, orientations. **Kit Grauer** provides an illustrated description of visual journals, helping all art educators to consider the importance of regular visual journaling in and across the curriculum. **Jennifer Eiserman** takes us into the realm of visual literacy and illustrates how teachers can access art in galleries and museums. Several models are described and Eiserman outlines how each can be integrated into one process. For those teachers who are unable to take advantage of galleries and museums, one might be able to create a school art museum for all students, teachers and community members to enjoy.

Learning in • through • and from Art

Learning in art and *learning through art* are both important to a vital educational program for all students. Yet there is one more twist of phrase to be considered. *Learning from art*. What can art teach us about learning that will inspire a love affair with learning itself? **Dónal O'Donoghue** provides a detailed analysis on how the work of contemporary artists can be used as a basis for reconsidering how we teach art. His seven commitments call us to re-examine how and what we teach. Most importantly, he asks us to move away from how we have traditionally taught, and allow the work of contemporary artists to guide our practices. **Graeme Chalmers** takes *learning from art* to another dimension when he attempts to have us look critically at *why* we teach art. He posits that teachers and students alike need to recognize that all art is political and even elementary students can make visual statements about injustice. **Bill Zuk** and **Robert Dalton** guide us through understanding how to include First Nations art and culture in an art curriculum. They place much emphasis on tradition and innovation, showing how both are important to understanding First Nations cultures today. **Lorrie Blair** describes the benefits and challenges of teaching a visual culture based curriculum, pointing us to again reposition our practices so that we examine the visual nature of our world and how that impacts students today. **Joanna Black** believes teaching technology in visual art without meaningful art content is meaningless. By engaging students in planning to videotape a subject within one's everyday experience, students become creators in a study of historical and contemporary culture. Related to visual culture is the idea of design education. **Michelle Wiebe** details how students might begin to think of themselves as designers of logos, packages, and poster designs, among other possibilities. **Hilary Inwood** describes the need for place-based education – one that is community-based. In doing so, we would create strong bonds between students and their communities while nurturing a sensibility of sustainability.



self • family • community • questions • learning

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We understand our selves, our cultures, and our histories,
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Learning in, through and from are essential to a rich art education experience. Art is critical because art transforms our consciousness. We understand our selves, our cultures, and our histories, through our sensory and aesthetic experiences. "Work in the arts is not only a way of creating performances and products; it is a way of creating our lives by expanding our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others, and sharing our culture" (Eisner, 2002, p. 3). **Harold Pearse** has done this within his own life. In this volume he illustrates how making cross-curricular connections through thematic daily drawing experiences opened up opportunities for learning with and through art in richly stimulating ways. Focusing on his dog, he *learned from art* (by studying art works with dogs he was able to learn about dogs) and he *learned through art* (by expressing his feelings toward his dog through his art making, he came to appreciate his relationship with his dog even more). Yet it was his *learning in art*, or his drawing experiences, that allowed him to explore a wide array of ideas. Making connections *in through* and *from* art became powerful learning experiences for Pearse to explore his relationship with his dog. It is here that all art educators need to aspire.

As I reflect upon treasured experiences in my studio, my many long walks in nature, or my lingering visits with works of art, I am struck by the ways the arts have caused me to keep learning out of the sheer joy and excitement I feel for learning. The arts have taught me there isn't one right answer; how something is communicated is just as important as what is communicated; imagination transforms my understanding in unique and surprising ways; aesthetic sensibilities define my quality of life; being purposefully flexible enhances my work and life; and lingering in an experience is vital to appreciating the inherently rich qualities I initially sought from the experience (see Eisner 2002). As I have reflected upon these ideas over my career, I have attempted to consider my teaching as an art form. At times this means paying attention to the rhythms of the day and the lesson while being careful to attend to patterns of interactions, to spatial relationships between individuals as well as between individuals and objects, to the colours in the classroom as well as tonal qualities in other sensory experiences, and to the storytelling nature of learning. These qualities have often sparked my attention to the ineffable, to that quality of experience that is difficult to talk about yet is easily recognizable by all who experience it. Performing teaching as an art form, calls teachers into a space of artistic work many seldom consider. Teachers who attend to their practice as an art form are often viewed as the teachers we remember years later, those teachers whose practices/processes make just as much difference, if not more, than the actual products of learning. People follow passion. Everyone wants to love what he or she does and who he or she is. When we experience teachers who are passionate about their own learning and their work, as learners we find ourselves motivated to learn for we want what our teachers have!

Learning in • through • and from Art

are each important to the design of curriculum experiences in any learning environment at any age level. Possibilities for learning are endless if one considers the magnitude of these ways of learning.

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