

*Re-imagining Arts Integration:  
Rhizomatic Relations of the Everyday*

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**ABSTRACT:** Curriculum integration often appears complex and when this happens those who are involved with providing professional development or teacher education may be inclined to promote simplistic or solution-oriented approaches to facilitate integration. Many variants of a problem-solution model exist, and programs that encourage teachers to identify a few difficulties and then strategize possible ways to remove those difficulties more than likely minimize the very benefits of an integrative program. In contrast to this, we propose a conceptualization of curriculum integration that is rhizomatic. Supporting and extending the research that integrative arts practices lead to imaginative, flexible, and embodied pedagogical praxis, a rhizomatic integration of the arts values complicated and disruptive possibilities that enliven the imagination toward more socially just ways of living and learning. Integration, when understood as rhizomatic, will enable teachers to better respond to the everyday multiplicity of surprises that are part of their ever-changing world.

**RESUME:** Le programme d'intégration apparaît souvent complexe. Lors de son application, ceux qui contribuent à l'insertion professionnelle ou à la formation des enseignants, sont tentés de promouvoir des approches simples ou des approches proposant une solution pour faciliter l'intégration. Tout un panel de solutions diverses au problème existe. Il existe aussi des programmes qui

incitent les éducateurs à identifier quelques difficultés afin qu'ils trouvent par la suite une stratégie pour mettre en place les moyens possibles de les supprimer ce qui réduirait sans doute, les avantages mêmes du programme d'intégration. Par opposition, nous proposons une conceptualisation du programme d'intégration rhizomatique. Pour encourager la recherche à consolider le fait que les mises en application d'intégration en arts et en lettres conduisent à une pratique pédagogique imaginative, souple et incarnée, une intégration rhizomathique des arts et lettres juge que les possibilités qui excitent l'imagination avec des manières de vivre et d'apprendre socialement plus harmonieuses, sont compliquées et perturbatrices. L'intégration, entendons l'intégration rhizomatique, permettra aux enseignants de mieux répondre à la multiplicité de surprises quotidiennes qui fait partie de leur monde qui est en perpétuel changement.

We have come together as a group of *a/r/tographers*<sup>1</sup> – artists, researchers, and teachers, who, by working in complementary and multiplicitous, but supportive ways, have experienced a rich source and context for entering into inquiry. In this condition of relationality, it is our hope to explore what it means to live well, to live with integrity, as artists, researchers, and teachers; that is, to live artfully in all of the many facets of our lives and, in particular, re-imaging a more holistic view of facilitating integration of the arts in schools and classrooms.

There are still those who would prefer a more practical or simpler approach: some teachers often appear to be seeking one magic process that will work all the time, a kind of technique that can be implemented to make integration go smoothly. We share Beane's (1997) concern that curriculum integration has meant little more than creating thematic overlap in a few subject areas. Curriculum theorizing must move past ways of making curriculum integration smoother, simpler, and more familiar.

This is not a new claim. Aldous Huxley (1954) wrote that in order to experience a more genuine, more authentic human experience, we as human beings need to "intensify our ability to look at the world directly, not through the half-opaque medium of concepts which distort every given fact into the all too familiar likeness of some generic label or explanatory abstraction" (p. 97). As if translating Huxley's words for curricular contexts, Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995) explain that in order to experience a more human, a more living

curriculum, we need an aesthetic which “questions the everyday, the conventional, and asks us to view knowledge, teaching, and learning from multiple perspectives” (p. 605). Heidegger (1977), similarly, says: “the most difficult learning is to come to know actually and to the very foundations what we already know. Such learning demands dwelling continually on what appears to be nearest to us” (p. 252).

For us, understanding the complexities of the classroom and having experienced the many, multiple perspectives as a/r/tographers working together, there arises the need for some further probing into the diverse understandings of integration. Pinar et al. (1995) propose that it is through the artful and multiple perspectives that there is hopeful possibility for the too oft tendency toward convention and abstraction. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) propose that it is in the rhizomatic that there is a way of holding together the tension of multiple points of view that seem in opposition. They describe rhizomes metaphorically through the image of crabgrass that “connects any point to any other point” by growing in all directions (p. 21). Like bamboo shoots or laurel or spider plants, a rhizome is a dynamic system with no point of origin; parts that are in seeming contradiction are rather in complex relation to one another. Thus, in a continuous movement of differentiation, the linearity of beginnings and endings is disrupted and the importance of the middle is stressed.

Working from the image of the rhizome, we believe that the aesthetic is intertwined with all of living and learning. We refer to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) discussion of the rhizome to show how an artful approach to integration through a/r/tography can empower teachers: first, to a more embodied and living practice of integration, and second, to a less prescriptive integration of the arts in curriculum.

A/r/tography is a practice-based inquiry developed to bring an artist's way of knowing to the learning process. A/r/tography is a commingling of artistic and educational practice and research into a rich experience of the arts in curriculum. An a/r/tographer is a reflexive practitioner who metonymically lives as an artist, researcher, and teacher. These three identities guide the practitioner in developing integrative curricular activities which are not “hands-on” or manipulated outside of the body, or separate from the students, but issue from the dynamic, changing context of the classroom in a living inquiry (Irwin, 2004).

In the hope of empowering teachers, we realize there is no perfect correlation, no one way of proposing an answer. A/r/tography is a way of

altering that resists predictions, abstractions, and reductions. With that in mind, we discuss briefly here some who have enriched the context of our proposal, whose discoveries have helped us remain in relation to one another beyond dichotomous competing alternatives to a more holistic understanding.

We refer initially to David Kirby's (2003) collection of poetry, *The Ha Ha*. In this collection, which is an artful and extended description of the everyday, Kirby illustrates that there are no easy answers, no one-to-one matches, no signifiers for the signifieds. In his poem "Americans in Italy," bringing forward the Italian word *studiolo*, he says there is no American equivalent. Learning a new language would be easy if studio were a match for *studiolo* or had an equivalent meaning. Playfully, Kirby shows us his commitment to complexity in translation, illustrating our need of a deep commitment to a rhizomatic relation to understanding. His lengthy definition of *studiolo* goes on for five lines, with a further context following for the entire poem. Kirby wills his definition to wander, to digress, and to bring diversity of human experience to the conventional and the familiar. For those language teachers who might be skeptical, who might prefer defining *studiolo* with studio or even the Spanish term *estudio* (i.e., study) who might be imagining that integration will only complicate their lives, we offer the last lines of Kirby's poem which provide a hopeful response to living well with everyday complexities of the classroom:

"They're thinking, Life's pretty terrible  
– well, no, not really,  
not when you think about it" (p. 15).

Like Kirby, our proposal is a complex one. The rhizomatic relation of the everyday relies on integration and complexity for its strength. It requires *thinking about it*, that deep reflection characteristic of teachers who are researchers. We refer to Kirby because he is a writer of the everyday, one who speaks of blunder, failure, disappointment, accident, and the like. Even though Kirby addresses the uncomfortable in human living, he brings hope to the very places it is needed: in the complexity, in the chaos, in the middle, in the spaces in between – in the holistic classroom of everyday teaching and living.

We want to note additional examples where the tension of multiple perspectives finds a unity in rhizomatic integration. Briefly, we digress to others who have created openings for our discussion here. For example, in the Heisenberg principle, we know that interference between

measurements is a key idea (Lindley, 2007); concerning the orbit of Mars, Johannes Kepler concluded that the true orbit lay halfway between the circle and the oval (1596/1997); during meiosis, Harriet Creighton and Barbara McClintock found that parts of each chromosome strand in a pair cross over to the other chromosome (Keller, 1983); in our experience of an object, Niels Bohr discovered that there is no essence of an object, only *relations between it* (Taylor, 2001); and finally, John Cage said that he composed to extend communication *beyond borders* (2001).

In these examples, there are multiple references to what comes between two quantities, objects, or people. It is because of this willingness to remain in the middle, in the interstices of ideas, that there is the possibility of understanding beyond ourselves *as if for the first time*. From the work of these scholars, and others in curriculum studies, we in artful scholarship have been questioning the everyday experience, noting that it is often disrupted, out-of-kilter, off balance, messy, and in need of some kind of relational bridge to guide our everyday practice. Sawada (1989) puts it this way: knowledge should "constitute the everyday epistemology of the everyday experiences of the everyday student who does not leave life behind when entering school" (p. 9).

Our goal is to demonstrate how a/r/tography is that relational bridge; how it is a back and forth crossing – a process – that ranges from the opaque and familiar to the tension of difficulty and disruption. In this way, a/r/tography is a continually renewed community practice of teaching and learning, almost like an ongoing map, one with several layers and points of view, one with constant differentiation and coordination. Highly dependent on context, we know that if a map is to guide our everyday practice, then it is both *created* from multiple viewpoints and *understood* in multiple ways – that the unity promised in a map becomes discovered in the diversity of multiple interrelated trajectories. This notion of continual renewal from the spaces of the in-between is illustrated well in Overton's work on development. Speaking of change, Overton (2002) notes the importance of both qualitative change and quantitative change. Taken together, apparently dichotomous elements (such as differing theories of change) can be understood as "fundamentally real, necessary, and interrelated" and can open "new paths of investigation" (p.16).

So it is, in speaking of our artistic pedagogy as a/r/tography, we refer to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) description of the rhizome to mean that a/r/tography is a kind of integration of the arts that can be characterized as simultaneous growth going in all directions all at once.

The rhizomatic is inherently a pedagogical reminder that hierarchical structures, linear procedures, and repeatable techniques can lack a specific appreciation for individual contextualized learning. Rhizomes are messy, with growth in every direction. The rhizome resists a central core, a key idea, or a repeatable process.

We believe there are benefits of working collaboratively, of living in and creating tensions, and then of sharing with each other the many points and perspectives that have come to shape our understanding of pedagogy. Like jan jagodzinski (1992), we support the understanding that the aesthetic is intertwined with all of living and learning. We suggest that a *rhizomatic integration* of artists/researchers/teachers in inquiry-directed projects renews and fuses<sup>2</sup> what are traditionally separate roles; thus, to breathe life back into the curriculum and to make learning meaningful, the teacher, the dynamic breath between learner and understanding, must first see himself or herself as an a/r/tographer, and by connecting mind, body and spirit, to the context, classroom, and students, a more hopeful – even transformative – human learning can occur (Sameshima, 2007).

Before moving further in our paper, we offer two thoughts by way of review:

1. The rhizomatic relation is a way to understand the tension of multiple complexities in the classroom.
2. The artfulness of a/r/tography offers a hopeful pedagogy for living well in a changing world.

From these two thoughts, what follows is a proposal and some examples meant to show that a/r/tography, as a pedagogy of the rhizomatic relations of the everyday, offers teachers a way of integrating the arts into a complex and ever-changing learning process.

While nearly all teachers see value in aesthetics in education (Upitis, Smithrim, Patterson, & Meban, 2001), there is still a vital need to bridge the gap between perceived value and actual classroom integration (Grauer, Irwin, de Cosson & Wilson, 2001). Integration is complex and burdens teachers with additional perceived variables. Thus, re-imagining this complexity as the *rhizomatic relations of the everyday* may have significant influence on teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding a more embodied and living practice of the arts in curriculum. In work on complexity theory, Sumara and Davis (2007) contend that diverse systems are by nature more complex and more unified (also see Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2007). Our work notes that a rhizomatic

understanding of arts integration is complicated and complex as it relates to teachers' embodiment of a living practice. We advocate that the complication is extended beyond the teacher's conception of the curriculum, to the student as an a/r/tographer, for to teach students how to embody living practice, to teach students how to sustain life-long learning, and to teach students how to appreciate the joy of creativity through self-motivation is the teacher's goal.

A/r/tographic teaching begins with a teacher who is an a/r/tographer, a reflexive practitioner. Living as an artist, researcher, and teacher, an a/r/tographer reconceptualizes curriculum so that activities issue from the processes lived in the dynamic, changing context of the classroom. In a living inquiry, the a/r/tographer is guided by the creative talents and pedagogic possibilities of the class as a whole. For example, if an elementary class were studying the life cycle of the salmon, one means of simplistic, superficial integration might be to colour the pictures of the salmon life-cycle chart. This activity could be called integration as it incorporates colouring (art) with the science content. The a/r/tographic teacher, on the other hand, might guide the students to learn from a living inquiry state of mind, in other words, to be a researcher. The students may be asked to list questions about the salmon life cycle, to observe redd and alevin in a tank, to wonder what the purpose of the yolk sac is, and so forth. The teacher then may ask the students to represent their learning, be it a narrative, poem, song, movement activity that mimics movement of salmon at different stages of development, poster, presentation, drama, and so on. In this sense, the students are being artists (creators of representation of learning), researchers (learning through questioning), and teachers (thinking about how to share their learning). Through the curriculum they live what is of interest to them. Such an a/r/tographic classroom is rhizomatic because it allows for students to branch out to learn what interests them, to research the connections which make sense to them.

In elementary music, processes, when transferred to other areas of teaching and learning, make the creative, artistic processes of music all the more relevant and important across the curriculum. Everything teachers do, from all the ways that they teach a simple song to the ways that they teach creative composition using stations, graffiti, and place mat techniques (i.e., creative instructional activities) as well as visual art, poetry, music, found sounds, and movement materials (i.e., products) can flourish in an everyday, process-oriented, rhizomatic approach (Gouzouasis, 2006). The everyday is the moment of learning and the

curriculum becomes retrospective (Knowles, 2006) in that the teacher has not planned the specific path of learning for each child. The way a lesson is planned is a holistic experience (i.e., connected for the experience itself and for reflective/reflexive opportunities), which enables children to learn across the curriculum in a broader pedagogy.

In working with and in supporting teachers with processes of arts integration, teachers sometimes appear to be seeking a technique that can be implemented to make integration go smoothly. In the classroom this sort of integration may look like drawing and colouring a title page for the new Social Studies unit. In such cases, say Jardine, LaGrange, and Everest (2003), “what result are connections that sometimes seem forced and trivial, betraying a rushed, ultimately unsatisfying lack of attention and care to anything in particular” (p. 199). According to Overton (2002) integration like this is “still thought of as two split-off pure entities that function independently in cooperative ways” (p. 22). This is not the sort of integration we are talking about. A/r/tography as a pedagogy of the rhizomatic relations of the everyday proposes that learning happens in the relational contexts in which curricula are embedded. It is about using creativity as a means to research and inform learning, and by emphasizing the rhizomatic by presuming an active learner continually creates in the everyday. A/r/tography is a more systemic rather than systematic way of integrating the arts in the development of a curriculum unit.

One of the benefits of rhizomatic integration is that it is, in fact, messy. Messiness is itself a structure, so reducing the inclination to clean up the mess is important. For example, if a particular line of thought is subscribed to, teachers will inevitably fail to pursue other tangential inquiries. This acknowledgment frees pedagogy from the processes which inevitably predict that implementation will look a particular way. Rhizomes resist taxonomies and create interconnected networks with multiple entry points (Wilson, 2003). After all, the mess is complex. Taylor (2001) notes that the more division, the more disparate entities that are embodied in the overall structure, the more unified a structure is. This paradox of diversity and unity illustrates the need to embrace a kind of diversified integration.

Coming up with simple approaches or techniques to facilitate integration tends to minimize the very benefits an integrative program purports to offer. Separating realities can be useful, and through description and later interpretation, phenomena can be made

intelligible. Analysis is just that: it has explanatory force because the constituent parts can be understood in their individual form and/or function. By separating out how the smallest parts are related to the whole, reality can be then explained correctly in terms of cause and effect, nature and nurture, subject and object, and the like. However, these kinds of patterns lose explanatory force because of a tendency to reductionism and objectivism. According to Overton (2002), "explanation is limited to *nothing but* observable efficient (i.e., the force that moves the object) and material causes, (i.e., the material composition of the object)" (p. 20). Teacher education programs are susceptible to this kind of solution-oriented lesson planning. Many variants of the problem-solution model exist; perhaps most notably the standard identifying questions: what to do, when, with whom, and for what purposes? Programs that encourage teachers to identify a few difficulties and then strategize possible ways to remove those difficulties are more than likely to hinder the better learning possibilities of rhizomatic, integrative learning.

Another teacher concern is that in the integration process the academic rigor in the individual subject area would be compromised. Teachers want assurances that teaching time devoted to more curricular-focused outcomes are not lost. Teachers who view integration as art decorating the curriculum would be correct in believing that colouring the salmon life-cycle chart would waste valuable learning time. But when teachers become a/r/tographers, they enrich their classroom, seeing integration as an aesthetic opportunity to value each child's unique artful contributions. According to Irwin (2004), this "imagining and forming different relationships among people and ideas" would be a fuller understanding of rhizomatic integration (p. 34).

Teachers also want assurances that *non-artistic* students do not feel threatened. Here is a fundamental flaw in supporting diverse learners. To imagine that students can be non-artistic is to believe that drawing makes one artistic. However, teachers who re-imagine themselves as a/r/tographers and see their students as creative beings—able to connect, link, cause growth, and develop learning through multiple artful means – understand that art-integration is truly artful, a kind of gathering of the known and the understood to create something new. This newness will be different for each student and thus is the dominant means of learning and transformation.

The rhizomatic nature of integration suggests that because teachers will encounter complication at every turn, they will need to possess and

exercise a wider, more complex understanding of the teaching variables. For example, Upitis, Smithrim, and Soren (1999) used a three-tiered matrix to assess and describe teacher transformation. Their focus on how the nature of the arts can transform teaching practice leads well into our claim that teachers need to examine their understanding of how they approach integrating the arts. They looked at the necessary conditions, the individual potential, and long-term likelihood of transformation, and conclude that lasting and profound changes to teachers' practices and beliefs arise when teachers experience the artistic process while making their own art. We concur and feel that re-imagining integration as rhizomatic encourages teachers to become artists and creators themselves, and to be reflexive in querying their own assumptions about pedagogy.

*A/r/tography* as a pedagogy of the rhizomatic relations of the everyday is an artistic response to the daily challenges teachers face in a changing world. With respect to curricular integration, it is the teacher's own understanding which matters most in the transformation of a teacher's living and teaching. What follows is the confidence to try new things, an appreciation of more artistic ways of engaging with processes and understandings, and a commitment to student learning in artful ways.

So rather than simplify the full complexity of integration difficulties to make integration more practical and manageable, our suggestion is that a rhizomatic approach to integration offers a way to embrace those difficulties, to let them be integral to the integrative efforts, and to continue to welcome diversity and multiple branching out pathways in the day to day experience of teaching practice. We believe that this encourages teachers to be more reflective of their own practice and integrate the arts in a more artful way.

Part of relating rhizomatic integration to the everyday is the conviction that teachers who understand themselves as *a/r/tographers* will change their practice as they gain new knowledge and experience. In suggesting how classroom *a/r/tographers* might come to a lived understanding of rhizomatic integration, we follow Bresler's work on teacher transformation, agreeing that teaching practices do not change in response to imposed curriculum guidelines, rather it is appropriation and adaptation practices which lead to transformation (2003).

How teaching practices change, or how teachers embrace change, or how teachers live well in and with change, are critical questions. Posing

such a question rhetorically in his poem "Histoire de Florida," Robert Creeley (1998) asks,

"what words, then,  
will separate  
finally  
*dancer*  
from *dance*"? (p. 6)

There are no words. There is no separation. These moments when meaning cannot be understood in separate forms or traditions or disciplines, according to de Man (1979), create a glorious "undecidability." "It is an affirmation of artistic transcendence" (Edmundson, 2004, p. 48). Like the dancer at one with the dance, we feel that lived understanding comes through embodied knowing and aesthetic wholeness. In Sameshima's work (2007, p. 30), *she* examines the teacher's own deep experience of integrating body and mind. Her work has influenced our belief that an embodied aesthetic attends to teaching and learning holistically *through* the body.

A rhizomatic integration of all areas of learning and living develops when the artist/researcher/teacher actively intermediates multiple points of view out of lived experience. Consider, for example, the words of Phil Goldthorpe, an experienced physics teacher in Edmonton, Alberta:

The teacher has been educated once again (and I wonder if the lesson will stick this time?). Over the summer, I made a lot of changes to my approach to physics and I had a great deal of excitement about this semester – as idealists tend to do. Well, the first couple of weeks have been a reality check for me. There has been a radical difference between my plans and the reality of the classroom, so much so that I had to basically scrap any new idea I introduced into my lessons. I have been humbled once again by the special needs of my students. (personal communication to Wiebe, September, 2006)

Here we see how Goldthorpe relates the peculiarities and constraints of teaching to how he lives in the world. Most personal experience lacks the neatness or clarity of a structured pedagogy (Stake, 2003), and this is why we refer to the everyday of teaching and living as rhizomatic. "Every living moment is a possible moment for realization, contemplation, experience, or action" (Sameshima, 2007, p. 32). Rhizomatic integration of the everyday is weaving the daily into reflective and reflexive understandings of continuous and contiguous

heartful living, learning, and teaching. Living is an integral part of learning.

When teachers acknowledge that there will be too many difficulties to possibly anticipate and that anticipation of difficulty is not part of a solution but part of the learning problem, then teachers are better positioned to learn from their complex everyday experiences, which, instead of being in the way, are now part of the way. This is a living practice and when teachers as a/r/tographers reflect on that practice, it is a living inquiry. According to Sameshima (2007, p. 32), "Artful, soulful, mindful, heartful, tactile, and multi-sensory epistemologies are thus more strongly supported as the artist/researcher/teacher/learner takes on a reflexive way of being." Rhizomatic integration is about holistic processes that emerge when we consider the whole artist/researcher/teacher.

With a commitment to re-searching, re-creating and creating new ways of understanding, appreciating, and representing (Finley & Knowles, 1995), and in relating rhizomatic integration to the everyday teaching experience, we have resisted definition and process. Instead, we encourage a re-imagined position of understanding the complexity of integration. In many senses, when teachers understand themselves as a/r/tographers, they are better positioned to integrate the arts into the curriculum because in a/r/tography, rhizomatic difficulties can be experienced from a space of learning rather than a space of avoidance.

Because teachers are the primary agents of change in schools (McLaughlin, 1990; Wise, 1991) our research on relating rhizomatic integration to the everyday contributes to the more general methodology on integration of the arts in learning. It is here that the connections between research and practice have to be addressed directly. We believe that a/r/tographic process is a complex, creative form of integration, and agree with Bresler's (1993) notion that the teacher's deep understanding of the nature of integration is in this transformational way of teaching.

Teaching artfully is much used in common speech, but its absence is more commonly noted than its presence (Sarason, 1999, p. xi). The complexity of the classroom is an everyday event, needing an everyday commitment, not just as teachers, but as human beings. Such a call to live well amidst complex change is exacerbated by the fact that our lives are caught up in the "storm and speed of the modern world" (Honore, 2004, p. 87). For this reason our paper has returned to spaces of difficulty and tensions, to cracks and spaces where others have already

dwelt, and by lingering longer there we remember in curriculum scholarship that quality of *betweenness* which moves away from the tendency toward Cartesian splits. Our work is akin to previous research findings (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Elster & Bell, 1999; Greene, 1995; Sylvester, 1998; Upitis, et al., 2001), which uphold that integrative practices lead to imaginative, flexible, and embodied pedagogical praxis.

We also return to integration in a new way. Having acknowledged the tensions of many multiple classroom variables, we hope that by revisiting those tensions with renewed vigour and deeper commitments, and by re-imagining those tensions as *rhizomatic relations of the everyday*, teachers will find in a/r/tography a pedagogy that empowers them to a living practice, or poiesis, the artful praxis of integration. In holding tensions but also remembering the contiguity of rhizomes – how they seem to be going off into all sorts of disparate directions, but are actually connected and inter/intradependent, we find a deep connection to ourselves and to the communities in which we dwell. Thus, learning becomes a living curriculum, the *currere* of understanding (Pinar & Grumet, 1976), and enables teachers to live well in a world of complex change. This holistic focus on the whole plant, whole child, and whole teacher merging a union of heart-mind-spirit-body moves beyond a focus on teaching and learning in reactive moments to a fluid pedagogical approach where teaching and learning become merged with the everyday life processes and experiences of the living organism of the class itself.

#### NOTES

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2. Fusion, in music education, for example, is a term referring to how diverse kinds of music from different cultures are fused to form something new, something that goes beyond what "aspects drawn from different musical traditions" contribute to the new form (Russell, 2006, p. 27).

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