

# Cross-disciplinary aesthetic education: The case of music

## Abstract

1. Knowledge that matters:
  - a. Traditions of school knowledge.
  - b. Anecdote: The contributions of researchers (partial donation) versus teachers (full contribution)
2. The situated inquirer – Bresler’s background as connected to this study.
  - a. Background as a performer, musicologist, then shift to educational research.
  - b. Work in arts integration in the schools.
  - c. On what is learned in music: conceptualization of teaching; interviewing; sense of community.
  - d. “We see the world as a noun and hear it as a verb” (David Burrows, 1990).
3. The roles of music in the schools.
  - a. The relationships of the arts to the general curriculum (Imitative; complementary; expansive).
  - b. Different role of music in schools (Subservient; affective; social; expanding academic subjects).
4. Discrepancies as alerts: Disciplinarity and knowledge.
  - a. Teachers’ practices versus beliefs: The culture of schooling (with a focus on elementary schools).
  - b. Arts integration in high schools: Music as the last to integrate.
  - c. “Best cases” of music integration: Non-traditional music background.
  - d. Rewards for arts integration to music teachers (and everybody else).
5. The virtue of “unknowing” (combined with knowing): Opening to others’ perspectives.
6. Seeking knowledge that matters
  - a. Process vs. product.
  - b. Knowledge that expands our deepest goals.
7. Some references to others’ work on arts integration in music. (Susan Drake, Canadian scholar; Janet Barrett: music curriculum; Linda Krakauer: working in the schools).

## **Cross-disciplinary aesthetic education: The case of music**

**Liora Bresler**

### **Slide #1:**

It's a pleasure to communicate with you today. Taiwan has a very special place in my heart, full of beautiful memories.

I am so sorry that I cannot be there in person, wish I could see you all with the energy of the conference and the people that make this vibrant conference. But I do appreciate the opportunity to present "remotely". I thank my host and dear colleague, Professor and Dean Sheau-Yuh Lin, for the warm invitation and all her enormous help with arrangements through our extensive communication. Thanks also for the translator { **please insert her name** } for helping my text cross one language to another, and the important presence and voice of Dr. Hsiao-fen Chen, a dear former student.

In talking about cross-disciplinary aesthetic education, with a focus on music, I chose {for my PP} to have an image of a compass. A compass helps us navigate. A compass can also be an "inner compass", connecting us to our deep values, beliefs, and aspirations. The act of teaching always involves an interplay between outer and inner compasses: new knowledge and ideas, resonating (and sometimes dissonating) with our existing knowledge, commitments and values.

### **Slide #2:**

Rather than a "lecture", I see this talk as an invitation for all of us to reflect on ways of integrating music to the curriculum, creating meaningful knowledge that expands us. I want to communicate an important finding from my research: **When teachers were working on meaningful curriculum for their students, they always felt expanded and enriched by the process.** I will elaborate on this later in this talk but it is important to realize it is not a "win-lose". In this case, both teachers **and** students get rewarded. This is as long as they have ownership, if they realize the important role that they serve in creating the curriculum.

This talk is an invitation to examine, for each of us, our personal journeys, what is important to each of us and where is it that we would like to arrive. Each of us in this room has our individual journey, intersecting with colleagues as part of a community of educators. The community is crucial in sustaining us and supporting us, as in today's conference, to share ideas and reflect together. But the personal aspect of examining and looking back at our personal values is crucial.

### **Slide #3:**

And in that spirit, I enclose a little joke that I find relevant in those personal reflections:  
*"A Pig and a Chicken are strolling down the road on a fine morning. The chicken notices a restaurant and suggests they go in. The pig seems doubtful. Looking cautiously at the Eggs and Bacon sign of the restaurant, he observes: For you it's only partial donation; for me it's a full commitment"* (This is a story that I heard from American Vipassana teacher and Psychologist, Dr. Jack Kornfield.)

There is potential, promise and challenges in all intellectual and pedagogical travels, as fairy-tales and other types of travel narratives illustrate well. One way to conceptualize integration and interdisciplinary travels, I suggest, centers on the spectrum of commitment, from partial donation to full commitment, and what it means for teachers' experiences and identity. This is true in all educational levels (in K-12, and in universities). Full commitment may result in transformation for the teacher (in the case of the pig, a transformation of who he is as a pig; for me when I embarked on arts integration, it meant an expanded view of what it meant to be a music educator, one that can see bigger picture of ideas and is connected to others).

#### **Slide #4:**

These are some of the key themes I will discuss in this talk:

- ❖ Disciplinary vs. integrated knowledge. It's important to acknowledge that these can involve different kinds of knowledge with different emphasis.
- ❖ The situated inquirer: What each of us bring to our teaching, inquiries, and understanding? I will share my own as an invitation for you to think of where you are situated in this project of music and arts integration, how it fits who you are and what you aspire to do as a teacher.
- ❖ The roles of music in the schools. Music fulfills different roles and its useful to be aware of the distinctions among them and their implications for what is being taught, contents, pedagogies, and evaluation practices.
- ❖ There are different approaches to music integration. It is useful to be aware of their merits and significance of each.
- ❖ Discrepancies as alerts. When there are challenges and difficulties, these can be useful invitation to think deeper. This is based on my research of music and arts integration in elementary, middle & high schools. I discuss the challenge of music integration, based on these several research projects in schools, and refer to some research that has been conducted recently as a follow-up.

#### **Slide #5:**

In the spirit of self-examination and disclosure, I start with my own journey, (and values). Music was my home base, before conscious memories. By age three, when my parents bought a piano, I sounded notes, traced melodies of Israeli folksongs, harmonies and rhythms, and soon sharing those with the audiences of my preschoolers and friends of family who gathered to sing together. I knew the songs through intimate connections of ears and fingers, basking in the glow of a small community united by music. Music was experiential, and often communal.

When I started formal lessons at nearly 6 notation became important. Classical music (unlike folk music) started with transferring music notation into sound, honing technical skills, and imprinting those skills on the memory of the body. Musical knowledge was framed as mental and auditory rather than embodied, with fingers serving as tools. This common view did not fool me: I realized the essential role of the fingers since it was my fingers that knew what to play when my mind went blank, as it sometimes did in the annual recital.

Years later, at age 18, when I studied Philosophy (a double-major, with my BA in the Music Academy), with specialization in aesthetics, I realized that writing about music and aesthetics could be dry and disconnected from experience. This was my first experience of **Discrepancy** between the experience of music and talking *about* music. I have been very aware of this discrepancy. When

I think of integration, I want the language and other disciplines to draw on the Experience of music, to have that experience be vital and alive.

**Slide #6:**

My first major experience of music integration into another project happened when I left Israel for Stanford University to join my husband who had embarked on his doctorate. I happened to visit a doctoral seminar by Elliot Eisner (I did not know who he was, but imagine he is a familiar name to many of you), and was enticed by Elliot's enthusiasm, his contagious ability to make aesthetics come alive, so I kept coming back throughout the semester. It was a surprise, a week after the seminar was over, to be offered a research assistantship with Elliot.

**Slide #7**

When I confessed to not knowing anything about education, Elliot was undeterred, reassuring me I would be just fine. My complete ignorance of the fields of curriculum, education, and qualitative research meant that I needed to draw on other sources. During that first fieldwork in an elementary classroom, I found musical dimensions – musical form, rhythm, orchestration, melody, counterpoint and dynamics – to illuminate classroom life. That classroom had a Form (beginning, middle and end); it had a rhythm, some parts of the class were faster than others; it had a particular orchestration, between teachers, girls and boys; some parts were “louder”, other “softer”. The musical dimensions helped capture those aspects.

**Slide #8:**

Elliot thought this was very original. Of course, as I often acknowledge, I was desperate with ignorance, and that is why I went back to my musical knowledge. Still, in that process I learned that familiar lenses from music theory helped me understand something quite different (understanding about the lived, moment to moment, “operational” curriculum of classrooms) in ways that Elliot and others found illuminating and meaningful. That was a powerful lesson on how lenses from one discipline can help another.

Throughout my career, I kept asking myself what else music has taught me.

I realized that my “musical listening” has shaped my **listening** in interviewing in my research; or that my teaching has been informed by “**performing style**”, **visceral presence**. Music has shaped me in ways that I did not realize when I actually studied music.

**Slide #9**

Underlying the power of the arts, and of arts integration, is the notion of Expansion, of Seeing More. Seeing more is a worthy challenge. John Dewey (1934/1980, p. 52) has observed that “recognition is perception arrested before it has the chance to develop freely”. There, he distinguishes between an automatic, surface response and the creative act involved in perception. To me, the van Gogh's famous chair in the PP captures this notion well. I did not look closely at the chair before I encountered van Gogh's painting, an invitation to perceive more deeply.

**Slide #10:**

Another important distinction that relates to differences between much of visual art and music (or dance, or drama) is David Burrows' observation that “**Where sight gives us physical entities,**

**the heard world is phenomenally evanescent, relentlessly moving, ever changing. We see the world as a noun and hear it as a verb.” (Burrows, 1990).** The temporal arts, like music, sensitize us to the world in a different way than the visual arts do.

**Slide #11:**

And now to some of the lessons I learned in my research in schools, both ordinary schools and those that were chosen for their special commitment to arts integration.

I first encountered arts integration in schools in a study conducted in elementary schools for the *National Endowment for the Arts* (Stake, Bresler, & Mabry, 1991).

{optional information, if relevant to the audience: The complete project focused on all arts disciplines in the program. Data sources included: (1) intensive observations of all arts instruction, as well as of after-school clubs, in- and out-of-school arts performances, and meetings of arts specialists across arts subjects, (2) semi-structured interviews with teachers (classroom and specialists) and principals, and (3) analysis of materials such as music textbooks, students’ tests, and program notes. }

Another study that I conducted later with a team of research assistants included music specialists. [For the first three years of the major data collection, I was aided by a team of eight graduate students who were responsible for parts of the observations in the various arts disciplines].

**Slide #12:**

Most of the arts integration contents were of what I called then (1995) “subservient orientation” where the arts supported knowledge in other disciplines (for example, learning a song on the “Fifty nifty United States” in a Geography lesson). Music was also integrated to the school timetable informally, as an “affective” component (for example, calming children after recess); and social (gatherings, often around holidays and celebrations, of parents and community members).

Co-Equal music integration, where musical skills and sensitivities were as important as the other disciplines, happened rarely in those schools, mostly because I believe, it was not part of school culture.

**Slide #13:**

This study prompted me to ask the question: **What is the role of the arts in the curriculum?**

- ❖ Clearly, most common, music and the arts were subservient to academic subjects, they **imitated** the traditional curriculum.
- ❖ But the arts also **complemented** the curriculum. This happened when they were used for their affective, relaxing, calming qualities, or when they were used for their social aspects, key to building community.
- ❖ As I said, it was relatively rare that music and the arts were used to support **understanding of big ideas**, including both **Cognitive AND Affective** aspects, in ways that Expanded the curriculum, and that integrated the special qualities that music has (for example, musical expression; attention to the evolution of musical form, to changes in rhythm, to orchestration with the different instruments).

**Slide 14:**

In this study, commissioned by the Getty Center and the College Board, 5 high schools (from 7 grade- to 12 grade) were chosen for their commitments to music and arts integration. (I was involved in reviewing proposals from schools all over the country). The chosen schools were spread throughout the US: West and East coast, big cities and small towns, all including minority populations (Latinos and African-Americans) and different Social Economical levels. I used similar data sources: In-depth observations; open-ended interviews; and analysis of archival materials.

Here, the arts were used to create a **new**, integrated curriculum, where the arts were integrated into All school subjects: from English and Social Studies (History) to Math, Physics, and languages. The new curriculum focused on broad questions, big issues, and themes. The integrated curriculum often emphasized socio-cultural issues. Some examples of themes included issues of Race; Historical Revolutions; Issues of Gender.

The curriculum highlighted Historical context (the year that I visited, the focus was on early 20th century in the US, where Jazz and other musical styles were important to convey the sense of the time, reflecting the “feel of the era” and “culture”).

Here, the school curriculum made strong connections with an exhibit in a nearby Art Museum of Portland, Oregon that had a beautiful exhibit of early 20<sup>th</sup> century visual art, where the students visited multiple times. Teachers and Students visited the Museum regularly, and drew on specific knowledge of music and arts history.

Same collaborations with museums in the Boston area, where the Integrated school collaborated with the Isabella Gardner Museum and where teachers worked closely with museum staff.

In these schools, there were specific structures for teachers to discuss ideas and plan together their curriculum.

Students' work involving their own explorations and research (they were able to choose topics that were of interest to them). Their papers highlighted personal interpretation of what these issues meant for them, thus including their personal self.

The Collaborations with museums and cultural centers that I mentioned above was an important aspect, giving teachers an opportunity to talk with museum staff (and visual art teachers) about “artistic qualities”. There the arts were integrated with each other as well as with the academic curriculum.

**Slide #15:**

A major issue for me, as a musician and music educator, was that of all the arts, it was music teachers that were typically less interested in integrating. (Visual art and drama teachers were the first ones to volunteer; the music teachers in those secondary schools were reluctant).

**Slide #16:**

I was initially puzzled (admittedly disappointed) by the reluctance of the music teachers, but when I looked more closely at the school culture, it made perfect sense. In USA high schools, Music teachers were expected to create musical performances that took great skills.

They could not afford to compromise quality of skills (music competitions are a big part of high school culture, and in many cases, I was told, if teachers did not bring the highest awards, they could be fired. This is obviously a major penalty). The skilled performance was an important part of music teachers' enculturation.

In collaborating with others to discuss big ideas and themes, more conceptual than skill-oriented, they had more to lose, in giving up their "traditional curriculum". Still, even with these constraints, I saw some truly inspiring cases of music integration, especially by teachers who were trained in "alternative" instruments and styles (for example: Jazz, Latin-American music).

**Slide #17:**

What was important in observing the settings of co-equal integration is that they involved close work among teachers. It was crucial that teachers have time to work together, to discuss curricular priorities and major concepts in their disciplines, and, very importantly, to listen to each other.

I came to think of this work as teachers being open to their own "unknowing" (those areas that they did not know), and welcome the possibility of learning from each other.

The concept of unknowing can be too quickly classified as ignorance. But recognizing what the limits of our knowledge is essential.

Knowing that we don't know is truly crucial (as Socrates has taught us many years ago). This is the first step towards inquiring, expanding our knowledge: the wish and desire to know more.

I know some teachers in the USA that think that Education and Learning is very good for their students, but not for them. As teachers and professors, our prime responsibility is to be learners.

**Slide #18:**

As we talk about music and arts integration, the "culture of schooling" is an important element in understanding both challenges, and the power of integration.

Schools often highlight:

- ❖ Explicit (tested) Knowledge.
- ❖ Conventional ("thin"), again knowledge that can be easily tested.
- ❖ Conceptual (and that often means non-experiential).
- ❖ Marginalization of artistic forms of representation, which means marginalization of nuance, of complexity, of ambiguity, of embodiment.
- ❖ Marginalization of the inner self, giving up Ownership and personal expression (important to all of us, but perhaps crucial to young people who are developing their identity).
- ❖ Marginalization of creativity, expression that goes beyond language to include musical qualities and sensitivities.

**Slide #19:**

If music education is a big field, music integration is less developed, but still exists. There are interesting projects and resources out there. I want to share two very recent ones. One, by a former elementary teacher who just finished her Ph.D. on music and drama integration in Maryland in the East Coast, Linda Krakauer. Linda is now working with elementary school teachers to help them integrate the curriculum. I sent the dissertation to Professor Lin, and I believe it should be easily available on the internet to all who are interested.

**Slide #20:**

This book (on the slide of the PP) just arrived at my house in early September. It's highly international in its scope (with authors and music educators from Switzerland, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, and England to the USA and Canada, representing even more diverse cultures like South Indian music and Brazilian experiences. We are missing Asian and Taiwanese voices, but hopefully after this conference, we can have your voices included in the next book!

Topics include Integrating arts performances and education in communities of practice; Psychology of integration; Music/arts/language interdisciplinary intervention: cultural, linguistic and artistic development in Francophone minority communities: Promoting spirituality through music in the classroom; and benefits of integration for students' self-development.

**Slide #21:**

The important thing is that we seek, develop, and teach knowledge that matters, to us, to our students. Here are some guidelines for qualities that I find extremely important:

- ❖ Rich, expressive, aesthetic knowledge.
- ❖ Conceptual and experiential.
- ❖ Incorporating artistic and embodied forms of representation, including nuance and ambiguity.
- ❖ Inclusion of the inner self, what matters to us as people.

**Thank you for your attention.**

**I am happy to respond to questions (on email).**

**I wish you best of luck in exploring music and arts integration, and in this process, exploring who you are, what speaks to you, what makes it rewarding and meaningful. And I would love to hear about what you are doing.**



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