

The Power of Art: Exploring the Individual and Social Benefits of Cross-Curricular Art Inclusion, a Comparative Study of Spain and the United States

El Poder del Arte: Explorando los Beneficios Individuales y Sociales de la Inclusión Artística Transversal, un Estudio Comparativo entre España y Estados Unidos

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Resumen

En esta era digital contemporánea, la constante creación y consumo de arte e imágenes visuales se ha vuelto predominante. Sin embargo, sigue existiendo la necesidad imperante de alfabetización visual. Esta investigación explora el impacto positivo de la educación artística en la vida de los estudiantes y aborda las desigualdades en la oferta de clases de arte en España y Estados Unidos. También enfatiza el rol fundamental de la integración de las artes de manera interdisciplinaria y transversal, instando a los encargados de formular políticas educativas a priorizar la educación artística mejorando la legislación educativa y la asignación de recursos. El artículo examina las dificultades para garantizar el acceso equitativo a la educación artística y señala las oportunidades que se pierden cuando las habilidades de alfabetización visual no se desarrollan. Los resultados indican la necesidad de incorporar el arte en el plan de estudios de todas las asignaturas y así promover las habilidades de alfabetización visual. El artículo concluye ofreciendo sugerencias para integrar el arte en las clases obligatorias y promoviendo una educación artística equitativa en las escuelas. Esta investigación contribuye al discurso vigente sobre el potencial transformador de la educación artística en el panorama digital actual.

Palabras Clave: Educación artística, alfabetización visual, beneficios del arte, equidad en el arte, Plan de estudios (preescolar a doce), España, Estados Unidos, comparación.

Abstract

In today's contemporary digital era, the constant creation and consumption of art and visual imagery have become pervasive. However, there remains a significant need for a deeper understanding of visual literacy. This investigative paper explores the positive impact of art education on students' lives and addresses disparities within art offerings in Spain and the United States. It emphasizes the critical role of cross-curricular and transversal arts integration, urging policymakers and educational leaders to prioritize art education through enhanced policies, legislation, and resource allocation. The article also examines challenges in ensuring equitable access to art education and notes missed opportunities where developing visual literacy skills were not fully realized. The findings indicate the urgent need to incorporate art curriculum across disciplines to promote visual literacy skills. The paper concludes by providing suggestions for integrating art into core curriculum classes and advocates for increased support of equitable art education in schools. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the transformative potential of art education in today's digital landscape.

Key words: Art education, visual literacy, art benefits, art equity, critical analysis, K-12 curriculum, Spain, United States, comparison.

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1. Introduction

In today's image-driven society, where many people are exposed to thousands of advertisements daily, it is necessary to examine our ability to interpret and evaluate visual information carefully and critically. With the rise and impact of social media in our daily lives, it becomes even more critical to question what we see and how we engage with it. According to the European Investment Bank (2021), visual materials account for 90% of the information people receive. This is supported by The Advertising Observatory in Spain Report of 2018 [El Observatorio de la Publicidad en España de 2018], which states that Spaniards are exposed to over 3,000 advertisements per day (Sánchez-Vizcaíno Lopez, 2019). Similarly, Americans encounter an estimated 4,000 to 10,000 ads daily (Simpson, 2017). The proliferation of social media has further amplified this exposure, as highlighted by Castelló-Martínez et al. (2014), who note that people are now connected in expansive ways, increasing the number of ads they meet daily. As a result, approximately 3.2 billion images and 720,000 hours (equivalent to about 82 years) of video are shared on social media platforms every day (Dootson, 2020).

With such statistics, daily living in an image-rich culture raises questions like:

1. How does the K-12 education system prepare students to analyze visual texts critically?
2. What gaps or challenges (if any) exist in Spain's and the United States' K-12 educational systems regarding preparing students in the arts?
3. What are the individual and social benefits of cross-curricular art inclusion?
4. What strategies can be implemented to include art across K-12 core subject areas?

Kędra and Žakevičiūtė (2019) note that people do not know how to interpret and evaluate images or use them for effective communication. Interpreting or evaluating images is a task that typically requires human judgment and perception. It involves understanding an image's context, content, and intended message, which can often be subjective and require complex interpretative skills beyond determining its authenticity. Therefore, in our increasingly visual world, it is vital, especially for K-12 students, to acquire critical visual literacy skills in order to navigate and comprehend an overwhelming visual environment.

Despite the pervasive presence of art in our world, a significant gap exists in understanding critical visual literacy. As information becomes mainly visual, the predominantly textual nature of K-12 education creates a disconnect. Integrating arts into core subject curricula (language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) can bridge this gap, fostering a holistic understanding. Moreover, a noticeable misalignment exists between the societal value placed on art and the inadequate support for art education in schools, emphasizing the urgency of addressing this disparity. Recognizing the indispensability of art education in the curriculum, we advocate for the cultivation of critical visual literacy.

Based on the work of Chung (2013), Özsoy & Saribas (2021), and Roswell et al. (2012), we define *critical visual literacy* as the ability to analyze, interpret, and critically evaluate visual media such as photographs, advertisements, videos, and other forms of visual communication. Apart from this, critical visual literacy also encompasses understanding messages, meanings, and ideologies conveyed through visual images, as well as recognizing social, cultural, and political contexts in which such images are produced and consumed. Critical visual literacy goes beyond merely reading images and involves questioning and challenging the dominant narratives, power structures, and representations often embedded in visual media. Doing so requires visual analysis, media literacy, cultural awareness, and critical thinking skills to deconstruct and understand the underlying messages, biases, and ideologies conveyed through visual imagery. By developing critical visual literacy skills, individuals can become more informed consumers of visual media, better able to recognize and challenge stereotypes, biases, and misrepresentations, and actively engage in creating and interpreting visual messages.

As an intervention to text-based instruction, we propose an arts-based infusion approach that can promote student engagement in content matter and help develop and promote critical thinking skills in our highly visual global society. We describe art initiatives in both Spain and the United States and consider how these efforts can foster well-rounded, academically and culturally aware citizens.

Art Education as a Field and a Curriculum

“Art education is defined as teaching and learning in or through the arts disciplines, within any number of formal or informal educational contexts” (Clapp & Ho, 2023, p. 136). This includes performing arts such as dance, music, theatre, and visual arts like drawing, painting, sculpture, and design. Art education also includes jewelry design, pottery, weaving, and fabric design and can span as far as commercial graphics, home furnishings, and emerging trends like photography, video, film, and computer art (Art Education Law and Legal Definition, n.d.).

According to the Second World Conference on Art Education organized by UNESCO in 2010, art education has three primary goals:

1. Art education must be accessible and of high quality in conception and delivery, and its principles should be used to reconcile sociocultural challenges.
2. Every country must provide opportunities to nurture children into citizens who can innovate and have the creative capacity to resolve current sociocultural problems.
3. Art education must enhance intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity, and social cohesion and uphold the responsibility to respond to significant global uptakes.

One of the roles of education is to develop citizens in values that would further advance their communities (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021). For instance, through art, the curriculum enables students to explore their voices, thoughts, and emotions uniquely. They learn more about diverse cultures, traditions, and perspectives

by studying different art forms, and they can gain further cultural awareness and appreciation (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021). Teaching art can advance tolerance, empathy, and respect for others, enhance school, societal, and civic competencies, and promote peacebuilding. As Cabedo-Mas et al. (2017) report, the benefits of teaching art relate to developing relationships between people, transforming conflict, and shaping community and individual identities. Therefore, infusing artistic opportunities in schools can catalyze change.

This can be observed in various formal or informal teaching, learning, and collaborative artistic environments. For example, in a teaching-learning collaboration in Alicante, Spain, Professor Emeritus Dr. Maribel Vera Muñoz from La Universidad de Alicante [The University of Alicante] asked the University of South Florida (USF) Education Abroad cohort if we had ever seen an art classroom. “Of course we have,” we all responded. She encouraged us to look at the hidden curriculum (unwritten or implicit interactions), stating that the students must wait, take turns, debrief, and communicate. In this setting, students understand that it is not only about themselves but also about their peers and community. Through art, students start observing what is essential in the lives of one another (M. Vera Muñoz, personal communication, June 22, 2023).

Another hands-on experience was at the community arts-based center in Alicante, Centro Cultural las Cigarreras [Las Cigarreras Cultural Center]. This center develops and supports diverse communities, such as people from indigenous backgrounds, people with different abilities, and the LGBTQ+ community, to bring their voices to the forefront through art and music. El Instituto Alicantino de Cultura, Juan Gil-Albert [Juan Gil-Albert Institute of Culture in Alicante] supports femininity and feminism by highlighting female artists such as Sómnica Bernabéu with expos such as “Alicante en Femenino” [Alicante in Feminine].

Additionally, Centro Cultural las Cigarreras [Las Cigarreras Cultural Center] has a program with penitentiaries that bring color, light, and opportunities for expression to these spaces through artistic practices. They also offer programs to support offenders’ reintegration into society after imprisonment. In these examples, where art is infused, there is a clear interaction within the different communities in the broader society, and this boosts confidence, independence, and artistic voices for people. Our society needs citizens who are not only cognizant of their history and current reality but also equipped to make sense of current issues and demonstrate problem-solving abilities (Cruz & Vera Muñoz, 2020, p. 2).

Benefits of Art Education

According to Swaminathan and Schellenberg (2014), art is one of the means that maximizes human potential. Numerous studies, such as American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2021), Egana-delSol (2023), Swaminathan and Schellenberg (2014), and Winner and Cooper (2000), have shown that students involved in art education tend to perform better in other subjects, such as language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. For instance, Winner and Cooper (2000) state that extended participation in art training predicts higher verbal and mathematical ability test scores. These findings reveal

that art education positively impacts students' overall academic achievement and that art is not simply a recreation program, time-filler, or extracurricular activity (Chung, 2013).

The arts support children's development and incentivize behavior that promotes health and care holistically. According to a 2019 report from the World Health Organization, some of the intercultural characteristics of art for human development are sensory activation, aesthetic commitment, emotional connection, cognitive stimulation, and social interaction. Among the psychological benefits are improved self-esteem, emotional balance, and self-management. The physical benefits are less stress and better cardiovascular and immune system functions. The social benefits are related to less isolation and a better social network. The behavioral benefits are related to better consciousness, body regulation, creative personality strengthening, and developing new skills and abilities. Furthermore, it has been proven that the states with higher academic scores are the ones that have included more hours dedicated to art in their curriculum because they do not favor rote memorization education (Egana-delSol, 2023); they teach kids to imagine possible futures and provide them with the necessary tools to do so.

Additionally, art education stimulates cognitive development, improves memory and concentration, boosts language processing, increases visual-spatial skills, and enhances overall academic engagement (Swaminathan & Schellenberg, 2014). Through these newly acquired and enhanced skills, it is pertinent to highlight that art knowledge and abilities are primarily transferable between other subjects in school settings and the workforce (Bowen et al., 2014). According to Burton et al. (2000), some transferable skills are meta-cognitive thinking, focused perception, integration of diverse viewpoints, coherence and engagement in reflection, and speculative and analytical thinking. Employers value creativity, innovation, and adaptability; art education equips young minds with such highly sought-after abilities, making art education a critical component of K-12 education worldwide.

If comprehension of symbolic and aesthetic language was acknowledged and supported, everyone could learn to use visual language and create images that transcend, criticize, and challenge ideas. Teaching students to comprehend and decode images is critical so they are better equipped to differentiate authentic visual messages from scams and misinformation. According to Dewey (1934, as cited in *The Manifesto*, 2020), art is a universal language shaped by the inherent qualities of human beings. It is a free and universal way of transcending meaning. Art education offers a diverse, liberating experience, serving as testimonio and resistance or providing *desahogo* (relief from a heavy emotional weight). Students and teachers seek a platform to express their emotions and internal challenges, "to talk, to question, to cry, to remember, to resist, to simply be" (Júarez Mendoza, 2020, p. 291).

Deprived of these opportunities and outlets, students lose engagement, inspiration, enrichment, creative and expressive potential, higher-level communication skills, and the ability to share and understand one another through intercultural relationships (Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority, ACARA, 2012). Additionally, they might miss the opportunity to participate in "rich traditions and the

development and expression of contemporary cultures and communities, locally, nationally, and globally” (ACARA, 2012, p. 3). For these reasons, we advocate for arts-infused in the curriculum across core subjects so that students become members of society equipped with the critical skills to analyze visual texts.

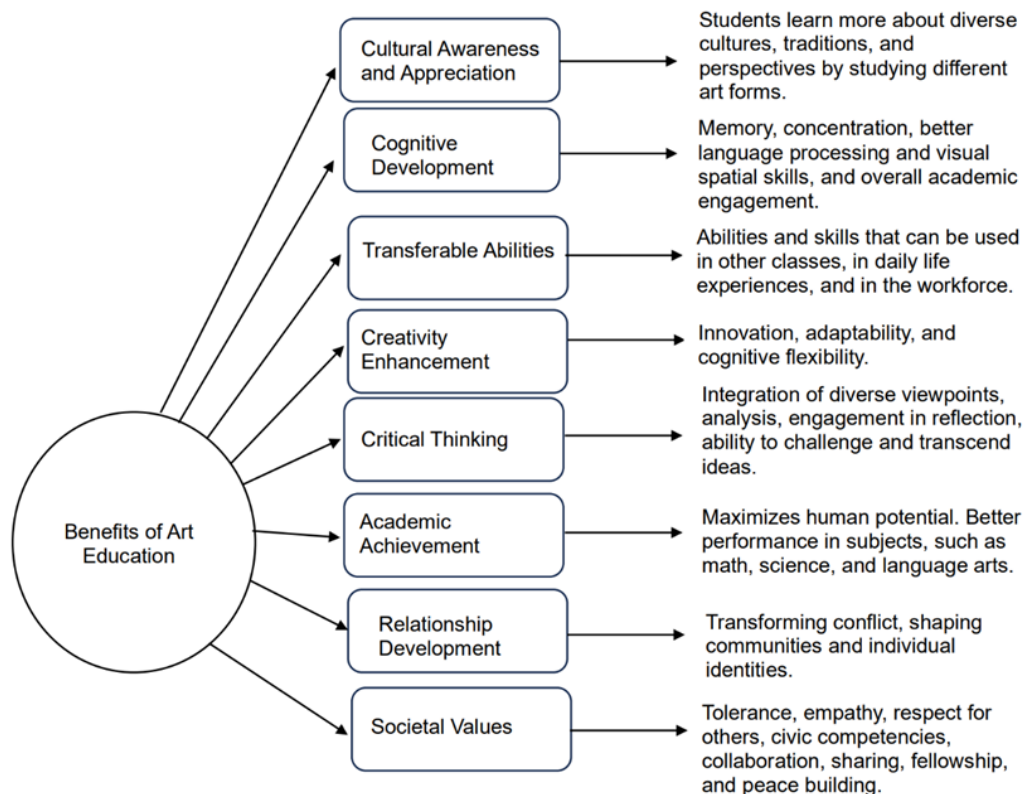


Figura 1. The Benefits of Art Education.

Note. This figure provides a comprehensive explanation of art education’s many benefits, as seen throughout this piece. It was constructed by the authors to showcase the ways in which art benefits humankind cohesively.

Cultural Heritage in Spain

Spain boasts a voluminous cultural heritage renowned as one of the largest in the world, with more than “60,000 assets of cultural interest and 44 assets included in the list of world heritage from UNESCO” (Fontal-Merillas, 2015, p. 119). Cultural heritage encompasses tangible artifacts such as monuments, buildings, sites, museums, and diverse values, including symbolic, historical, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, industrial, and cave paintings of scientific and social significance that a group or society inherited from past civilizations (UNESCO, as cited in Fontal-Merillas, 2015). Simply put, a cultural asset, in this sense, pertains to physical or emblematic representations of the presented culture in the form of art. Spain’s vast cultural heritage traced throughout history, landmarks, festive traditions, myths, and traditional symbols translate into daily life as a cultural expression.

Art and cultural heritage, therefore, play a pivotal role in improving students' cognitive levels and fostering meaningful relationships. In personal communication on June 24, 2023, Dr. J.R. Moreno-Vera highlighted cultural heritage as an educational resource for forging collective identity and citizenship. By incorporating cultural heritage into classes, students have the potential to develop higher-order cognitive processes, enabling them to explain complex phenomena, offer argumentation, establish comparisons, and relate concepts (Bloom et al., 1956, as cited in Moreno-Vera, 2023).

According to Moreno-Vera (2023), "Heritage education can play a detrimental role, particularly in the learning and teaching processes in social studies classes during primary school" (p.1). Teaching visual or audiovisual elements related to a community's meaning and identity can offer historical evidence that must be effectively transformed into educational materials because it is through cultural heritage that one obtains resources and historical evidence to understand past civilizations and societies (J.R. Moreno-Vera, personal communication, June 24, 2023).

Las Hogueras de San Juan [The Bonfires of Saint John] Festival in Alicante, Spain, exemplifies the integration of cultural heritage into contemporary celebrations. This event, featuring the burning of giant satirical statues made of various materials such as wood, cardboard, and fiberglass, attests to Spain's commitment to preserving and showcasing its cultural richness. Declared of international and touristic interest, festivals like Las Hogueras de San Juan [The Bonfires of Saint John] draw substantial attention, emphasizing the global significance of Spain's cultural heritage.

Art Equity in Spain

Despite Spain's unique assets in arts, artists, and cultural patrimony, the country surprisingly does not meet the minimum expectations of art educators and institutions (Manifiesto #EducaciónNoSinArtes, 2020). It is controversial and incongruent that although Spain is a country of renowned artists such as Diego Velázquez, El Greco, Francisco Goya, Joaquín Sorolla, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, and Salvador Dalí, not enough attention is paid to the arts in the K-12 curriculum. The Manifiesto #Educación NoSinArtes (2020) is a public policy declaration created by 160 educators from 43 universities and is supported by 12,000 people and various institutions in Spain. Its goal is to challenge the legislation La Ley Orgánica de Modificación de LOE (LOMLOE) and call for art in Spain's daily curriculum. Supporters of this art education movement stress the importance of teaching the utilization of audiovisual and visual languages. In El Manifiesto (2020), Spanish educators request that the educational system prepare students with critical skills to discern, analyze, and create new and alternative discourses toward social upholding and life in society. They also convey the need to keep enhancing higher-level thinking skills through art.

Unfortunately, this reform is not the first time Spaniards have had to advocate for art education in their curriculum. In 2013, for instance, a similar issue unfolded. The last educational reform, Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa (LOMCE) [Law for the Improvement of the Quality of Education], made art an expendable subject, turning it into an elective that did not have to be offered in K-5 schools. This allowed

students to progress in their K-5 schooling without receiving a single hour of formal artistic education (Fontal-Merillas, 2015). Students, therefore, may not have encountered artistic outlets unless their teachers incorporated them into the curriculum across other subject areas or if exposure to such methods occurred within the home environment through one's parents or other family members.

With scant opportunities for artistic exploration in Spanish schools, communities must unite to preserve their cultural heritage. For instance, when visiting El Instituto Alicantino de Cultura Juan Gil-Albert [Juan Gil-Albert Institute of Culture in Alicante], we heard from Pilar Tébar Martínez, the Director of Culture. She shared that the institute provides many community outreach connections to offer artistic outlets for children and families who may not have much exposure to the arts. For instance, the institute travels to book festivals where they set up tents or booths with activities so families can interact through artistic lenses (P. Tébar Martínez, personal communication, June 28, 2023). Such initiatives are crucial in addressing the unequal art education systems across schools, contributing to the widening opportunity gap between students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and their less privileged peers.

A way of deconstructing the divide and creating a more equitable learning environment for all students is through the educational curriculum. The curriculum must emphasize art accessibility and dismantle spaces that are not inclusive of everyone (Moreno Vera & Vera Muñoz, 2012). If we prioritize art accessibility and deconstruct barriers that separate people rather than unite them, a universal language that liberates human thought and expression can be cultivated.

In a class discussion in Alicante, Black colleagues expressed their views about art and the lack of representation of their cultures. They shared how it is deeply entrenched in the Western culture to highlight white art and slavery history. However, Black people were not always enslaved. They were owners of kingdoms and entire civilizations, so in which museums is that historical art exhibited? Dr. Cruz, Dr. Moreno-Vera, and Professor Emeritus Dr. Vera-Muñoz openly shared that art is not receiving enough attention due to the capitalistic economic system. Teachers are the gatekeepers and the keys to knowledge in an educational system. If parties are developing a teacher-proof curriculum that is scripted and prescribed, they are taking teachers' agency and autonomy away. By doing so, teachers are forced to teach what is merely factual, not allowing students to develop their full potential as critical thinkers who question the status quo and systems in place.

Art Curriculum in Spain

We define *curriculum* as encompassing the objectives, the learning experiences, the progression of these experiences, and the assessments that students encounter throughout their educational journeys (Ralph Tyler, 1969, as cited in Ovid & Leonardo, 2022). The formal curriculum could be biased because it involves ethical considerations that are not partial, universal, or fit for all, as it might be thought. The question is, "Whose valued knowledge and purposes are included" in the curriculum? (Zipin and Brennan, 2021, p. 174). This question guides us to inquire whether some funds of knowledge are

more valued than others across educational systems. The valued knowledge might be located in specific social networks, while others could be unrecognized or undervalued. If we part from this viewpoint, the educational system has an established status quo or a prior order, creating a disbalance between students regarded as having cultural capital and those lacking it (Bourdieu, 1986). We extend this comprehension to the K-12 formal art curriculum in Spain and the United States by exploring how it legitimizes what is socially constructed and valued as relevant for learning, as well as what is believed to be exemplary practices in art.

According to the report *Educación Artística en el Contexto Escolar Europeo (EACEA)*, 2009, [Art Education in the European Educational Context], art class is marginalized in the curriculum in the majority of European countries, with an annual hourly allocation of 50-100 hours in primary school and 25-75 hours in secondary school (EACEA, 2009, as cited in Moreno-Vera et al., 2013). By converting art education into an elective, the legislation, as a statute guiding the curriculum, informs citizens of the hierarchized importance of knowledge. It includes what is valued and excludes what is not (Fernández Abad, 2015). Moreover, acknowledging that the curriculum appears to be neutral in topics, though it is not in reality, is critical. A clear visual hierarchy exists based on economic status, power, gender, and genre and can be seen throughout the curriculum. Torres (2005) argues that the belief that educational systems are neutral in capitalistic countries is a myth. For this reason, consciousness regarding such matters is vital. With no neutrality in the curriculum, an obvious narrative is painted, which often excludes many diverse talents and cultures.

To highlight the importance of art in the curriculum, Aguirre (2005) states three aspects that must be considered:

1. The mystified conception of art and artists portraying them as people with unique and inherently natural talent.
2. The misunderstanding that art has no cognitive value; it is seen as disconnected from the other subjects in the curriculum and more related to a hobby.
3. Its underdeveloped programs lead to inadequate teacher preparation and insufficient relationships with educational researchers.

Due to this underrated awareness of art in the curriculum, Spanish educators and institutions constantly challenge the different legislations that reduce art education to an elective class. According to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), "creating" is the highest level of thinking. When translated to fine arts, this level is expressed through painting, designing, manipulating, constructing, developing, and producing. As mentioned, such outlets provide students with ample opportunities to develop their creativity and opinions, strengthen their cognitive development and overall academic achievement, and foster relationships with others with the ability to problem-solve and shape communities and individual identities.

Art Equity in the United States

The United States' education system frequently neglects to prioritize art education. Confronted with budget limitations and increasing accountability demands, policymakers and administrators find themselves compelled to make challenging choices regarding the inclusion of arts in schools. Consequently, access to arts education has declined. In certain instances, it is considered supplementary to other subjects, an elective, or an extraneous aspect (Chung, 2013). In other instances, it has been eliminated. Moreover, the dependence on property taxes to finance school districts results in an uneven allocation of funds between affluent and underprivileged neighborhoods, intensifying racial disparities in student access to arts education (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021).

Lauren Barack states, "35% of students, predominantly those who are Black and also economically disadvantaged, remain 'without consistent access to high-quality arts education'" (2020). This data shows that accessibility is the key to creating equitable student experiences. Regardless of one's socioeconomic background, art should be a fundamental component of one's education, as access to it and involvement in it provide many positive opportunities. For instance, a study done by the University of Arkansas in 2014 resulted in findings that proved that young people who were exposed to art were more empathetic and tolerant. Additionally, another research study associated lower dropout rates with consistent access to arts education (Wendler, 2019). This correlates with data from Americans for the Arts (2020), who showed that low-income students highly involved in the arts are twice as likely to graduate college as their peers who do not participate in art-based activities.

Unfortunately, despite the positive outcomes of including art education in schools, many art programs have been cut due to state funding (Wendler, 2019). One of the reasons art programs are being attacked compared to other subjects is that only 32 states (out of 52, including the District of Columbia and Department of Defense Activity Schools) view art education as a core subject versus an elective (National Art Education Association, 2023). Due to this, art classes and curricula within K-12 schools in the United States have been made to seem less vital as significant importance is placed on core subjects such as language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The measurement of student success through standardized testing is used to secure funding for schools and programs, contributing to the diminished perceived importance of art education. To further support this, Wendler (2019) shares that since the arts are not considered tested subjects, they are frequently the first classes an administrator eliminates when schools face financial hardships.

Consequently, according to the World Socialist Web Site (2021), "Attacks on arts and humanities courses and the deteriorating conditions of schools go hand in hand. As schools and districts balance their books, money for repairs, system upgrades, teachers and courses are the first things to go" (World Socialist Website, 2021, as cited in Timon, 2021). This is unfortunate as the right to a quality education regarding art, culture, and leisure is being denied to students. With severe budget cuts at the forefront, effects that can be felt include reductions to educational programs, increases in class sizes, lay-offs,

eliminations of course offerings, and extensions on when new and up-to-date curriculum is purchased (Timon, 2021).

An example of this can be seen at Julia R. Masterman Laboratory and Demonstration School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where approximately 1,180 students attend school in grades 5-12. The issue arose as Philadelphia School District officials announced strategic changes designed to create “a fuller school day” to assist with downtime in high school students’ schedules. The changes will ultimately affect its middle school-aged students as they “will have art classes in sixth and seventh grade (two or three times a week), music in fifth and seventh grade (one to three times a week), and gym in fifth and eighth grade (two or three times a week)” (Graham, 2023). They previously had each of those classes every year, once a week. With these changes, “eighth graders will be able to access art and music...during their lunch period; there will also be art, music, and gym opportunities during the extended advisory period. Seventh and eighth graders will also get extra time in math and English” (Graham, 2023). Such changes concerned parents, as many voiced their grievances. Stacy Koilor, a parent of two children at Masterman, stated, “I’m just really concerned about the removal of some art, music, and gym. I think it’s important from a mental health standpoint to have access to those things. One or all of them could be an introduction to something that changes a student’s life” (Graham, 2023). Another parent and former sociology professor at Temple University, Sara Goldrick-Rab, voiced her concerns: “Middle schoolers need to have arts and music. It is an absolutely bizarre moment to take that away from them. I don’t know why you would cut the kinds of things that help with climate, that relieve stress” (Graham, 2023). Both Koilor’s and Goldrick-Rab’s concerns add up as “music, dance, painting, and drawing help kids build skills that math and English classes can’t” (Wendler, 2019).

The same issue even affects higher education institutions, as the University of Vermont announced plans to terminate the college’s Classics, Geology, and Religion departments. The Indiana University of Pennsylvania also stated it will close five art programs as plans to merge its fine arts and humanities schools are set to occur. This merger alone will eliminate nearly 130 jobs (Timon, 2021). Students who embark on collegiate journeys may have fewer and fewer options to choose from in the arts if this theme continues, leading to the diminishing of a society that no longer thinks critically or questions the status quo. With the diminishing of arts programs, clear messages are sent to the United States society regarding what is and is not valued. Not only does this affect school environments, but it reaches as far as career opportunities. If college programs are cut, leading to fewer opportunities in specific fields, arts-based careers may disappear or be replaced by technology such as artificial intelligence (AI). To combat such measures, advocates for the arts are needed and must make waves and spread the word regarding what is happening. It is up to community members, teachers, parents, librarians, and local artists to keep art alive and in the hands and minds of young people. “For all Americans to reap the full benefits of the arts, we need to ensure that access to arts education is not merely a privilege enjoyed by some but a right guaranteed to all” (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021, p. 3).

Art Curriculum in the United States

In the United States, the State Departments of Education are responsible for developing policies and establishing education standards for K-12 schooling in their respective states. Public schools must adhere to local and state standards, while national standards are optional and may be utilized by some states to inform their standards. Some states, however, choose to adopt the national standards as their own (National Art Education Association, 2023). These differences foster controversy as each state within the U.S. may or may not be cultivating artistic experiences for its students.

While all 52 states, including the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activity Schools, have elementary, middle, and secondary art standards, their requirements ultimately differ by state due to the United States' decentralized educational system. For instance, according to ArtScan Summaries produced in March 2023 by the Arts Education Partnership through the National Art Education Association (NAEA), 43 states require art education at the elementary level, while nine do not; 42 states require art education at the middle level, while 10 do not; and 43 states require art education at the high school level, while nine do not. The differences by state contribute to students' exposure to art. Additionally, the National Art Education Association (2023) reports that 28 states require art as part of high school graduation requirements, while 24 states do not. From the data, if art is not required, it either does not exist in general, or requirements to meet art are established in other ways, for example, through foreign language and career and technical education classes (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021).

While such courses may still be beneficial, art education provides many benefits for children and adults. For instance, benefits such as greater critical thinking outcomes, heightened tolerance and empathy, elevated enthusiasm for participating in arts and cultural activities, increased test scores, improved attendance, higher graduation rates, and enhanced college aspirations all materialize through art education (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021). Additionally, research suggests that exposure to art education has been found to lower the percentage of students receiving disciplinary actions in school by 3.6% (Americans for the Arts, 2020). Disciplinary actions add to missed learning time and widen opportunity gaps between students and their peers. Such widening opportunity gaps create further inequities as "Black and Hispanic students lack access to quality arts education compared to their white peers, earning an average of 30 and 25 percent fewer arts credits, respectively" (Americans for the Arts, 2020.). The consequences of these disparities reach beyond the educational realm and contribute to social inequalities.

The Florida Department of Education emphasizes the importance of curriculum alignment with standards, stating, "good curriculum is closely aligned to standards." However, concerns arise regarding the alignment of such standards with what students truly need to learn or what would benefit their overall development. Sometimes, standards prioritize cost-efficiency, mass progress measurement through standardized tests, or the production of obedient citizens, potentially neglecting the student's holistic needs.

For all Americans to enjoy the full benefits of the arts, it is imperative to ensure that access to arts education is not just a privilege for some but a fundamental right for all (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021). This requires a reevaluation of standards, an equitable distribution of resources, and a collective effort to prioritize the holistic development of students through arts education.

Table 1

Comparison between Spain's and the United States' Art Curriculum in Grades K-12

Spain's Art Curriculum	United States' Art Curriculum
<p>Overall School System:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Spanish education system follows a decentralized management and administration model. - The implementation of art depends on the regulation and programming of the autonomous communities (departments of education), schools, and educational administrative plans. 	<p>Overall School System:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education in the United States is provided mainly by the public sector, with funding and control from state, local, and federal agencies. - The State Departments of Education are responsible for developing policies and establishing educational standards for K-12 schooling in their respective states. - Public schools must adhere to local and state standards, while national standards are optional.
<p>Art in Elementary School:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Based on Ley Orgánica, art is considered an elective that students can choose to take if offered in their school. - Art might only be offered in some schools since it is not a mandatory subject. - Schools may offer other electives such as foreign languages, civics, or religion instead. 	<p>Art in Elementary School:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 43 of 52 states (including the District of Columbia and the US Department of Defense Activity Schools) require art education at the elementary level, while nine states do not. - Children's access to art education as a core subject is uneven with nearly 14,000 school districts.
<p>Art in Middle and Secondary Schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Based on Ley Orgánica, at least one art course is required, and students can choose from visual arts, audiovisual education, and classical culture. 	<p>Art in Middle and Secondary Schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 42 of 52 states (including the District of Columbia and Department of Defense Activity Schools) require art at the middle school level, while 10 do not. - 43 of 52 states (including the District of Columbia and Department of Defense Activity Schools) require art at the secondary level, while nine do not. - Language and Career and Technical course offerings provide or replace art credit to students.
<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Art is not mandatory in K-5. - Students may not be exposed to art in the form of a class until their last year in secondary school. - Even though Spain has a renowned cultural heritage volume and is the birth country of great artists, the importance of art and annual art allocation time is not mirrored in the curriculum. 	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State art programs have been cut due to less funding and resource allocation. - There has been an increase in class sizes and an elimination or reduction of art course offerings. - Accessibility to high-quality art education is 35% less for African American and/or economically disadvantaged students.
<p>Relevant Topics in the Art Curriculum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Art education has been linked to patrimony and cultural heritage. - Traditional visual and audiovisual art pertinent to the community's meaning and identity. - Plethora of unique assets in arts and artists. - Music, folklore, and art history of local and national communities. 	<p>Relevant Topics in the Art Curriculum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Artistic processes in art education include creating, performing (dance, music, theatre), presenting (visual arts), responding, and connecting. - 5 philosophical foundations and goals of art are communication; creative personal realization; culture, history, and connectors; means to well-being; and community engagement.

Note. This table was created by the authors for illustrative purposes.

Table 1. comprehensively compares art curriculum requirements across elementary, middle, and high school levels in both Spain and the United States. It highlights challenges specific to each country and addresses pertinent topics covered in arts-based classes.

2. Methodology

The methodology used in this study involved qualitative investigative methods. A comprehensive literature review was first conducted, encompassing scholarly papers, books and book chapters, contemporary news sources, conference papers, and theses and dissertations published in both Spain and the United States. This review was conducted to gather relevant information and insights on the topic, identifying key concepts, theories, previous studies, and gaps in the extant literature.

The literature review was followed by a document review where educational policies, declarations, laws, U.S. national data sets, and state curriculum guidelines were systematically collected, analyzed, and interpreted to provide additional context and insights for the study. Document review supports valuable contributions to evidence-based best practices and can be beneficial in collecting emerging insights from specific populations (Bretschneider et al., 2017).

Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, and opinions. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to obtain evidence and in-depth information from the participants while maintaining their track and direction (Ruslin et al., 2022). Likewise, semi-structured interviews are adaptable and flexible, unfolding the meaning of the participants' opinions, behaviors, and life accounts (Kvale, 1996; Naz et al., 2022; Sewell, 2009). Some of the pre-determined, open-ended questions that prompted discussion were:

1. Why do you think policymakers and the Ministries of Education withhold complete support for the arts in the K-12 curriculum?
2. In your opinion, what are the major interdisciplinary advantages of teaching art as a core subject in K-12?
3. How does art support and/or promote sociocultural understanding and intercultural competencies?
4. To what extent do you believe the K-12 curriculum addresses the teaching of visual literacy, including the comprehension of symbolism and aesthetics? Please provide your rationale.
5. In the present context, do you believe the teaching of visual literacy is crucial? Why or why not?

While having these conversations, the researchers took written documentation about the interactions individually. Later, they independently engaged in reflexive journaling based on these interactions to collectively discuss topics of interest, convergence, and divergence. Thematic analysis was applied to the written notes collected from the conversations to identify common themes and patterns. Thematic analysis is a flexible process that identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns or themes within the data to organize and comprehend the participants' perceptions, experiences, and potential needs (Braun & Clark, 2006; Clark & Braun, 2017; Guest et al., 2012). Additionally, an

open coding procedure was employed to examine the semi-structured interviews and sort them into emerging themes (Guest et al., 2012).

Finally, the coding process linked the themes into specific categories to address the research questions. Integrating the results from the systematic literature review, document review, and thematic analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does the K-12 education system prepare students to engage in critical analyses of visual texts?
2. What gaps or challenges (if any) exist in Spain's and the United States' K-12 educational systems regarding the preparation of students in the arts?
3. What are the individual and social benefits of cross-curricular art inclusion?
4. What strategies can be implemented to include art across K-12 core subject areas?

Description of Context

This research has a starting point at the University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, where the U.S.-based researchers enrolled in a class that included a study abroad exchange summer program to Alicante, Spain, that integrated multiple visits to La Universidad de Alicante's Museo de Arte Contemporáneo [Museum of Contemporary Art, University of Alicante] history and art museums, cultural centers, and workshops related to global and arts-based education.

Participants

This study included K-20 Art and Social Studies Educators in Tampa, Florida, United States, and Alicante, Spain.

Instruments

Literature Review. Relevant information and emerging trends were gathered by reviewing existing scholarly literature. Analyzing previous studies helped identify inconsistencies, contradictions, and areas that need further investigation.

Document Review. Document review was a vital component of the research methodology involving a systematic analysis. Systematic techniques aim to efficiently identify as many pertinent studies as possible, which can help ensure that valuable qualitative studies are preserved in the ever-expanding body of research (Jones, 2004). The identification of relevant studies was based on the following criteria:

1. Current and previous educational policy statements that addressed K-12 art education in Spain, the U.S., or both countries.

2. Educational laws pertaining to K-12 art education in Spain, the U.S., or both countries.
3. Art standards and the inclusivity of art curriculum in K-12 education in Spain, the U.S., or both countries.
4. Comparative analyses on the present state of art education in Spain and the U.S.
5. Documents advocating for the inclusion of art instruction in the curriculum in Spain and the U.S.

Documents were excluded if they:

1. Primarily focused on countries other than Spain or the United States.
2. Were published before the year 2000.
3. Were written in a language other than Spanish or English.
4. Did not include art or social studies education in their keywords or abstracts.

After this systematic analysis, some of the documents reviewed were:

Spain: La Ley Orgánica de Educación (LOE) (2006), La Ley Orgánica para la Mejora

de la Calidad Educativa (LOMCE) (2013), La Ley Orgánica de Modificación de LOE (LOMLOE) (2021); The Manifiesto #Educación NoSinArtes (2020); and Educación Artística en el Contexto Escolar Europeo (EACEA) (2009).

United States: Review of Art for Life's Sake, a report conducted by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2021); Examination of Art National Standards (National Art Education Association, 2023); Investigation of ArtScan Summaries produced in March 2023 by the Arts Education Partnership through the National Art Education Association - an analysis of the incorporation of art education in the curriculum as defined by 52 individual states including the District of Columbia and Department of Defense Activity Schools.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with K-20 educators from Art and Social Studies content areas in Spain and the United States.

The literature review, document review, and thematic analysis findings were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Through these methods, the authors could expand on current knowledge and contribute to a deeper understanding of the research area.

3. Results

The results of this study offer valuable perspectives on the intricate dynamics surrounding the appreciation of art education and its positive influence on students' lives, as well as the disparities within the K-12 educational systems of Spain and the United States. In this section, the authors revisit their research questions and comprehensively analyze the implications derived from the study.

1. How does the K-12 education system prepare students to engage in critical analyses of visual texts?

The findings indicate that the K-12 education systems in Spain and the United States need further attention in adequately preparing students to interpret, evaluate, and critically analyze visual texts. Despite living in a visually saturated world with constant exposure to media, there needs to be more emphasis on visual literacy learning, perception, judgment, and critical comprehension. In both countries, the educational systems allocate more time and resources to tested or core subjects, often overlooking art and visual literacy as avenues for cultivating critical thinking skills essential for objectively analyzing visual information. This disconnect underscores the necessity of integrating the arts into the curriculum, emphasizing the crucial role of educational policies and strategies prioritizing visual literacy. Such initiatives aim to empower students with the capacity to engage with and analyze visual texts critically. Consequently, politicians, curriculum writers, legislators, and educational leaders must advocate more for educational policies and legislation where art education can receive greater relevancy and resources in both countries.

2. What gaps or challenges (if any) exist in Spain's and the United States' K-12 educational systems regarding the preparation of students in the arts?

Despite the extensive body of research and the numerous benefits art education provides both individuals and communities, there appears to be a lack of growing interest and support from legislators or policymakers in strengthening visual literacy learning. This is evident in the lack of endorsement for requiring art classes as a fundamental requirement for graduation, as well as the inadequate provision of opportunities for art funding and teacher training. It is ironic that even though we live in a pervasively visual environment, where marketing and videos are constantly bombarding our senses, we are not educating competent citizens who can consume visual information critically or with the capacity to analyze it objectively. Additionally, although new generations have more access to technology and thus are more connected, informed, and aware of national and international issues (Taylor & Keeter, 2010), this does not necessarily result in students and society becoming more critical, visually literate, or educated.

In both countries, evidenced-based learning through the arts shows a clear need to prepare more analytic consumers of images in this digital age. However, this need is not being met equitably in Spain's or the United States' curriculum for all students. One of the challenges faced in the United States curriculum is that the availability and quality of art education (visual arts, theater, media arts, music, and dance) do not offer the same

opportunities across the board. It is relevant to mention that there still exists an opportunity gap between Black and Hispanic students compared to white students in art education (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021). This is not the only equity gap that remains. For instance, access between urban and suburban schools, upper, middle, and lower-class students, and students with special needs and disabilities do not benefit from art instruction like their more privileged peers. Unfortunately, the curriculum focuses on tested subjects, and inequitable art education is provided to approximately 14,000 school districts (National Art Education Association, 2023). Likewise, funding challenges and emphasis on subjects that nurture the capitalistic economy are detrimental factors that hinder art education opportunities in the United States.

Spain also has its challenges while supporting and implementing art education. The fact that art is no longer a core subject in K-5 schools due to the legislation LOMCE passed on December 9, 2013, is a significant setback. This legislative change might hinder younger students from enhancing their cultural awareness, gaining empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for others, and building a peaceful and civic culture. The decentralized Spanish management and model of education could expose some students to art and equip them with skills that can be transferable and enriching in all their academic success. On the contrary, students who are less exposed might miss the opportunity to develop their creativity and infuse that into their daily lives, widening the opportunity gap between more and less privileged children. Despite all the benefits of art education, which go far beyond the classroom or studio, art is still disregarded and defunded, not reflecting its importance in developing children and future citizens.

3. What are the individual and social benefits of cross-curricular art inclusion?

Art education has enhanced students' creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and cultural awareness. It fosters societal and civic values such as empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for diverse perspectives, contributing to the development of well-rounded individuals. Furthermore, cross-curricular art inclusion promotes collaboration, communication, and teamwork among students, creating a positive and inclusive learning environment. Moreover, increased test scores in core classes are noted (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021). These individual and social benefits emphasize the importance of integrating art across core subject areas in the K-12 curriculum because it maximizes human potential (Swaminathan & Schellenberg, 2014).

4. What strategies can be implemented to include art across K-12 core subject areas?

The study identifies several strategies that can be implemented to include art across K-12 core subject areas. First, there is a need for curriculum leaders and policymakers to prioritize art education by allocating resources, providing professional development opportunities for teachers, and mandating art classes as a core requirement for graduation. Collaboration between art educators and teachers from other subject areas is crucial to integrating art into different disciplines. This can be achieved through interdisciplinary projects, cross-curricular lesson planning, and by incorporating visual texts and artistic activities in core subject lessons. Additionally, community partnerships,

field trips to museums and art centers, and utilizing local and community-based art spaces allow students to showcase their artistic work and engage with local artists, enhancing their learning experiences.

Overall, the results of this study emphasize the importance of valuing art education, addressing the gaps and challenges in the K-12 educational systems, and implementing strategies to include art across core subject areas.

4. Discussion

Art education has demonstrated numerous advantages for students, including improved academic performance, increased creativity, and enhanced problem-solving skills. In addition, art education develops students' self-confidence, self-expression, and sense of community. Given these benefits, legislators, policymakers, curriculum developers, and educational leaders must consider supporting its instruction in the curriculum in K-12 settings. However, to do so, a significant focus must be placed on monetary allocation to provide federal grants to produce the resources necessary to create strong and long-lasting art programs in schools. Such grants would allow district leaders and principals the means to:

1. Employ skilled educators and offer professional development opportunities to ensure their embodiment of best practices.
2. Supply classrooms with necessary resources and materials.
3. Enhance classroom spaces.
4. Ensure all students have access to art education by creating or restructuring student schedules.
5. Develop inclusive art programs for students of underserved backgrounds and students with disabilities so that all students can experience the benefits of art education.

Due to funding, a significant focus has been placed on tested subjects such as language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. While these subjects benefit students' growth and development, art education holistically caters to the child's individual needs. Teachers who need more training, knowledge, and funding to effectively teach art or integrate it into their core content classes may hesitate to introduce it. Unfortunately, this act deprives students of art's numerous benefits. To adequately address this issue, it becomes crucial to establish teacher preparation programs that equip future educators with the skills and knowledge required to incorporate art into their lessons across various subjects. One practical approach could be introducing art education courses during teacher preparation programs. This would ensure prospective teachers become familiar with and comfortable integrating art into their teaching practices. Moreover, providing hands-on training and professional development opportunities can turn theoretical ideas

into tangible realities. With proper training, resources, and knowledge, teachers will likely feel more competent and confident in incorporating art into their core subject areas, leading to more enriched educational experiences for their students.

Regarding the art curriculum in Spain, Alicante brought us first-hand experience. While there, we were surprised and impressed by the strength of the community and the infusion of art despite Spain's similar restrictions on art classes and curriculum compared to the United States. What was incredible to witness was the amount of community art spaces Alicante had scattered throughout its city where local artists could display their latest pieces. El Departamento de Cultura de Alicante [The Department of Culture of Alicante], El Centro Cultural las Cigarreras [Las Cigarreras Cultural Center], and El Instituto Alicantino de Cultura [The Alicante Institute of Culture] showcase artworks from local artists. These cultural centers serve as communal spaces, allowing community members to express their perspectives and enabling others to gain insights into essential aspects of their lives through their artistic endeavors.

When visiting the La Universidad de Alicante [The University of Alicante], we were introduced to Reme and David, two experts in Art Curriculum. Reme and David are responsible for providing enriching artistic experiences for schoolchildren and adults of all ages who come to learn at their on-campus museum, El Museo de la Universidad de Alicante [The Museum of the University of Alicante]. Reme and David work together to create artistic opportunities that engage life-long learning. On our first visit, we learned how archeological digs were conducted and viewed artifacts from a local Roman site owned by the university, L'Alcudia. In the classroom, we then ventured on an archeological dig of our own. Each station had a box of dirt, a cardstock graphic of an ancient vase to reconstruct, scissors, glue, and a colored pencil. We were instructed to cut the broken pieces of the vase and bury them in the dirt box to simulate an excavation. After trading boxes with a colleague, we used a paintbrush to find and retrieve our buried pieces. We then reconstructed our clay vase by gluing our retrieved paper pieces to the vase graphic. Once the vase was reconstructed, we had to imagine and draw the missing graphics and patterns based on what we knew and saw. This activity was appropriate for people of all ages as it could be differentiated to meet higher learning needs by including additional pieces in the dig that do not belong to the vase itself. While leading this activity, Reme clarified that creating experiential, art-infused, enriching experiences and learning activities requires the involvement of multiple experts from various subject areas. Her mention of this helped us think about how some educators' approaches to the curriculum can create enhanced interdisciplinary learning opportunities in all classes.

The authors reflect on these art-based experiences and acknowledge a connection to various core classes by incorporating artistic elements. Students can explore independently and critically deconstruct, construct, and re-create with these approaches. Therefore, as an educator, observing students navigating tasks with minimal scaffolding can be an intriguing method for gaining deeper insights into their abilities and thought processes. Monitoring how they interpret activities and the ultimate benefits they derive can offer valuable insights applicable to similar cross-curricular endeavors. This unobtrusive approach furnishes the teacher with significant information about their students and presents opportunities for deliberate processes within a group setting. In

such scenarios, communication between two or more group members becomes crucial in seeking a common outcome for approaching tasks and fostering learning through the shared experience. The teamwork and communication demanded by these activities serve as valuable learning experiences.

Consequently, educators must be creative in bringing art into their lessons. Students may collect recyclable materials to create art with, and in the process, a potential lesson on recycling and sustainability could transpire in a science classroom. Math teachers could become inspired by Eusebio Sempere's work and graph lines to convey textures of lightness and darkness. Language arts and social studies teachers can use paintings and images to discuss historical events, introduce new topics, or spark a debate. Including art in classrooms is possible even when it may not seem likely. As a collective society, we need to imagine and create possibilities for ourselves so that art stays alive in the presence of future generations.

Based on our experiences, Table 2 provides a reflexive account of how infusing arts-based approaches into core content area classes can transpire.

Table 2

Ideas for Art Infusion in K-12 Core Content Area Classes

Language Arts	Mathematics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create character portraits or illustrations to represent characters in stories. - Design sets, costumes, and props for plays and performances. - Write poems or songs about characters or events in stories. - Create pieces of art that represent themes in stories. - Design book covers or bookmarks for favorite books. - Design graphics for new vocabulary words that help convey their meanings. - Incorporate art history into lessons about different literary periods. - Create blackout poetry. - Create comic books or storyboards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use art, architecture, and design to explore geometric elements. - Create symmetrical pieces of art to discuss the importance of symmetry in math and art. - Create abstract art using mathematical equations to construct geometric 3D figures and sculptures. - Craft visual representations of data sets such as graphs, charts, and infographics. - Explore real-world applications of mathematics in art fields like graphic design, architecture, and animation. - Create storyboards or comic strips to illustrate mathematical concepts. - Create and engage in games of chance when studying probability. - Draw or paint visuals using a variety of colors to represent fractions and percentages.
Science	Social Studies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design and partake in experiments and investigations. - Draw diagrams or flowcharts to explain different scientific processes. - Make 3D models, sculptures, and/or dioramas of scientific objects or systems such as the solar system, the water cycle, and molecular and anatomical structures. - Create infographics or posters to present scientific data, research findings, or steps to an experiment. - Experiment with art techniques that involve chemical reactions, such as tie-dye or inkblot art. - Use recyclable materials to create art while learning about the environment and sustainability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use historical artworks, artifacts, and photographs to explore time periods and cultures. - Connect art movements to historical events. - Analyze political cartoons. - Engage with historical maps and cartographic representations to understand societal changes. - Create artwork based on historical figures and events. - Utilize art as a hook to spark discussion or debate regarding the identification of the event unfolding. - Integrate art projects that address contemporary global issues such as climate change and human rights. - Examine propaganda art from different historical contexts and countries. - Explore the role of art in various civil rights movements. - Engage in art projects that showcase the cultures and traditions of different societies.

Note. This table was created by the authors for illustrative purposes.

Table 2. Ideas for Art Infusion in K-12 Core Content Area Classes.

5. Conclusion

Art education holds a fundamental role in the holistic development of K-12 students. As students navigate a pervasively visual environment, there is a crucial need to foster critical visual literacy skills from a young age. Legislation, educational policies, and state and federal funding require revision to support art education integrally, recognizing music, theatre, dance, art history, visual arts, and art literacy as equally significant to other tested subjects.

Challenges persist in the K-12 education systems of Spain and the United States, particularly concerning art equity. The uneven inclusion of art education exacerbates opportunity gaps and racial disparities. The curriculum's role is pivotal in creating an equitable learning environment for prioritizing art accessibility and dismantling barriers to inclusion. Concerns arise regarding the representation of diverse cultures in art and the necessity to challenge a capitalistic economic system undermining the attention given to art.

Art education goes beyond individual skill development; it provides a means for students to make sense of their emotions and surroundings. Through various art forms, students express themselves in ways that challenge unjust norms and encourage critical thinking. However, advocating for art integration and equity requires addressing scripted and prescribed curricula that may limit teachers' agency and autonomy.

In advocating for art integration and equity, educators are crucial in promoting critical thinking and questioning the status quo. While concerns persist about challenges in the current education systems, educators must persevere in infusing art education transversally into core classes. This approach aims to cultivate young, curious minds capable of finding interdisciplinary solutions to interconnected world issues, contributing to a more equitable and enriched educational experience for all.

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