

Olsen, D. (2024) *Media Arts Education: Transforming Education Through Multi-modal Cognition, Holistic Learning, and Techno-Embodiment*, Routledge, 174 pages. ISBN 978-1-032-55467-9 (hardcover); ISBN: 978-1-032-55468-6 (paperback); ISBN 978-1-003-43083-4 (eBook)

Today, the educational environment is undergoing rapid and profound transformations driven by technological advancements and evolving societal needs. As art educators and students navigate this dynamic landscape, it is imperative to explore innovative teaching methods that foster meaningful learning experiences. The book, *Media Arts Education: Transforming Education Through Multi-modal Cognition, Holistic Learning, and Techno-Embodiment*, by Dr. Dain Olsen, delves into the critical role of media arts in shaping modern education, with a particular focus on the significance of multi-modal learning. By engaging students through various forms of media and technology, multi-modal learning promotes interaction across cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions, thereby enhancing the overall educational experience.

The author of this book, Dain Olsen, Professor in the Department of Media Arts at the University of California, Santa Barbara, bridges the fields of multi-modal cognition, holistic learning, and techno-embodiment to offer a comprehensive understanding of how media arts can transform education. His work provides valuable insights into how students engage with and learn through diverse media forms in educational settings. In this clearly structured volume, Olsen effectively synthesizes current research and literature on Media Arts Education (MAE), explores key concepts such as embodied learning and multi-modal cognitive processes, and examines the implications for teaching and learning in contemporary classrooms. This book is intended for a diverse audience, including

educators looking to enhance their teaching methods, researchers interested in exploring the intersection of technology and education, and policymakers aiming to develop forward-thinking educational policies. By providing a comprehensive exploration of the role of media arts and multi-modal learning in education, this book aims to offer practical insights and evidence-based strategies to support the transformation of educational practices in the digital age.

The book is organized into 14 chapters, each focusing on a distinct aspect of MAE, and situates these topics within the broader context of educational psychology and transformative pedagogical practices. Olsen not only analyzes existing research but also offers practical suggestions for educators looking to integrate media arts into their teaching strategies, while discussing future directions for both research and practice in this rapidly evolving field.

This book provides a systematic exploration of the significant role and practical value of MAE in contemporary education. The opening chapter demonstrates the author's foundational understanding of the concept and significance of MAE, setting a solid foundation for the rest of the book. Olsen conceptualizes MAE as a dynamic and interdisciplinary framework that bridges art, technology, and culture. He positions MAE as a vital component of contemporary education, emphasizing its capacity to foster critical thinking, creative expression, and technical proficiency among students. In Chapter 2, Olsen defines media arts as the machine-based manipulation of aesthetic phenomena to convey meaning, emphasizing its role as an aesthetic synthesizer for cultural products and broadening the reader's understanding of the diverse forms of media arts. Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the current context of MAE. Readers can gain insight into how MAE tackles contemporary challenges while fostering students' creativity and critical thinking. Chapter 4 elaborates on the significance of MAE within the 21st-century curriculum, refuting the criticisms posed by what Olsen refers to as traditional education (TE), a system he characterizes as already "full" and "fixed"

in its contents, methods and objectives. It is clear to see that the comparison highlights the unique value of MAE in modern education and reflects the evolution of education.

In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, Olsen illustrates the interdisciplinary nature of MAE by showing how it integrates knowledge and methods from multiple fields such as art, technology, culture, and communication within a multi-modal framework. This interdisciplinary approach is evident as students engage with various media forms—visual, auditory, and interactive—allowing them to explore and analyze content from diverse perspectives. By combining different disciplinary insights, MAE encourages students to think creatively and adaptively, fostering flexible problem-solving skills.

In Chapter 8, the author examines MAE as a holistic educational concept, emphasizing how it promotes creativity, critical thinking, and active student participation through interdisciplinary methods, aligning with constructivist principles. This chapter underscores the importance of experiential learning in fostering deeper understanding and student agency. MAE draws on James Zull's biology-based learning model, emphasizing the balance between experiential learning and abstract thinking.

In Chapter 9, the author presents key concepts of the MAE meta-framework, highlighting the role of multi-modal representations in making abstract ideas tangible and enhancing real-world understanding. Multi-modal representations can render abstract concepts more tangible and enhance real-world understanding.

Chapters 10 and 11 emphasize MAE's significant benefits over traditional education, especially regarding its innovative educational methods. Its forward-thinking approach aligns with modern education's evolving needs, preparing students for

success in a tech-centric world. Its adaptability and integration of new technologies make it a key tool for shaping education's future.

In Chapter 12, the author introduces a foundational course to cultivate students' aesthetic abilities in media arts. This course, which serves as a critical part of the educational framework, is intended to encourage bold thinking and creativity—qualities that are essential for success in the rapidly evolving and highly competitive field of media arts. The course not only aims to enhance students' artistic sensibilities but also helps them develop the confidence and critical skills necessary to innovate and push boundaries within the field. Chapter 13 explores the Yearbook course, which involves students in the process of documenting and reflecting on the academic year through various media formats. This course emphasizes the importance of student agency within genuine learning contexts.

In the last Chapter, MAE offers innovative English learning methods for new immigrant students. Compared to traditional teaching, MAE utilizes online applications to provide personalized learning paths, enhancing the enjoyment of language learning.

Olsen's book *Media Arts Education: Transforming Education Through Multi-modal Cognition, Holistic Learning, and Techno-Embodiment* offers a thorough analysis of how media arts can transform education. It explores the relationships between multi-modal cognition, holistic learning, and technological embodiment, providing valuable insights for educators seeking to incorporate media arts into their teaching methods. The book offers practical guidance on integrating media arts into education, making it accessible to both experts and non-experts alike. As a graduate student in the Department of Art, I find it to be a particularly valuable resource for art educators aiming to implement more holistic learning approaches in their teaching.

While the book effectively highlights the transformative potential of MAE in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary learning, it could benefit from a deeper exploration of the systemic challenges related to unequal access to technological resources. Schools with limited budgets and those in underserved communities face significant barriers, such as outdated infrastructure, hardware, and a lack of professional development for educators. These disparities could worsen educational inequalities and limit the reach of MAE. Additionally, the book could further address the complexities of integrating rapidly evolving media technologies into traditional curricula, particularly regarding teacher preparedness, curriculum alignment, and assessment methods. Tackling these challenges would offer a more balanced perspective on implementing MAE and help educators and policymakers navigate potential obstacles.

In conclusion, MAE remains a valuable resource for educators and researchers looking to enrich teaching practices and adopt more holistic approaches to learning. The book successfully advocates for MAE's critical role in equipping students with the skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly digital and interconnected world, contributing significantly to contemporary educational discourse.

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Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education

Vol. 20, no. 1, 2025, Regular Issue
<https://doi.org/10.20355/jcie29678>

Reviewed by Jingyu Guo

Department of Art, Harbin Conservatory of Music

20232008@stu.hrbcu.edu.cn

