

Transform

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How can arts-based professional development be an integral part of education reform?

In certain learning communities, the interest in arts extends beyond its role as a single subject area in the curriculum. For these educators, the arts provide hope and evidence that public schools can educate the whole child. These communities embrace reading, writing and math, along with a wide array of disciplines. Art, music, dance, theatre, creative writing, multimedia arts, and arts concepts are integrated across the curriculum. Project-based and student-centered learning become the norm. The focus shifts to helping young people learn in vibrant, effective educational environments, giving more children a greater number of chances to learn. In these learning communities, arts education professional development fits into a bigger picture of strategies to improve public schools.

Strategies From General Education

Education research continues to clarify important lessons for professional development and school change, although these lessons may not be widely applied. Researchers William Pink and Arthur Hyde recommend the following systemic approaches:

- **Proactive approach to change the system.** Shift from reactive responses to perceived problems to proactive approaches based on visions, models and conceptions of change. Professional development plans should focus on organizational change rather than individual teacher remediation. Redesigning the structure of schools to support and sustain change is as equally important as instructional change.
- **Involve a wide array of stakeholders including community.** Involve all relevant stakeholders in the school community in planning, educating and evaluating learning successes. Support of influential central office personnel and a vision of systems change are key. Invite input and collaboration from university educators. This collaboration can help conceive, implement and evaluate professional development seeking to promote positive school change.
- **Change the many cultures.** Rather than treating school culture as monolithic, consider it as a composite. Pay attention to the cultures of teachers, classrooms, schools, the district and school-community interactions.
- **Flexibility.** Adapt, depending on the goals of the educational reform: one size does not fit all. Incorporating theory, research and practitioner reflection can help frame the context.

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Engage Whole School Communities

...By whole school, I mean every teacher, every teacher assistant, and every specialist, and everyone who interacts with the children in that building... The reason for this is so that everyone gets the same dose of whatever it is that they are doing. It's a common shared experience, not just the information or the instruction. It is about sharing the understanding and shape of it.

-Gerry Howell, A+ Schools

In whole school approaches, the entire educational site adopts a particular philosophy of education arising from the arts. Significant segments or entire faculties, staff and support staff participate in professional development. Those moving the reform forward induct the school's educators to the philosophy. Teachers, administrators, principals and aides learn about the reform's background content, approaches, and assumptions. In some cases, others participate. These partners could include parents, student leaders, teaching artists, cultural organization administrators, or researchers. Specific commitments are expected from the school, such as:

- Participation over a minimum number of years
- Specific resources (space, materials, equipment, release time, support of substitute teachers, coordination, participation in evaluation, funding)
- Specific benchmarks of good practice (such as core philosophical principles or a particular curriculum).

Gerry Howell, Executive Director of A+ Schools, insists the frequent practice of involving a few key educators in reform and expecting them to come back and teach the rest is simply ineffective. Recent comparative research by [Arts Impact](#) suggests that having the whole school peer network including school leaders provides more resilience to the changes that can derail education reform.

Educators who find the arts-based, whole school approach effective become energized by the extra attention, the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in their schools and across a network and the influx of resources; they help shape the approach. Arts specialists may move from the periphery to a more central role in curriculum development, teaming with other educators and advising the school community on the quality component of the arts portion of the reform.

Some communities seek to change a critical mass of schools across a district. Some of these communities experience transformation of school identity. See [Center for Arts Education, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education, Fairfax County School District & The Kennedy Center, Greenville County School District](#).

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Deepen School-Cultural Community Partnerships

The arts in a true partnership become a primary part of the life of the school and the community, and the life of the school and the community become a primary part of the life of the arts learning.

-Gail Burnaford & Arnold Aprill, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education

Long-term relationships among educators and the cultural community expand upon the arts-in-education approach of the early days of the National Endowment for the Arts. A brief artist exposure may not change the way a teacher teaches, but a sustained relationship over time can make a difference. Often, longer term relationships among elementary classroom teachers and teaching artists are catalyzed by cultural organizations. Here, artists may bring a rich understanding of a particular art form while the generalists come with a sophisticated understanding of their students and, in many cases, proficiency with student learning and assessment strategies. A few common professional development elements in many of these partnership learning communities include:

- Flow among teachers and teaching artists, who take turns teaching, modeling and observing
- Significant time spent in planning, debriefing after teaching and observation; more planning
- Joint examination of student work where partners come together to build a learning community around student work in the arts and other subject areas
- Refining the assessment of student work together

See Arts in Basic Curriculum Project, *Big Thought: A Learning Partnership*, Center for Arts Education, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE), Kansas City, Kansas School District.

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Cultivate Researcher Relationships

A researcher can offer a practiced ability to step back from a situation and analyze it. Researchers from many backgrounds can be useful. Sociologists help see the big picture and put things in context. Art, music, dance and theatre researchers bring a depth of arts content knowledge, familiarity with the literature and knowledge of authentic assessment to each discipline. Statisticians help specify indicators and develop methods to capture and quantify evidence. Qualitative researchers help dig deeper than the 'whether or not' questions to develop theories about why things happen in learning. Education researchers ground theory with their understanding of the shifting, complex nature of educational practice.

Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero has formed research partnerships with a variety of school districts, such as Traverse City Area Public Schools in Michigan or Alameda County in California, to explore how lessons from arts learning can shape our understanding of the thinking and learning. Networks such as the Arts Education Partnership, Music in Education National Consortium (MIENC) and Perpich Center's Arts Quality Network integrate researchers within the group.

Center for Arts Education (CAE) and Perpich Center for Performing Arts makes a point to cultivate relationships with local university professors or graduate students. The practitioners and theoreticians help each other make sense of the learning journey. The relationships outlast specific funding initiatives and each partner looks out for the other formally and informally.

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Reform Through Arts Integration

Arts integration is... A powerful vehicle to cross the boundaries of core subjects and arts concepts, affective and cognitive modes of expression, form and content, processes and products, the self and the world.... A search for the rightness of fit between domains of knowledge across the boundaries of disciplines.

-Gail Burnaford, Arnold Aprill, Cynthia Weiss, Renaissance in the Classroom, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE)

What does arts integration look like?

Many arts-based education reform efforts adopt strategies that include integrating the arts with each other and among other subjects. What does arts integration look like? The Civil War offers a ripe topic for interdisciplinary learning through arts integration, as Susanne Burgess, Tennessee's Southeast Center for the Arts' Director of Music Education, finds. Teachers can bring out both the history of the war, its reasons and effects, and the arts learning from the ways people expressed themselves during that tumultuous time.

One of Burgess' lesson plans walks students through two folk songs from the era as jumping off points for deeper arts understanding. What might the composer have been talking about? How do the minor key and the form affect our perception of the song? Students compose part of a ballad in response to historical information, putting themselves in the shoes of an artist from another time.

University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement developed useful tools to characterize and rate arts integration in collaboration with Minneapolis Public Schools and the Perpich Center for Performing Arts. At the most basic level, minimal arts content assists learning in other subject areas. For example, when a class studies Egypt and celebrates with a festival showcasing student-made dioramas about building the pyramids, that's arts integration missing the arts. The teaching focuses primarily on the history content; visual arts standards are not intentionally addressed although a visual arts activity is incorporated.

A lot of people want to jump to integration, without ever teaching teachers what is in the art form. Then you get superficial [arts education].

-Kristine Alexander, The California Arts Project (TCAP)

In Stockton Unified School Districts, generalists and music educators moved beyond a basic level of integration. Together, educators increased their proficiency in teaching music using the Orff-Schulwerk method in combination with the adopted language arts curriculum. In such arts-based education reform efforts, the development of skills in advocacy, thinking across the curriculum and envisioning collaborative possibilities helps participating educators work with the system to support arts integration.

At more complex levels of arts integration, referred to as two-way or authentic integration, a synergy exists among the arts content and other subject areas. The content and instruction focus both on skills and understanding within the arts disciplines as well as the learning in other core subjects. For instance, students could learn about both science and music as they make simple string and box instruments while exploring how longer strings make lower sounds and shortened or shorter strings ring higher. To encourage this more authentic interconnection among disciplines, the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations recommends:

An interdisciplinary focus promotes learning by providing students with opportunities to solve problems and make meaningful connections within the arts and across disciplines. Interdisciplinary curriculum encourages students to generate new insights and to synthesize new relationships between ideas. The Consortium recommends that arts specialists seek a balance between disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning emphases in their classrooms and in their work with other teachers in the schools

-Consortium of National Arts Education Associations

See Big Thought: A Learning Partnership, Dramatic Results & Long Beach Unified School District, Hubbard Street Dance MAP Program Theatre, Music Center: Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County.

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Promising Practices

A+ Schools. This decade-long whole school reform effort views “the arts as fundamental to how teachers teach and students learn in all subjects.” The North Carolina A+ Schools reform effort, now based out of the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, relies on a strong, involved, active network of classroom teachers, arts specialists and education administrators to adapt and improve the work. Applying cognitive research, including Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences, to their learning environments, A+ Schools work to integrate the arts into all instruction and strengthen the arts disciplines offered as discrete subjects in the school. This comprehensive education reform strategy focuses on improving the learning opportunities for all students.

An intensive weeklong summer institute attended by the entire school community – from teachers, principals and secretaries, to key community partners – inducts schools into the A+ Network. Master teachers experienced in this arts-infused approach comprise the A+ Fellows, who help to teach and support the increasing collaboration among educators. Both classroom teachers and arts specialists learn to foster two-way arts integration, support hands-on learning and approach the curriculum in a thematic way. A principal’s network supports the education administrators who need to navigate this reform throughout the changing educational climate.

According to *The Arts and Education Reform: Lessons from a Four-Year Evaluation of the A+ Schools Program*, a summative report of four years of evaluation results include:

- Adaptations in A+ schools: A decentralized approach leads to each A+ School’s application of the general tenets of the reform, while making the particulars work for its community. School changes include legitimization of the arts, increased communication within and across schools and community, as well as an increased organizational capacity and a more focused educational community identity.
- Changes in teachers: Participating educators increased ownership of the A+ core principles. Also, teachers developed their own repertoire of A+ strategies they were comfortable using in the classroom. Overall use of these strategies increased, including employing:
 - hands-on instruction
 - integration of arts activities with other core subject content
 - thematic units
 - multiple intelligence connections in lessons

Effects also included: greater collaboration among educators, increased involvement in leadership positions and development of appropriate, substantive assessment models that could better measure the learning than the existing high stakes standardized assessments. As evidence of the increasing entrepreneurial capacity of the network itself, the A+ Network assessment committee secured a Goals 2000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to support the efforts, kicking off a continued commitment to developing relevant assessment for this burgeoning community.

Student changes related to the adoption of A+ teaching practice include: increased opportunities to experience core concepts in the curriculum, to connect with and use them; increased student engagement in learning, offering a path to learning for a greater number of the students and

therefore more equity; improved attendance and behavior; and students holding their own or demonstrating improvements on the North Carolina accountability system introduced during the pilot.

Other communities of interest:

HOT Schools. For more than a decade, Connecticut Commission on the Arts' education reform effort has integrated arts into school reform. Strategies include a network of schools learning to infuse the arts into teaching, incentives to deepen arts and cultural partnerships, and a philosophical commitment to support democratic practices for the whole school community. HOT Schools supports a culture of sharing and showing works of art and learning in progress to the wider school and family community as a demonstration of the learning process. They offer an intensive summer institute open to core HOT Schools and outsiders. This helps schools learn from each other as they work to retain their identity and commitment within this reform.

ArtsLit: The ArtsLiteracy Project: Brown University This arts-infused literacy education program's long relationship with Central Falls School District offers a research and development arm for both partners.

See also Arizona Artist Teacher Institutes, Lincoln Center Institute, Minneapolis Public Schools: Arts for Academic Achievement (AAA), Rhode Island Arts Learning Network.

Lessons Learned

Think more broadly than a workshop or institute. Think of support for educators and their learning community to allow for big changes over time. Consider a broad vision of reform that includes the arts. Create opportunities for whole site-based school staffs to learn from each other, explore an integrated, thematic approach to teaching and learning, and support their practice and adaptations needed to try it in practice. Link this to overall education reform efforts, where the arts can offer a key learning strategy. Support arts as a core discipline along with other subject areas of importance.

Learn from existing arts-based reform efforts. Perhaps an existing network has a philosophy that fits well with your educational community and welcomes new members. Explore it by sending a reconnaissance team of educators, administrators and partners to an intriguing, intensive, and formal professional development session. Then, assess relevant and important elements from the approach and investigate resources for joining, adapting, and cultivating your own approach. Recruit arts specialists as central members of the faculty, so they share their skills throughout the educational planning and reform effort. Create the time, resources and incentives for them to develop the capacities to participate at this higher level.

Evaluations and reflections of various arts-based reform efforts yield helpful lessons, particularly useful for the main professional development stakeholders interested in improving their efforts:

- Flexibility and adaptability to the specific needs of the school community is critical. It is the ownership of educators and those that work with them that translates the concept into practice. Develop tenets, then expect variability as local stakeholders run with what works for them. Whole school reform may be more sustainable than working with pockets of staff
- Time + Depth + Commitment = Change. With ABC schools, the more time involved in the arts learning community, the higher the level of arts achievement.
- With HOT Schools, the closer to attainment of the core goals, the more measurably successful the school reform.
- The momentum of a larger arts-based education reform effort can help inspire leadership capacity and entrepreneurial activity in educators.
- Educators may develop and apply skills as grant writers, leaders, public relations experts, grassroots organizers and policy experts to help shepherd change in their communities.
- Remember to integrate arts disciplines with other arts disciplines, creating a peer network among arts forms. Music, dance, theatre and visual arts have much to offer each other. See [Mt. Diablo Unified School District & Civic Arts Education](#).
- Build on an existing whole school reform effort. See [Greenville County School District](#).

Useful Tools

Arts Integration:

Arts Integration Frameworks, Research and Practice: A Literature Review

Burnaford, Gail et al. Arts Education Partnerships, 2007.

Describes the research related to arts integration teaching and learning as it exists in published and available studies and reports written between 1995 and 2007.

Authentic Connections: Interdisciplinary Work in the Arts

Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 2002.

Guide on levels of interdisciplinary teaching and the arts with examples

Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development

Deasy, Richard. Arts Education Partnership, 2002.

Details the relationship between learning in dance, drama, music, multiple arts, and visual arts, and the development of fundamental academic and social skills.

Renaissance in the Classroom: Arts Integration and Meaningful Learning

Burnaford, Gail, Aprill and Cynthia Weiss. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001.

A nuts-and-bolts guide to arts integration, across the curriculum in grades K-12.

Education Reform:

Arts for Academic Achievement: Summative Evaluation Report

Ingram, Debra and Karen R. Seashore. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, 2003.

Report summarizes findings from longitudinal evaluation of the Arts for Academic Achievement program.

Third Space: When Learning Matters

Deasy, Richard J. and Lauren M. Stevenson. Arts Education Partnership, 2005.

Describes the process of transformation in ten elementary, middle, and high schools serving economically disadvantaged students in urban and rural regions of the country.

Your Turn

- How can the arts support and catalyze the educational mission of your school community?
- What role can the arts play within the current and future priorities of your school community?
- What stakeholders and leaders do you have already invested in the arts learning community's vision; who could be cultivated?
- What opportunities exist to deepen existing partnerships with the cultural community?
- What strategies could increase the visibility and legitimacy of your efforts?
- What funding sources could enhance your efforts?
- How can you piggyback on any existing general education reform efforts in your school or district?