

Running Head: Impact of Arts Integration

The Impact of Arts Integration: Voice, Choice and Access

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Abstract

How are the arts being taught to students with disabilities in conjunction with academic, cognitive, and social skills? During Phase I, VSA arts conducted 34 focus groups and interviews in 16 states over two years. During Phase II, a pilot project was implemented to examine the efficacy of using rubrics to measure academic, cognitive, social, and artistic skill development for students. The pilot project, involving seven teachers from seven states, built on findings from the focus groups and interviews. Results from both Phase I and Phase II suggest that the arts have an important role to play in helping students to demonstrate their knowledge of academic content areas. Moreover, teachers and artists alike cited numerous examples of how the arts provided both access to learning and opportunities for students to express their preferences and interests.

## The Impact of Arts Integration: Voice, Choice, and Access

### *Arts Integration*

What is the role of the arts in the instruction of students with various disabilities? Relatively little data are available to help educators understand the impact of arts instruction and integrated arts instruction (i.e., instruction in music, visual arts, drama, dance, and creative writing) on either artistic skill development or academic, social, and cognitive learning of students with disabilities (Information Center on Disabilities and Gifted Education, 2003). While current literature supports a positive relationship between substantive arts involvement and social, cognitive, and artistic development, much of the data are qualitative in nature. Few studies have provided quantitative data and fewer still have specifically addressed the arts and students with disabilities (Corbett, Wilson, & Morse, 2002; Deasy, 2002; Winner & Hetland, 2002).

Several recent studies have focused on arts integration for the larger population of students, with and without disabilities. Winner and Hetland (2000), for example, conducted a meta-analysis of 188 studies (synthesized from 11,467 articles, books, theses, conference presentations, technical reports, unpublished papers, and unpublished data) prepared between 1950 and 1999 that sought in some way to address the connection between the artistic disciplines and academic achievement (i.e., standardized evaluation of literacy and numeracy). The criteria for inclusion within the meta-analysis involved evaluation of sample size, experimental controls, and significance levels. Their findings suggested three areas with reliable causal links between the arts and academic achievement: listening to music and spatial-temporal reasoning; learning to play music and spatial reasoning; and classroom drama and verbal skills. Two additional areas of

equivocal support (with reliable causal links based on very few studies) included: learning to play music and mathematics, and dance and nonverbal reasoning.

Deasy (2002), in a compendium of 64 studies on the connection between the arts and student academic and social development, offered insights into the specific contribution of the arts disciplines, suggesting a strong relationship between the arts and student learning and achievement. In this compendium, *Critical Links*, Deasy found that the impact of the arts was particularly important for students with disabilities or other students with special learning needs. He also concluded that the arts impact academics in the following ways:

- drama develops higher-order language and literacy skills;
- music enhances language learning;
- art experiences develop literacy and writing skills; and
- arts experiences develop numeracy skills.

Several *Critical Links* studies directly addressed the connection between arts instruction and students with disabilities. For example, Mentzer and Boswell outlined the effects of a movement poetry program on creativity of children with behavioral disorders. Their findings suggested that, when combined, poetry and movement may contribute to engagement, development of creativity, and social and/or motor learning in children with behavioral disorders. De la Cruz analyzed the effects of creative drama on the social and oral language skills of children with learning disabilities. The study found that the creative drama program increased the social skills in all four clusters of social behaviors of the students in the control group. Kariuki and Honeycutt offered an investigation of the effects of music on two emotionally disturbed students' writing: Their writing skills increased by two letter grades when they listened to music as they wrote. According to results from research conducted by Wilhelm, the reading skills of two seventh-

grade boys, who had been classified as learning disabled and considered reluctant readers, were strengthened as they practiced visual arts activities.

Closely related to findings regarding the academic value of arts integration is Eisner's leadership in articulating the relationship of the arts to cognition and academic content (2002). He defines arts integration as simply "emerging the arts curriculum into other arts and nonarts curricula" (p.40). Eisner hypothesized that as individuals engage in the arts, their understanding of concepts shifts in ways that enhance cognition and literacy. Eisner's premise is that while the arts have significant intrinsic value, they also enhance a variety of cognitive abilities, including perception, memory, and ability to interpret events and concepts, in part due to changes in neurobiological functioning and perception that occur in the process of creating art.

In explaining a structure for arts integration in relationship to cognitive and academic gains, Eisner reflects on how hands-on experiences with visual arts, music, and literature sometimes help students understand particular periods in history. He also elaborates on enhancements in problem-solving skills that occur when students are engaged in the arts: Sometimes curricula and lessons are designed so that students are required to use multiple perspectives from several disciplines, including the arts, to demonstrate the scope of a problem and/or potential solutions. According to Eisner, as students engage in the arts, they learn skills such as observation, problem-solving, organizing, and communicating that not only are necessary for the artistic experience, but are also skills that can be transferred to other learning situations. As Fiske (1999) indicates, "evidence of learning in one domain supports and stimulates learning in others, which supports a complex web of influence ...and provides compelling evidence that *students' achievement is heightened in an environment with high quality arts education offerings* and a school climate supportive of active and productive learning" (p. viii).

Eisner's theories are supported in part by research such as that completed by Catterall (1998) with the Department of Education's National Elementary Longitudinal Studies database of 25,000 students. Catterall examined the database by dividing students into those with high levels of arts participation versus low levels. Those with high levels of arts participation outperformed others on virtually every measure.

For students with disabilities and others, a major advantage of an arts-based approach to instruction may be that students have opportunities to make decisions as they create. Thus learning becomes hands-on as students work with the artistic medium. For students who are involved in creating or performing through arts integration, academics sometimes cease to exist as vague and distant concepts. Instead, as students have opportunities to demonstrate their own views and interpretations of the academic subject matter, learning becomes more participatory, enhancing understanding. Moreover, as Onosko and Joergensen (1998) and others have indicated, the arts are sometimes recommended as a part of an instructional strategy for use in inclusive classrooms, particularly as either "openers" to get attention and create interest, or as culminating projects for students to demonstrate their learning, particularly in cooperative learning situations (Qin, Johnson, & Johnson, 1995).

Despite these positive indicators, and due in part to the complexity of arts education and school curricula, research to date has not established a direct causal relationship between arts-based teaching and learning and higher academic achievement. Moreover, little research is available to further understanding about *how* teachers integrate the arts for students with disabilities, teachers' *impressions of the value of arts integration* with this population, or its *actual impact on cognition or academic achievement*.

Research into the impacts of the arts and arts integration is influenced by measurement issues such as how to quantify both quality of artistic expression and also the impact of the arts, which are not presented in isolation. A very few researchers have measured gains on standardized academic tests (Deasy, 2002; Catterall, 2004). However, because of compounding variables, it is difficult to assert that it is the arts themselves and not some co-occurring variable that accounts for differences in academic or cognitive learning. When considering the needs of students with disabilities, this research is further complicated by such factors as the training and experience of the music, visual arts, and drama teachers and whether these instructors are prepared to instruct students with specific types of disabilities. Such variables as how the arts are presented, whether instruction is discovery-oriented or explicit, the frequency and duration of the instruction, and whether the instruction occurs in an integrated or isolated classroom may influence the impact of the arts on academic learning, social skills, and cognition. Furthermore, in terms of social skills, we could find no research that compared social skills development with arts instruction on either normed measures such as the AAMR Adaptive Behavior Scales (Nihira, Leland, & Lambert, 1993) or on formative assessments using single subject designs.

Another potential approach to measuring the impact of arts instruction involves the use of interviews or focus groups with educators, artists, students, parents, and other school personnel such as administrators to gain their impressions concerning the value of the arts. As our research shows (Mason, Thormann, & Steedly, 2004a), these measures provide an initial understanding of the value of the arts, but leave many questions unanswered. However, in searching for approaches to measuring the functional relationship between the arts and integration of arts instruction and learning, social skills, cognition, and artistic skill development, we located several web sites for educators that display rubrics that are used to evaluate both the quality of

artistic products and performances and also the impact of these experiences on cognition and academic and social skills. Several of these web sites actually posted rubrics for measuring artistic, social, and academic gains for state standards of learning (Pistone & Lathrow, 2004).

### *Rubrics*

Rubrics are commonly used in inclusive classrooms as a criterion-based measurement system to evaluate student performance on daily assignments as well as for longer reports or projects. One of the strengths of rubrics is that because evaluation criteria are explicit, students and educators are aware of the criteria prior to completing tasks. This awareness can result in modifications to the instructional approach to make directions more clear and to strengthen academic or cognitive outcomes.

Rubrics, which provide performance-based descriptions of tasks within an assignment, are tools that teachers can use to set forth guidelines that are used to judge or score student work. Rubrics used as scoring procedure are highly flexible and can help teachers to reveal authenticity and product quality (Taggart, Phifer, Nixon, & Wood, 1998). Our understanding of rubrics to date indicated that for rubrics to be effective, students need: (a) a clearly specified target, (b) the opportunity to help define quality work, (c) feedback that describes what students did and didn't do in relationship to their goal, and (d) the opportunity to correct or self-adjust their work before submitting the final material (Wiggins & Iura, 1997).

### *Research Purpose and Key Questions*

VSA arts, as *the* international organization focused on the arts abilities of individuals with disabilities, was interested in gaining a better understanding of the value of the arts instruction in academic settings for this population. VSA arts is a nonprofit organization founded in 1974 by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith. Five million people participate in VSA arts

programs every year through a network of affiliates nationwide and in more than 60 countries. VSA arts initiated a teacher-focused investigation of arts-based work to better understand the impact of the arts in education. To address key questions relevant to studying the impact of the arts, we conducted the research in two phases:

Phase I: Focus Group Research

Phase II: Implementation of an arts evaluation procedure (rubrics)

*Phase I: Focus Group Research*

The key questions addressed in Year 1 centered on teachers' perceptions of the arts' impact on students with disabilities in terms of social, cognitive, academic, and artistic skill development. The following questions were used to guide the research in Year 1:

1. In what ways does arts-based instruction meet the academic, cognitive, social, and artistic needs of students with disabilities?
2. What are teacher and artist-in-residence perceptions regarding the impact of the arts on the academic achievement of students with disabilities?
3. How is student learning evaluated and assessed within the VSA arts Affiliate Network?

*Methodology*

Thirty-four focus groups and interviews were conducted in 16 states over a two-year period. Teachers, artists in residence, and VSA arts affiliate directors in rural, urban, and suburban areas in various geographical regions participated in these sessions. Across the two years, representation was obtained from elementary-, middle-, and high-school teachers in inclusive environments and special-education centers. The teachers and artists described their experiences in instructing students with a wide array of sensory, physical, emotional/behavioral, cognitive,

and learning disabilities. The majority of the participants were certified teachers. Of those, almost 50% had Master's degrees in education.

Focus groups/interviews were conducted in schools and special-education centers during 60-90 minute sessions using a standard protocol and a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) whereby questions evolved as information was gleaned.

In Year 1, questions centered on the impact of integrated arts instruction. In Year 2, this shifted to a more in-depth presentation by participants of *a successful integrated arts lesson*, with information on how the session was planned, taught, and evaluated. Both in Year 1 and 2, the focus-group researcher also observed artist residencies, exhibits, and culminating events at several sites.

Each focus-group interview was audio-recorded and transcribed, and two independent researchers who were not staff members at VSA arts visually scanned the data for major themes and then sorted data into topical categories. Consistent with the grounded theory approach, data categories were added as themes emerged.

#### *Data Analysis*

We used *QDA Miner* (<http://www.kovcomp.co.uk/QDAMiner/>) to analyze findings from transcriptions of the 34 focus groups/interviews, with QDA Miner used more extensively in Year 2 when based on a visual scan and results from the 2004 research, the researcher entered 35 variables into the computerized QDA miner program to conduct an electronic search of the terms. After the search was completed, the researcher again conducted a visual search of the 18 focus-group reports and hand-coded some related items (for example, drumming was coded under music).

The primary variables that were coded and resulted in sufficient data for analysis are presented in Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 here

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*Focus Groups: The Impact of the Arts*

The stories of the focus group participants and interviewees provided considerable anecdotal evidence regarding the value of both including students with disabilities in arts activities, and of integrating the arts across the curriculum. In listening to the teachers' comments, the time and effort involved in arts integration were beneficial from several perspectives. Teachers offered numerous examples of how the arts provided depth to the curriculum, increased student engagement, and allowed for greater freedom in instructional practice. Three main themes emerged with respect to the way in which students' social, cognitive, academic, and artistic skills developed through engaging in the arts: voice, choice, and access.

*Voice: Social Skill Development and Communication*

The arts can provide the opportunity and space for a student with disabilities to find and explore his or her voice—however that voice may manifest. In this respect, students are not “given” their voices; rather they find their voices through the process of trying on, exploring, and rehearsing. So in that regard the arts provide a way for students to express their understandings, their feelings, and their beliefs. “Voice” within this context refers to the unique and individual way students with disabilities can use an art form, and the process of creating art, to communicate information about themselves and their understanding of the world. The teachers who participated in this project often spoke about the opportunity that engaging in art-making

provided for them to learn about their students in ways that would not have otherwise been possible. Specifically, the arts also helped students find *appropriate* ways to communicate. The arts helped students express anger, frustration, fear, confusion, and unhappiness.

Voice is also closely tied to notions of confidence and self-esteem—when people learn they have something to say, they often want to say it. Time and again, teachers related that the arts are a way for their students, who often fall outside of rigidly defined notions of success, to contribute to the community. The arts become a conduit for positive attention and what educators perceived to be positive increases in self-esteem.

*Choice: Cognitive Development and Problem Solving*

Choice is also central to the art making enterprise. An artist chooses both medium and message. The art making process allows for the artist to dictate the twists, turns, and ultimate destination. This is particularly important for students with disabilities who engage in art making in an educational context. So much of life is scripted for individuals with disabilities, and when well crafted, the educational experience of making art puts the script in the hands of the individual artist-student. Through the arts, students who are typically never asked how they view the world are given the opportunity to share their thoughts.

The arts continually engage students with disabilities in the acts of observation, rehearsing, weighing, and judging, all of which are essential tools for learning in general. As they decide how paint goes on canvas, what to say onstage, or how to format a poem that they are writing, students have opportunities to hone the critical capacity for decision-making that will enable them to be active and independent members of society. The teachers with whom we spoke repeatedly mentioned that offering students choice and opportunity, within the context of creating art in this instance, prepared students to make better choices in the future.

For example, when asked about how art facilitates problem solving, teachers discussed the relationship to sequencing and determining how to organize and improvise with the materials at hand. Students, as they engage in the visual arts, drama, or music, think through what to do first, second, third, etc. As one teacher indicated, “In drama there is always problem solving, figuring out how to approach the action and the character, how to create the set, establish the mood, and learn the lines.” One participant said, “Certainly in theater work with students, one of the basic things was to get someone to step away from just what do you want, and who are you like and to think, ‘What would this character want?’ The very act of portraying a character is a step toward critical thinking because it takes you outside yourself.”

An elementary educator spoke about using role-play with her students. She asserted they used creative drama as a strategy to problem solve. In the game “Rewind,” her students created a multimedia performance about bullying. The performance involved students acting out a scenario in which the students role-played bullying. After they’d portrayed bullying, they would then “rewind”—move backward—and then they’d move forward with another alternative. A teacher relayed that when walking down the corridor one day, a year after this play was performed, [one child] went flying down the corridor. Typically, a teacher would say, “What are you doing? Stop.” This time, the teacher looked at the student, and [the student] just said, “rewind,” and corrected himself.

*Access: Artistic Skill Development*

Teachers in focus groups talked about the inherent ability of the arts to “level the playing field” and “meet students where they are.” “Leveling” and “meeting” are the essence of access within the educational milieu. For example, during a “peacemaker project,” where students used pastels to draw portraits of famous peacemakers, they were able to meet the artistic curricular

objective (drawing the human form) in the way that they desired and were able. The students involved in an exploration of poetry accessed the language-arts curriculum in individual ways through writing and illustrating a poem. There were no wrong poems or illustrations. The students who were learning mime created and physically explored narrative in ways not bound by language or physical ability. The art form became an avenue for access.

As participants indicated, for some students the challenge of learning a new visual-art technique, playing a musical instrument, singing a song, or participating in a theatre piece, for example, can become an important learning activity, leading to a sense of deep satisfaction as they develop their artistic skills. The inherent flexibility of all art forms allows students to engage in art-making to the extent to which they are able. By extension, when students make art they are participating in the educational experience in a unique, individual, and important way. Cultivating artistic skills deserves a place alongside social, cognitive, and academic skill development within the landscape of schools and classrooms.

#### *Other Common Themes*

Following are three examples of other common themes that emerged from the data. Each is followed by a quote from one of the focus-group participants.

1. **Administrator involvement was appreciated and was viewed as a tremendous support to arts integration.** One participant explained the impact of the principal on arts integration and the atmosphere in the school: “This year, what we’ve been doing as a faculty is taking a look at what I used to do individually—what do I want to repair? What’s our problem? And writing was the problem. In third grade, they’ve never been tested on writing, and now everybody is going to write and be tested in grades 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and so that’s where we wanted to look. We sat in on what [the principal] calls a tuning protocol: He gathers together some teachers, and

we started identifying what our problem is, and that's where we generated this particular grant...using the arts as a way of getting through some of our difficulties. For two years now, it's been extremely successful.

- 2. Expectations for student involvement varied; however, in several cases the primary expectation was that students would be engaged in the activity and, with some support from the teacher, would create art and somehow indicate that they enjoyed the activity.**

An artist in residence shared this success:

This particular age is Kindergarten and [they're] kind of ill-prepared for sitting and listening, and being in a school. So the child will sit there, and the teacher, at the end, will say—and I'm looking at the kid the whole time, and of course—same story—the teacher says, “Oh, we've never seen him sit this long, we've never seen him raise his hand, we've never seen him get up and actually try to do something.”

- 3. The arts made learning fun and exciting for teacher and students.** The following example, in which the arts were used for a unit on the human body, shows the creativity involved, as well as the learning that occurred:

We worked on a project about the human body. I learned a lot; I didn't know where things were. We built a life-size working digestive system, a light-up central nervous system, a flexible skeletal system, [and] the circulatory system. So we built them out of junk... Three of them were cut out of wood—the kids drew silhouettes of themselves, or people, and they were life-size. For the central nervous thing, they nailed in nails—thousands of nails—and thousands of feet of telephone wire, because they wound it, and wound it; and they kept hitting their finger with the hammer and [would] say “Ow!”—and we said, that's the central nervous system. It stood up, and there were Christmas

lights on it, and that was like stepping on a nail, so the light would go up to the brain...It was perfect from the idea that this is all happening, electrically, throughout our body, so the lights were going up to the spinal cord, connecting to the brain, and there was another pattern that was going back down. [We could say,] “See the impulse? It’s going right up, and now it’s coming right back down.” [It] was fully three-dimensional. The face opened up, there was a tongue, and there were teeth. We used old rope lights for the intestines, and you could actually put little candies down the throat; it wouldn’t come out the butt, but it was cool. One of my degrees is in sculpture, so that fit in perfectly, but they didn’t learn science, they learned the art; but they learned science by [doing art].

### *Phase II: Arts Evaluation*

#### *Methodology*

Seven artists in residence and teachers from throughout the United States participated in Phase II research where they were instructed in the use of rubrics, which they then implemented over two months. The methodology that was used was a Community of Practice.

#### *An Arts Community of Practice*

Despite the efficiencies that can be achieved by such an approach, teachers have received little guidance about how to modify rubrics and “rubrics instruction” for students with disabilities (Salend, 2001; Whittaker, Salend, & Duhaney, 2001). So some procedure was needed to make sure that the teachers and artists across the seven sites had some common knowledge. The concept of a community of practice (CoP) comes from the work of Wenger and Snyder, who define it as “a group of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise.” CoPs can provide an insightful approach to facilitate changes in attitudes and behaviors. The theory behind CoPs is based on a social learning approach that indicates

essentially that learning occurs in a social context and will be most meaningful as individuals share knowledge, ask questions of others, and reveal their concerns.

According to Saint-Onge and Wallace (2003), CoPs not only help develop common language, methods, and models around specific competencies, they also increase expertise by sharing knowledge and expertise in a larger population. This can lead to more efficient problem solving. Buysse, Sparkman, and Wesley (2003) have suggested that these communities offer the potential for practitioners and researchers to “co-construct knowledge” because these communities “represent an ongoing enterprise that invites both groups to share, build upon, and transform what they know about effective practices. Because the focus is not a single research study, but rather the development of a professional community, fundamental changes in how researchers and practitioners establish mutual trust and sustain long-term relationships can be expected” (p. 265). These interdependent communities provide for *bi-directional learning* as learning is generated within social and cultural contexts. In education, in schools, and with practitioners in particular, these communities are supported by significant research that supports “reflective practice” (Schon, 1987; Hatton & Smith, 1995).

A CoP that fosters knowledge of practice is created when researchers work hand-in-hand with teachers to build situated reasons, interests, goals, or concerns in their joint activities. As co-participants in the community, each provides what the other is unable to do alone, in a mutually interdependent fashion. We implemented a CoP process that borrowed from steps that Englert and Rozendal (2004) described as part of a CoP they implemented for a project to advance literacy. The steps included:

1. Establishing shared goals and purposes in areas of mutual concern,
2. Situating the work of the CoP in the broader field or discipline,

3. Fostering problem-solving conversations that helped participants access, implement, and transform practices,
4. Developing participatory mechanisms that allowed for the exchange of funds of knowledge and distributed expertise,
5. Promoting reflective talk about teaching and learning in ways that anchored and intertwined practical and theoretical concerns,
6. Developing participatory mechanism that helped members legitimize, reify, and disseminate the shared ways-of-doing, ways-of-teaching, and ways-of-knowing to individuals both inside and outside of the community, and
7. Evaluating the effectiveness of practices through an ongoing analysis of teaching and learning outcomes.

#### *Key Research Questions Phase II*

We investigated three primary research issues during Phase II:

- What is the efficacy of a rubric's approach to evaluation of the arts?
- How do teachers implement lesson plans for arts integration?
- What is the value of an electronic community of practice on teacher implementation of an integrated arts approach?

#### *The VSA Rubric Module*

We relied on Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), the outcomes-based model for special education developed by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO; Ysseldyke, Thurlow, & Erickson, 1994; [http://education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/Accountability/Account\\_Resources.htm](http://education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/Accountability/Account_Resources.htm)), and results found from scanning websites using the search terms

“rubrics, disabilities, art, music, creative writing, and drama” to create a model for rubrics for teachers and artists to use during Phase II (Mason, Thormann, & Steedly, 2004b).

The rubric module that we shared with participants during Phase II research was developed and refined during the first year of the project. The module included several examples of rubrics that included using the arts as introductory materials and activities, as the core instructional methods, and as culminating activities for students to demonstrate their learning. During Year 1, the rubric module was reviewed by a group of seven teachers and artists from three states who provided feedback to VSA through a phone conference. The primary modifications made prior to the dissemination of the rubric module was to strengthen the preschool component and reduce the number of examples.

*Participants.* Six teachers and one resident artist, including three males and four females, from the Southeast, Midwest, and Western United States, participated in the VSA CoP. The participants taught grades PreK–8, and included two special educators and one theater-arts, one music, and one visual-arts teacher. One of the teachers taught in a resource room and another was a teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in a public middle school. Participants signed a contract agreeing to the requirements of the project (see next section) and, upon submission of their final documents, received a stipend of \$1,000 for their involvement in this project.

The level of support for this project within schools and districts, as well as the degree of collaboration, varied among participants, with one participant continuing to work in isolation in her school throughout the project, even as many of the participants experienced considerable collaboration as planning was shared with general educators, music and art teachers, and special educators.

*General expectations and procedures.* Over the course of eight weeks, three conference calls were held with participants. The first one described the expectations for their involvement, the second was held midway through the project as a progress check, and the third focused on completing the requirements. Within six weeks after the end of the CoP, participants were to have submitted final surveys, examples of rubrics used with students, samples of student work, and permission forms signed by students and/or their parents or guardians that allowed VSA arts to display their art work.

*General findings.* All participants agreed that their participation in this CoP was a valuable activity and when asked to rate on a scale of 1–5 (5 being high) whether they learned new information, the mean rating was 3.8. Participants agreed that the most useful part of the experience was developing and using the rubrics and that they were eager to recommend this approach and experience to colleagues.

The following are a few comments that reinforce the value of this approach.

Regarding the value of the rubrics:

It was interesting to see the rubrics others were coming up with....They gave me ideas of ways I construct future rubrics for my class. I have to say that being involved in this made me look at rubrics with a more critical eye and made me develop rubrics for projects for which I had not previously used them.

When asked if they would recommend this approach to a colleague:

I already have. One music teacher tried the fractions/rhythm lesson...he was pleased with how the lesson went.

When asked about the most useful part of the experience:

Developing rubrics—I will use this to create portfolios within my class in the future.

When asked what they had learned:

We need to focus more on evaluating the results of student assessment to improve instruction.

When asked to provide some narrative reflecting on the experience:

I realized that involving students in the assessment and evaluation process is an essential part of the balanced assessment. I observed students becoming partners in the learning process. They gained a better sense of themselves as readers, writers, and thinkers. The students reflected on what they learned, and they developed tools to become more effective learners.

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### *Conclusions*

Kroeger, Burton, Comarata, et al. (2004) describe the value of a photography experience, “photovoice,” in which adolescents who were at risk of school failure used photographs to give voice to their concerns and document their realities. Kroeger et al. concluded that “photovoice helped us develop relationships that led to learning about the whole person. This led to personal connections. When this occurred, we began to understand differentiated learning on a deeper level” (p. 55). The outcomes from our research with teachers and artists support the notion that the arts can be an important tool in differentiating instruction. Moreover, if the arts are integrated in ways that allow students opportunities for choice, they may be a natural avenue for supporting self-determination and helping students to understand and value their own interests and strengths.”

While the evidence we have gathered is certainly preliminary, it does suggest that further research is warranted and that educators, when they reduce opportunities for students to engage in the arts (often because of pressures to increase academic achievement), may in fact be closing doors to deepening student understanding of concepts as well as decreasing opportunities for self-expression and an enjoyment of learning. To further understand these implications, both expanded use of the rubrics and focus groups or interviews with students with disabilities are recommended.

In terms of professional development and teacher preparation, arts integration often involves a collaborative component among general educators, arts specialists, and special educators. Some of the participants we interviewed, as well as those participating in the CoP, indicated that they tended to work in isolation and had little time allotted for collaborative planning. If the arts are an integral part of a student's learning experience, then it might be worthwhile to both research the extent to which arts integration is part of the teacher-preparation curriculum and how school districts, state departments of education, and national associations are providing for professional development activities to support arts integration. Where this is found to be lacking, further expansion of arts-integration CoPs may be valuable.

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**Table 1. Variables Searched with QDA Miner**

|                            |                           |                   |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| academics                  | general education         | preschool         |
| autistic                   | high school               | principal         |
| behavior                   | how (lessons were taught) | science           |
| choice                     | how teach-assess-         | success           |
| collaboration              | standards                 | reading           |
| communication              | IEP                       | visual arts       |
| confidence and self esteem | Independence              | visual impairment |
| creativity                 | Learning                  | vocational        |
| drama                      | Learning disability       | writing           |
| elementary                 | math                      |                   |
| evaluation                 | Mental retardation        |                   |
| expectations               | multi-media               |                   |
| funding                    | music                     |                   |
|                            | physical (disability)     |                   |

Integration of Arts with English/Writing: Art used to Express Understanding with Final Product

|   | 1                 | 2                                   | 3                                | 4   | 5  |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
|   | Needs improvement | Followed directions with few errors | Followed directions; no mistakes | Some interpretation; advanced knowledge; original thought | Showed appreciation of topic; thoughtful reflection; built on other work |
| Adequate planning                           |                   |                                     |                                  |   |  |
| Quality of draft writing                    |                   |                                     |                                  |   |  |
| Originality, imagination, problem solving   |                   |                                     |                                  |   |  |
| Demonstrated comprehension                  |                   |                                     |                                  |   |  |
| Completeness/thoroughness                   |                   |                                     |                                  |   |  |
| Elaboration, addition of interesting detail |                   |                                     |                                  |   |  |
| Use of art to enhance or complement meaning |                   |                                     |                                  |   |  |
| Technical aspects of writing/art            |                   |                                     |                                  |   |  |
| Quality of final product                    |                   |                                     |                                  |   |  |
| Total points                                |                   |                                     |                                  |   |  |

From Mason, Thormann, & Steedly (2004) as modified by a teacher in a CoP.