

A VSA *arts* Affiliate Research Project

**How Students with Disabilities Learn In and Through the Arts:
An Investigation of Educator Perceptions**

Christine Y. Mason, Mary S.Thormann, and Kathlyn M. Steedly

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PREFACE

The interrelationship among the arts, cognition, and academic learning is an area in which very little research has been conducted, particularly in reference to students with disabilities. Yet, integrating the arts into academic instruction is something that teachers, whether they be special or general educators, have done successfully and continue to do. Admittedly, the extent and quality of arts integration varies widely, dependent upon such factors as the background, skills, and comfort level of the individual teacher, as well as support from administrators and the resources available to assist teachers in the endeavor.

In this document, *VSA arts* is pleased to provide some exciting examples of how teachers are using the arts to enhance student motivation, engagement, and learning. During the focus groups it became apparent that the teachers hold a deep-seated belief that the arts provide a valuable contribution not only to learning for individual students, but also to the climate and culture of the school.

This project provides a beginning to an investigation that is very much needed. In these days of accountability, it is critical that we gain a better understanding of when, where, and how arts integration makes a difference in the lives of students with disabilities, their teachers, and their schools. Much work remains. The summary section of this report highlights what we believe are some of the most critical next steps. *VSA arts* is mindful of the many pressures schools and teachers are facing today. Nevertheless, we feel a sense of urgency to expedite the suggested research. We believe that finding answers to questions such as what types of art activities work best in which situations, or what professional development activities are needed, is critical to taking the arts off the back burner for students with disabilities.

We have a vision of schools in which students with disabilities excel, in part, because art is a meaningful aspect of their lives. We urge those reading this report to consider what arts integration could mean if it were implemented with adequate resources, sufficient professional development, and commitment from those involved.

James E. Modrick
Vice President, *VSA arts*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Arts integration relies on dedicated teachers, with invaluable assistance from artists in the community. So, our thanks go first to the many, many teachers who take time to provide arts opportunities to their students and thanks as well to the artists who have collaborated closely with school districts across the nation. Thanks too to the many students with disabilities who have excelled in the arts—your talents have helped to highlight the ways in which students with disabilities can participate in the arts and stress the value of arts involvement for you and your peers.

For this research we relied on assistance from the *VSA arts* affiliate directors and their staffs. Thank you for your help in pulling the focus groups together and for your continued support for the arts programs in your states and communities.

And finally, our thanks to the focus group participants who took time from their schedules to meet with us and to share your insights. Your comments have helped us set the stage for what we are hoping will be a line of research inquiry that will help the general public and educators to more clearly understand both the benefits of the arts and also ways to strengthen how the arts are used in schools with students with special needs.

Christine Mason, Mary Thormann, and Kathlyn Steedly
August 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Both the general public and educators are quite aware of the widely publicized exceptional artistic talents of a small number of individuals with disabilities. However, knowledge about the value of the arts for the broader population of individuals with disabilities, including students, is sorely lacking. Moreover, very little is known 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*.

The available research on the impact of the arts on learning provides substantial demonstration of a correlation between quality arts instruction and cognition and academic learning for students in general; however, much remains unknown. Finding a lack of definitive research on arts integration for students with disabilities, *VSA arts* researchers looked to the general arts literature and uncovered useful theory, significant advocacy from arts-focused educational groups, and recent research results that informed the current study. Eisner (2002) provided a philosophical underpinning for understanding arts integration. 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. These changes lead to shifts in understanding of concepts and enhanced cognition and literacy.

Particularly useful for understanding directions for the current research was a compendium of 64 recent studies, *Critical Links* (Deasy, 2002). Based on these studies, Deasy concluded that the impact of the arts was especially important for students with disabilities or other students with special learning needs. These conclusions are supported by other research such as the Annenberg studies being conducted by the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota. The CAREI study found that "for students in grades three, four, and five, arts integration is significantly related to gain scores in reading" and that "arts integration is more effective for third grade English Language Learners students and third grade students from low socioeconomic homes." (Ingram & Reidel, 2003, p.26)

Related research by Corbett, Wilson, and Morse (2004), *The Arts Are An "R" Too*, concludes that *the greater the degree of arts integration (time and resources committed to the efforts), the greater the impact on student achievement and the positive effects on school culture*.

In reviewing this related research, it became apparent that to understand the impact of the arts on outcomes for students with disabilities, knowledge was needed regarding the following:

- The levels of integration of the arts in academic subject matter;
- How teachers approached integrated (art-academic subject matter) instruction;
- The impact on students with disabilities in terms of academic achievement, cognition, communication, student attitudes, and social skills, including adjustment or coping skills; and
- The influence of arts integration on the school climate and the approach to instruction within that environment.

To address these concerns, *VSA arts* designed a research evaluation study to investigate the education-focused work of 10 *VSA arts* domestic affiliates. Specifically, the *VSA arts* Affiliate Research Project examined the way in which the arts, as manifest in the work of *VSA arts* affiliate organizations, integrates the arts and the impact on students' social, cognitive, and artistic skill development. The objectives of the current research follow:

This study sought to:

- Identify overarching themes common across the *VSA arts* affiliate network as related to learning for students with disabilities in and through the arts.
- Contribute to the body of research that seeks to better understand the nature of the arts' impact on learning for students with disabilities.
- Provide an evaluation framework clearly articulating academic, social, and artistic skill development of students with disabilities.
- Suggest areas for future investigation into the programming and practice of the *VSA arts* affiliate network.

Methodology

Objectives outlined by the U.S. Department of Education, a funding source for *VSA arts*, formed the foundation of this research study. The objectives stipulate that *VSA arts* and its affiliate organizations “increase artistic, cognitive, and social skills of participants, primarily persons with disabilities.” In simplest terms, this research effort sought to better understand how those objectives are met by looking closely at the work of affiliate organizations from the perspective of educators involved in program implementation. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education research objectives ask for creation of a “model of consistent quality data collection concentrating on effective measures” of artistic, cognitive, and social skill development.

The basic data for the Affiliate Research Project was collected at 10 affiliate sites. Each visit was approximately two days and over 90 persons participated in the 16 focus groups that were held. With few exceptions, each site visit included an interview with the executive director and/or education staff of the affiliate in order to get a broad sense of their education-focused work. Focus group interviews were conducted with teachers, teaching artists, administrators, and others involved with *VSA arts* programming, to gather information on arts integration, collaboration, and their impact on student achievement. Each focus group interview was recorded and transcribed. Artist residencies, exhibits, and culminating events were observed where possible.

In sum, 16 focus groups were conducted, nine artist residencies were viewed, six visual arts exhibits were visited, nine interviews were conducted with *VSA art* affiliate executive directors and their staff, and three culminating performances were attended in the process of visiting the participating affiliate organizations. Sixty teachers, and 32 others (primarily arts specialists or artists-in-residence) participated in the 16 focus groups across the 10 states. All focus group participants were volunteers who when asked by the local affiliate had agreed to participate in a 90-minute focus group on the value of using the arts to further academic, cognitive, and social skills.

Findings

The overwhelming theme that emerged from the 16 focus groups was that teachers without exception were enthusiastic about the involvement of students with disabilities with the arts. The teachers valued the involvement of students, were thrilled when students demonstrated artistic talents or abilities, and were encouraged when they observed students engaged with the arts. The arts captured the attention of students and teachers alike.

When discussing arts learning in the focus groups, the teachers made many references to the use of music, dance, movement, visual arts, and drama. The teachers also provided numerous examples of how the arts supported academic achievement and cognition across subject matter areas. The relative number of comments that were coded for various art media follow:

- 214 comments described use of music, dance, and movement.
- 173 comments referred to the value of visual arts, including drawing and painting.
- 127 comments provided information regarding the use of drama, theater, and plays.

In general, the comments from teachers reflected arts integration that was done under less than ideal conditions. A “shrunk time-frame” for integrating the arts was cited by a number of the participants. The best examples of arts integration were found in the early childhood and preschool programs where it is difficult to

imagine instruction that doesn't rely on music, movement, drawing, painting, and playing with clay. These items are a natural part of the early childhood curriculum. When asked in a screening survey to describe the role of arts in day-to-day teaching, 48% of the focus group participants indicated that they used art daily, 21% indicated once a week, and 9% once in month.

The teachers explained how the arts inherently provide for individualization of instruction, a key element to meeting the need of diverse learners: The arts allowed teachers to understand the strengths and weaknesses of students and to incorporate that knowledge into how they worked with students. Working with VSA's artists-in-residence allowed for moments when teachers were able to see their students in new ways.

The arts also open doors to communication. Some children used language (as result of their verbal training) to communicate, some used textbooks, others had a talking computer to speak for them, and some signed to communicate. The arts also helped students find *appropriate* ways to communicate. The arts were able to help students with major disabilities express anger, frustration, fear, confusion, and unhappiness. Art not gave students with disabilities a way to express themselves, but it also enhanced their self-esteem.

In response to questions regarding the impact of arts integration on academic achievement, many teachers lamented how the focus on standards has driven schools from providing students with art experiences. In some schools budgets for the arts have decreased; in many schools time is spent primarily on drill and practice for academic learning. Yet many, many teachers provided anecdotes about how students with and without disabilities who experience success with the arts and have experiences with the arts, tend to learn more and be more successful academically. Across the groups, one stunning result, that may be indicative of the potential for arts integration, was reported: After 15 years of implementing a curriculum where the arts were built into the curriculum, one school had the highest state assessment scores in the district. A poet, literary artist, and visual artist were given credit for developing art skills and raising scores. The poet "makes the kids think differently." In that strand of the state assessment, the school was 12 % above the state standard.

At this stage it appears that teachers are doing very little to address in a formal sense how the arts impact learning for students with disabilities. While possible rubrics for evaluating the impact of the arts were shared with some focus group participants, participants seemed much more interested in describing the impact of the arts than in attempting to measure it.

A follow-up teleconference discussion with seven teachers from three states clarified that while rubrics are used with state assessments, assessment of art ability or skill is not required, and that the arts curriculum is not specified in the assessments. These teachers who had volunteered to assist VSA *arts* through a

teleconference discussion on evaluation and rubrics, however, are interested in using rubrics to measure the impact of the arts on learning and welcome the opportunity to work with *VSA arts* in both developing and implementing these rubrics, particularly if this implementation may provide a vehicle for increasing funding or greater support for integration of the arts in schools.

One *VSA arts* affiliate director, in describing her interest in measuring the impact of arts, said, “What I wish would be happening is ongoing research and evaluation and that we had a structure set-up that would allow for doctoral students who would come in, link up with a university, and have them be a part of helping us do research.”

The arts can provide the opportunity and space for students with disabilities to find and explore their voice—however that voice may manifest. Choice is also central to the art-making enterprise. Choice cultivates autonomy. The arts continually engage students with disabilities in the acts of observation, rehearsing, weighing, judging all of which are essential tools for learning in general. Access provides a conceptual bridge that can be used to connect the idea of voice and choice to the larger arts, education, and disability conversation. Access within this context refers to the opportunity to fully engage in the curriculum, participate in the school and community, and contribute in ways that allow students to reach their full potential. Student, school, and community are strengthened when true access is achieved.

Next Steps

While the focus group results support the value of the arts in providing access, choice, and voice, more rigorous research is needed. Research beyond the scope of a focus group approach is needed to determine more specifically both the procedures teachers use to integrate the arts and the impact of arts activities on academic achievement and cognition in particular.

Six avenues of research may be particularly worthwhile for follow-up: (a) development and implementation of rubrics to measure gains in cognitive, academic, and artistic skills; (b) interviews or focus groups with students and adults with disabilities to gain appreciation of their views regarding the values of the arts and integrating arts into cross-curricular instruction; (c) focus groups with middle and high school teachers; (d) focus groups with teachers including general education teachers and others without a long-term relationship with *VSA arts*; (e) measures of the impact of professional development activities on teacher implementation and results for students; and (f) implementation of specific arts curriculum and measurement of the impact according to state standards of learning or performance on national assessments.

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Stated as simply as possible, the problem in arts education is not curriculum per se, not teaching, nor evaluation, nor funding. It is the interconnection, the systemic application of theory and accumulated wisdom derived from practice, the weaving together of a sequential and content-based curriculum and teacher competency that will make an appreciable difference.

Engel and Hausman (1981, p. 3)

Introduction

Students with disabilities benefit from classrooms and experiences where art is integral to learning across academic disciplines. When instructional strategies and curriculum are broadened to include a variety of approaches and content areas, the educational experience for all young people, including students with disabilities, can be both enriched and personalized. A major advantage of an arts-based approach to learning is that students have opportunities to make decisions as they create, thus learning becomes hands-on as students work with the artistic medium. As students are involved in creating or performing through arts integration, academics cease to be vague and distant concepts, and students have opportunities to demonstrate their own views and interpretation of the academic subject matter. As Arts Education Partnership and President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities indicates in *Champions of Change*, "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" (Fiske, 1999, p. viii).

In *The Arts and Creation of the Mind*, Eisner (2002) explains cognition in the context of academic instruction and achievement. He elaborates on how the arts "invite the development of a disposition to tolerate ambiguity, to explore what is uncertain, to exercise judgment free from prescriptive roles and procedures (p.10) and describes the relationship of the arts to individual autonomy, as well as to the ability to "stabilize" ideas and images. Eisner also refers to the personal transformation an individual may undergo with arts experiences and *how this leads to concept formation*. He posits that the arts can change perception, neurobiological functioning and memory, and that in so doing concept formation may shift and learning be facilitated.

As early as 1999, in *Gaining the Arts Advantage*, the Arts Education Partnership made bold statements about the value of arts education, stating that “after decades of research, [we know] that an arts education contributes significantly to improved critical thinking, problem posing, problem solving and decision making....[and] that the arts are multi-model in addressing and fostering the multiple intelligences of students” (p.6). The arts can provide a primary conduit for students to meaningfully engage in a learning environment. And while little is known specifically about the impact on students with disabilities, several research studies have provided some evidence that the influence of the arts is greater for students with special learning needs, including students living in poverty and students learning English as a second language, than for the general population of students (Deasy, 2002; Ingram & Riedel, 2003).

Results to date suggest a disconnect between our understanding of the value of the arts for students with diverse needs and the instructional emphasis placed on the arts. Why is there such a disconnect between our understanding of the value of the arts, our communal intuitive knowledge that the arts can breathe life into an otherwise distant, sterile, and even boring context, and the substantive support necessary for quality arts-based instruction for students with special needs? Engle and Hausman (1981) suggest the answer lies in linking the “accumulated wisdom” of the highly skilled practitioner with “content-based” curriculum. By extension, fostering arts-based learning experiences for students with disabilities and other students with unique learning needs begins with clearly articulating the developmental impact of those experiences from the perspective of educators who use the arts to teach students with disabilities on a daily basis. That ethos underpins the educator-focused nature of this investigation.

Today, the instructional mandates that students meet certain academic standards. The need for strategies to boost school success for students with disabilities is critical. In a climate which focuses on standards of learning and academic achievement, 33 % of the 6.2 million students with disabilities that enter our nation's high schools will leave before graduating, compared to 1 in 10 (10 %) for students without disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). These high school dropouts are three times more likely to slide into poverty than those who finish high school (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Low rates of enrollment in post-secondary education - only 37% of students with disabilities graduating from high school enroll in postsecondary education, compared with 78 % of non-disabled high school graduates (National Center for Education Statistics) and only 16 % of students with disabilities enrolling in post-secondary education will receive a four-year degree compared to 50 % of those without disabilities.

A 2002 data brief produced by the National Council on Disability Education

characterizes the educational situation for students with disabilities in an equally dire manner. In relating the information to the available information on the states that participated in this study, students with disabilities in Arizona were 2.4 times as likely to drop out of high school. In Iowa, the differential is 8.6. Respectively, the differentials in Kentucky, Massachusetts, Montana, and New Jersey are 5.4, 4.6, 4.4, and 4.9.

More recently, the National Council on Disability, in *Improving the Educational Outcomes for Students with Disabilities* (2004), provided a synthesis of research literature addressing educational outcomes and students with disabilities. The Council identified five competencies critical to a successful transition from secondary to post-secondary education, and by extension to a better quality of life. Closely tied to literacy were competencies in: functional academic skills (e.g. reading, math, writing, and problem solving), community living, personal-social, vocational, and self-determination skills.

In addressing literacy, the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) indicated in a recent review that our understanding of literacy is evolving from a long-held focus on ability to decode, access, or interact with print, to “multiple methods of interaction with the printed word.” (Thompson, Johnston, Thurlow, & Clapper, 2004, p.3). While NCEO focused on the value of and need for alternative approaches to assessment that will enable students with widely varying disabilities to express their knowledge and skills in ways that are not hindered by their disabilities, similar arguments can be made for alternative means of instruction. The arts have a role to play in both learning and expressing comprehension.

Research Questions

The current study seeks to contribute to the knowledge base of how the arts can contribute to student learning, especially for students with disabilities. Some of the critical questions that must be addressed to further understanding include: What role does the arts education community have in facilitating student competencies and quality of life? How can the arts be used to develop or guide positive educational experiences for all young people? Can the arts be applied as a successful teaching strategy to meet the needs of students *before* they make the decision to drop out of school? In what ways can the arts strengthen the social, academic, and artistic skills of students so that they have options and opportunities?

Focusing on the above questions, *VSA arts* designed a research evaluation study to investigate the education-focused work of 10 *VSA arts* domestic affiliates. Specifically, the *VSA arts* Affiliate Research Project examined the way in which the arts, as manifest in the work of *VSA arts* affiliate organizations, integrates the arts and impacts students’ social, cognitive, and artistic skill development.

Objectives framed by the U.S. Department of Education, a funding source for *VSA arts*, formed the foundation of the current research study. The objectives stipulate that *VSA arts* and its affiliate organizations “increase artistic, cognitive, and social skills of participants, primarily persons with disabilities.” In simplest terms, this research effort sought to better understand how those objectives are met by looking closely at the work of affiliate organizations from the perspective of educators involved in program implementation. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education research objectives ask for creation of a “model of consistent quality data collection concentrating on effective measures” of artistic, cognitive, and social skill development.

The following questions were used to guide the research:

1. In what ways does arts-based instruction (as exemplified in the work of the affiliate organizations) meet the academic, social, and artistic needs of students with disabilities?
2. What is the relationship between *VSA arts*’ work and the National Standards for Arts Learning?
3. How is learning, broadly defined, evaluated within the *VSA arts* affiliate network?
4. What do those assessments reveal with respect to the impact of *VSA arts*’ efforts?
5. In what ways can the work of *VSA arts* affiliates contribute to the larger arts in learning conversation?

Objectives of the Current Research:

- Identify overarching themes common across the *VSA arts* affiliate network as related to learning for students with disabilities in and through the arts;
- Contribute to the body of research that seeks to better understand the nature of the arts’ impact on learning for students with disabilities;
- Provide an evaluation framework clearly articulating academic, social, and artistic skill development of students with disabilities;
- Suggest areas for future investigation into the programming and practice of the *VSA arts* affiliate network;

Relevant Literature

Attempts to demonstrate the impact of the arts in measurable and demonstrable ways constitute a large portion of current arts education literature. Theoretical substantiation for arts education abounds in the work of prominent scholars in the fields of psychology, sociology, and philosophy. “Multiple intelligences” (Gardner,

1983), “dispositional capacities” (Eisner, 1999), and “narrative modes of knowing” (Bruner, 1985) are outlined in brilliant detail in an effort to explicate the unique contribution of the arts. “Aesthetic epistemologies” (Muxworthy Feige, 1999) are championed in an effort to regain a more holistic educative process. A related issue has to do with the cognitive function of the arts. In sum, literature from the field of arts education is replete with theoretical attempts to buttress the connection between the arts and student learning.

In a similar vein, empirical evidence also has been gathered that argues for the impact of arts inclusion. In 2000, Harvard’s Project Zero published a comprehensive meta-analysis of research on academic achievement outcomes of arts education. The meta-analysis, the culmination of the *Reviewing Education and the Arts Project (REAP)*, entitled *The Arts and Academic Achievement: What the Evidence Shows* (Winner & Hetland, 2000), involved consideration 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 (drama, art, music, and dance) 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.

The REAP findings suggest three areas where reliable causal links were found, including: listening to music and spatial-temporal reasoning; learning to play music and spatial reasoning; and classroom drama and verbal skills. Two areas of equivocal support (with reliable causal links based on very few studies) include: learning to play music and mathematics, and dance and nonverbal reasoning. Five areas where no reliable causal links can be demonstrated include: arts-rich education and verbal and mathematics scores/grades; arts-rich education and creative thinking; learning to play music and reading; visual arts and reading; and dance and reading

Several arts integration efforts have attempted to define the relationship between the arts and student development. Whether as a local initiative, statewide effort, or multi-state collaborative endeavor, the combined efforts of arts integration programs to investigate and document the impact of their efforts provide an initial foundation of knowledge on which to base arguments for arts integration. Horowitz's (2004) *Summary of Large-Scale Arts Partnership Evaluations* describes overall findings with respect to program implementation and program outcomes of arts integration. The report synthesizes findings from six large-scale evaluations of arts education partnerships: (a) *Arts in the Basic Curriculum (ABC)*, South Carolina; (b) *Arts for Academic Achievement: Minneapolis Annenberg Challenge for Arts Education*; (c) the *Partnership Grant Program of the Center for Arts Education*, New York City; (d) *the A+ Schools Program*, North Carolina; (e) *Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge (TETAC)*; and (f) the *Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE)*. Within program outcomes, the

participant programs reported positive changes in instructional practices and school culture. In addition, programs also reported student growth in the arts and academic subjects.

The Mississippi Arts Commission *Whole Schools Initiative* conducted independent, longitudinal research into the impact of their statewide arts integration effort entitled *The Arts are an R Too* (2004). This study found a positive relationship between arts integration and student academic performance. The study supports the positive correlation pointed to by Horowitz and others that suggest *the greater the degree of arts integration (time and resources committed to the efforts), the greater the impact on student achievement and the positive effects on school culture.*

Ingram and Riedel (2003), in their review of arts integration in the Minneapolis Public Schools through the *Annenberg Arts of Academic Achievement* project, were interested in how the teacher and arts partner work together, and the nature of the instruction itself, given the finding of considerable variation in how teachers and artists collaborated. In studying grades three to five, they found that the *percentage* of teachers integrating arts into instruction in a building ranged from 49-92. Moreover, teachers most often integrated arts into language arts, and math was the least likely to be integrated. They concluded that “for students in grades three, four, and five, arts integration is significantly related to gain scores in reading,” and that “arts integration is more effective for third grade English language learning students and third grade students from low socioeconomic homes” (p.26). Furthermore, for students in third grade, their teachers’ involvement in interdisciplinary teaming with an artist made a significant contribution to student gains in reading and they found that “the more their math teacher integrates arts into mathematics lessons, the more students gain on the mathematics test” (p.29).

In *Arts Based Learning: Review of the Literature*, Rooney (in press), a review of the literature on the impact of the arts on academic learning, further supports the connection between the arts and learning. The report articulates that the arts help to develop learning abilities, and promote better rapport with teachers, a more sustained focus, better self-direction, development of thinking skills, and the development of neural connections as the “arts enhance neurobiological systems including cognitive, emotional, attentional, and immune systems all of which may influence spatial reasoning, creativity, and general math” (p. 8).

Researchers, in a compendium of 64 educational studies that focus attention on the connection between the arts and student academic and social development for students with and without special needs, provide insight into the specific contribution of the arts disciplines, suggesting a strong relationship between the arts and student learning and achievement. This compendium, *Critical Links* (Deasy, 2002), concluded, among other things, that the impact of the arts was

particularly important for students with disabilities or other students with special learning needs.

Several *Critical Links* studies directly address the connection between arts instruction and students with disabilities. For example, Mentzer and Boswell outline the effects of a movement poetry program on creativity of children with behavioral disorders. Their findings suggest 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 analyzes 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 of the students in the control group. Kariuki and Honeycutt offer an investigation of the effects of music on two emotionally disturbed students' writing: their writing skills increased by two letter grades when listening to music. Wilhelm's work, *Reading Is Seeing: Using Visual Response to Improve the Literary Reading of Reluctant Readers*, two 7th grade boys who had been classified as learning disabled and considered reluctant readers. Reading skills were strengthened as students practiced visual arts activities.

From his review of recent research, Deasy (2002) suggests 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.

Despite these positive indicators, 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 for 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*.

METHODOLOGY

The unique and independent nature of VSA *arts* affiliates requires a contextually-driven research methodology that reflects local needs, resources, and relationships. Specifically, affiliate education programming is dependent upon the support of educational entities such as schools, local districts, and state education agencies, and necessarily reflects the support and the desires of these program partners. The type of programming offered by VSA *arts* affiliates builds upon this collaborative dance of mutual needs. Taking those factors into consideration became central to this study. In addition, every effort has been made so that any report, overarching framework, or model emerging from this

work be experientially based, that is, based on the knowledge of what is actually happening within the affiliate network, and what teachers and teaching artists know about how young people with disabilities learn in and through the arts.

Framework Development

The Affiliate Research Project also developed an evaluation framework from which focus group interview protocols and data analysis strategies were derived. This framework was developed by reviewing:

- Assessments currently being used by *VSA arts affiliates* and other arts programs
- Existing standards for the arts, and social and cognitive skills
- Rubrics for measuring progress in the arts and cognition
- Research on approaches to assessment, including portfolios and other performance-based methods
- Current findings regarding the impact of arts instruction

In addition, the substance of the framework has been informed by ongoing efforts of *VSA arts* to gather information about the role of *VSA arts*-sponsored programming and systemization and implementation of the National Standards for Arts Education. This task has proven complex and multi-faceted given the local, state, and national influence on educational standards.

The current research was most closely informed by Eisner's (2002) philosophical approach, and recent related research by Horowitz's (2004) summary of six large-scale arts initiatives, Deasy's *Critical Links* (2002), the framework for Arts Integration, from the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at the University of Minnesota, and Corbett, Wilson, and Morse's (2004), *The Arts Are An "R" Too*. In reviewing their contributions, it became apparent that to understand the impact of the arts on outcomes for students with disabilities, knowledge was needed regarding the following:

- The levels of integration of the arts in academic subject matter;
- How teachers approached integrated (art-academic subject matter) instruction;
- The impact on students with disabilities in terms of academic achievement, cognition, communication, student attitudes, and social skills, including adjustment or coping skills;
- The influence of arts integration on the school climate and the approach to instruction within that environment.

Furthermore, knowledge was needed regarding the roles played by various entities:

- General and special educators and related services staff such as occupational, physical and language specialists,
- Arts specialists and artists-in-residency,
- VSA *arts* affiliates,
- Parents, and
- School administrators.

In conjunction with this, knowledge of the attitudes of these individuals and the level of their support for arts integration would be useful to obtain a deeper understanding of both the impact of arts integration and also any special circumstances which should be considered in light of varying disabilities. To make recommendations to VSA *arts* affiliates around the country, VSA *arts* also sought to understand something about arts integration for students with disabilities under varying conditions (rural and urban, different regions of the country, different socio-economic conditions, and with students of varying ages and disabilities).

In studying the cognitive, academic, and social impact of the arts, VSA *arts* considered the impact of the arts on personal transformation. As Eisner indicates, the “arts refine our senses so that our ability to experience the world is made more complex and subtle; they promote our imaginative capacities so that we can envision what we cannot actually see, taste, touch, hear, and smell; they provide models through which we can experience the world in new ways; and they provide materials and occasions for learning to grapple with problems that depend on arts-related forms of thinking.” (2002, p. 19)

Operational Terms

The following operational terms also helped to shape the direction and course of the current evaluative study.

Cognition. Cognition is defined with reference to Rudolf Arnheim’s definition from *Visual Thinking*, “all means of mental operations involved in the receiving, storing, and processing of information: sensory perception, memory, thinking and learning” (1954).

Note that Arnheim has extended the meaning of cognition to include perception and conversely suggests that thinking cannot be separated from perception. As he stated “visual perception is visual thinking.” Central to understanding of cognition is also an understanding of how the arts impact comprehension, retention, and thinking (Corbett et al., 2004)

Arts integration. Corbett describes the process and impact of arts integration, “Arts integration enabled students to be active, to experience things directly, and to express themselves in ways best suited to the students. In the process, students had fun and enjoyed themselves and were enthusiastic which then made them eager for the next time they could engage in active, hands-on, and varied lesson.” (p. 17) A goal of arts integration is to use the arts so that students can have direct experience, be involved in making decisions about their learning, and be engaged in lessons that are motivating.

In general terms, arts integration refers to simply “emerging the arts curriculum into other arts and nonarts curricula” (Eisner, 2002, p.40). Eisner describes this as being organized into four structures, two of which are most relevant to our research:

- “The arts are used to help students understand a particular historical period... With this approach, art, music, literature, and history come together around a particular historical period.”
- “Problem solving. Students can be invited to define a problem that requires that it be addressed through several disciplines, including the arts...multiple perspectives are needed and curricula are designed that are problem-centered and require the integration of several disciplinary perspectives, including the arts.”

As Eisner explains, an important part of this research is the understanding of the relationship between experience in the arts and performance in academic subjects, particularly in terms of “transfer” of learning.

Arts infusion. Sometimes the terms art integration and arts infusion are used interchangeably. In the current study of VSA *arts* affiliates, the use of the term *arts infusion* is restricted to art that is deeply embedded in learning experiences; that is art that permeates instruction and in so doing becomes something that cannot be separated from instruction. In these cases the “arts are integral to instruction and are not add-ons.” (Corbett, 2004, p. 33)

Site Selection

A variety of factors guided the choice of the 10 participating affiliates. First, the sample of VSA *arts* organizations included affiliates of varying size, geographic location, and educational program offerings. This sample represented diverse cultures, socio-economic levels, and population sizes, including rural, urban, and suburban groups. It was important that both educators from large, medium, and small affiliates weighed in on our research questions. Geographic distribution was considered so that organizations from the North, South, East, and West, could be involved to inform our work with different regional perspectives. Next,

VSA arts works with affiliated organizations nationwide and in over 60 countries worldwide. Within the United States, VSA arts programs are conducted by a network of VSA arts state organizations with their own 501-c-3 status or in collaboration with an affiliated organization. Organizations within the VSA arts network maintain strong connections to the home office in Washington, D.C. in a relationship that includes funding, participation in conferences, networking, the use of resources, technical assistance and programming, as well as sharing best practices and strategies among peers.

Domestic organizations apply annually for affiliation and funding in a process designed to ensure that they meet with fiscal and operational standards and as a way to gauge and encourage growth in all areas. International affiliates do not receive funding from VSA arts.

the sites for the study needed to be representative of the breadth and depth of VSA arts' work, meaning they had to be sites that offered a variety of programming, everything from artist residencies to arts festivals. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, site selection took into account the need for accessing sources of information necessary to respond to our research questions. Based upon these criteria, sites were invited to participate. The participating VSA arts affiliates included: Arizona, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Jersey, Texas, and Washington.

Site Visits and Focus Group Protocol

The basic data for the Affiliate Research Project was collected at 10 affiliate sites. Each visit was approximately two days and occurred between March and June 2004. With few exceptions, each site visit included an interview with the executive director and/or education staff of the affiliate in order to get a broad sense of their education-focused work. Focus group interviews were conducted with teachers, teaching artists, administrators, and others involved with VSA arts programming, to gather information on arts integration, collaboration, and their impact on student achievement. Each focus group interview was recorded and transcribed. Artist residencies, exhibits, and culminating events were observed where possible.

The visits to the first three states (four focus groups) served as a pilot for the study. Following these initial visits, slight modifications were made to the focus group protocol such as reframing (see Appendix A), and prioritizing some of the questions, given time constraints (approximately 1.5 hours) and teacher availability. Prior to the focus group meeting, at each site the participants completed a brief survey providing basic demographic information such as years of teaching experience, education, experience with VSA arts, and estimation of frequency of arts experiences.

In sum, 16 focus groups were conducted, nine artist residencies were viewed, six visual arts exhibits were visited, nine interviews were conducted with VSA arts affiliate executive directors and their staff, and three culminating performances were attended in the process of visiting the participating affiliate organizations.

Participants

Sixty teachers, and 32 others (primarily arts specialists or artists-in-residence) participated in the 16 focus groups across the 10 states. All focus group participants were volunteers who when asked by the local affiliate had agreed to participate in a 90-minute focus group on the value of using the arts to further academic, cognitive, and social skills. Fifty-six percent of the participants were early childhood or elementary teachers and 12 % were secondary teachers. Of the teachers, 68 % were special educators, and 12 % were art teachers. Eighty-two percent of the participants were female. Ninety-eight percent of the participants were White.

The number of focus group meetings conducted per state varied from one to three. Each focus group consisted of an average of nine participants, with a range of one in Montana to 24 in Iowa.

The majority of participants (69%) were certified teachers and almost 50% held master's degrees. Most participants (73%) had over nine years of teaching experience. Forty-one percent of those interviewed had extensive experience with *VSA arts*. Twenty-seven percent had participated in *VSA* festivals and 32% had participated in *VSA arts* training sessions. Slightly over one-third of the participants did not receive training in how to teach art. A total of 30% rated their arts preparation as adequate, and 22% rated it as excellent (12% did not respond to this question).

Among the focus group participants, teacher education for arts instruction varied widely with the highest ratings occurring in Florida and Michigan where 42% of the participants rated their experience as excellent compared to an average rating of 16% for the other states.

Fifty-three percent of the participants taught early childhood or elementary school, 12% taught at the secondary level, and 35% were artists-in-residence, or *VSA arts* staff, or school administrators. Most participants reported that students with disabilities were "somewhat" integrated into general education programs (34%). The highest degree of integration of students with disabilities in general

Artists-in-Residence

Artist residencies varied in structure and substance from site to site, and program to program. In general, residencies involved teachers and teaching artists utilizing the arts within the classroom context. Beyond that basic description, residencies maintain significant differences in terms of level of curricular integration and artistic objective. Residencies occur in all art forms, in both inclusive and self-contained settings, at the pre-K, primary, and secondary level within the *VSA arts* network. The nature of the relationship between teaching artist and teacher is fluid and reflects the circumstance of the participating affiliate. Meaning, the amount of training and orientation provided by the affiliate, in combination with time for planning and reflection is not consistent across the sites; therefore, any effort to generalize across sites must take these differences into consideration. The variety in artist residencies impacts this study in that participating educators drew from a variety of contexts in relating their perspective as to how students with disabilities learn in and through the arts.

education classrooms was noted in Arizona (75% indicated full integration) and Michigan (60%).

Coding and Analysis

The audiotapes for the focus groups and interviews were transcribed and then reviewed by all three researchers using the following procedures: (a) sorting data into topical areas using a grounded theory approach which allowed data categories to be added as themes emerged; (b) combining data across the sites and drawing conclusions based on frequently identified responses as well as data which were unique to particular circumstances; and (c) comparing results to recent studies and deciding the underlying implications of particular data. For example, teachers enthusiastically discussed how they *approached* arts-integrated instruction, yet they were hesitant and somewhat resistant to describing how they *measured the impact* of arts instruction. Based on these responses, the researchers conducted a follow-up conference call with seven of the focus group participants. The conference call covered strategies for evaluating the impact of the arts, and particularly the use of rubrics to measure academic and artistic progress, and provided important information for discussing the implications of the findings.

The final step in coding the data to prepare for interpretation was to use *QDA miner* software to sort the data. This electronic sorting verified the categories that had been developed and also provided some quantitative numbers to assist in valuing the weight of specific information. In using *QDA miner* any comments by the moderator were eliminated from the data sets and visual scanning was employed to eliminate irrelevant data.

FINDINGS

We are not integrating art into education, we're educating through art. That is the mode through which the children are learning.

2004 Focus Group Participant

When asked to comment on arts integration, and especially in the context of working with children with disabilities, teachers reported that arts integration helped to “level the playing field” and to allow for “multiple points of entry for students to receive information.” One teacher indicated that “students who lack confidence take skills that are tied into art activities and expand their self-esteem, personal pride, and group participation.” Another stated that it “gives them the opportunity to find success in what they are able to accomplish as they work on and finish a piece of artwork.” These themes were echoed by many and several reported that it gives students a “place to shine.” An elementary teacher said that children can learn any concept through the arts and in a way that is personally meaningful.

The overwhelming theme that emerged from the 16 focus groups was that teachers without exception were enthusiastic about the involvement of students with disabilities with the arts. The teachers valued the involvement of students, were thrilled when students demonstrated artistic talents or abilities, and were encouraged when they observed students engaged with the arts. The arts captured the attention of students and teachers alike.

Levels of Arts Integration

When discussing arts learning in the focus groups, the teachers made many references to the use of music, dance, movement, visual arts, and drama. The teachers also provided numerous examples of how the arts supported academic achievement and cognition across subject matter areas. The relative number of comments that were coded for various art media follow:

- 214 comments described use of music, dance, and movement;
- 173 comments referred to the value of visual arts, including drawing, painting; and
- 127 comments provided information regarding the use of drama, theater, and plays.

In general, the comments from teachers reflected arts integration that was done under less than ideal conditions. A “shrunk time-frame” for integrating the arts

A preschool teacher pointed out how drawing helps students prepare for writing. “A lot of drawing ends up being pre-writing. It’s not uncommon at all for a child who is four to be drawing a picture of his or her mom... You ask them to tell you about their picture. They say these are letters. That’s my name. That’s my mom’s name. There are these wonderful little marks, and they mean something specific to the child. It’s their pre-writing. It does carry over in that way. Anything that they’re thinking about that they’ve done in the classroom is going to come out in their drawing or painting somewhere.”

was cited by a number of the participants. The best examples of arts integration were found in the early childhood and preschool programs where it is difficult to imagine instruction that doesn’t rely on music, movement, drawing, painting, and playing with clay. These items are a natural part of the early childhood curriculum.

Beyond the preschool/early childhood level, the procedures for integrating arts into the classroom for students with disabilities, as well the degree of integration, varied widely among states and sites. At one extreme were teachers who integrated arts on a

daily basis. One teacher in an arts school indicated that it is “more like integrating learning into the art classes rather than art into learning.”

At the other end of the spectrum from the examples of arts integration were comments suggesting that some teachers may not fully understand or appreciate the importance of the arts in learning. As one participant stated in reference to art and learning from a social studies textbook, “Children, and perhaps some

teachers, don't think of those two things as coming together. Art is something separate...Unless you're just doing art for art's sake; your content probably comes from somewhere else, some other idea."

How Teachers Approached Arts Integration

We begin with music and math when we do operas because there is a relationship between whether they will have eighth or quarter notes or half notes...because as we write the text for the opera the kids then begin to find whether it's going to be in double meter or triple meter. We did a reading assessment before we started the opera. The average reading level of those second graders was first year, six months. When we finished, they had moved to third years, six months. VSA Affiliate Director

With respect to planning, preparation, and presentation, arts integration presents both challenges and opportunity. Preschool educators spoke of the impossibility of separating the arts from their work in other content areas. From this perspective, the arts are seamlessly woven into the fabric of curriculum and instruction. Complete integration is a more difficult task within a secondary environment where subjects are separate, standardized assessments of reading and math seemingly require direct instruction solely in those areas, and historical precedent suggests an instructional model that, as Freire (1970) explains, mirrors a bank into which deposits are made.

Time for arts integration demands several components. Teachers spoke of the value of planning lessons alongside teaching artists prior to and during residency (follow-up and "debriefing" appeared to be rare). Planning time allowed the arts-based lessons to directly intersect the curriculum standards that guide the teacher's time and attention. In addition, teachers and teaching artists addressed the importance of establishing a relationship in which the artist becomes comfortable in the role of an educator and the teacher can engage in the world of the artist. Participating affiliates approached the process of training and support in different ways. Some offered training and support efforts to teaching artists, while others structured planning time into the structure of the artist residency. Regardless of the approach, the more systemic and significant the training and support effort, the more successful the arts-integration experience.

When asked in a screening survey to describe the role of arts in day-to-day teaching, 48% of the focus group participants indicated that they used art daily, 21% indicated once a week, and 9% once in month (not relevant, 20%). New Jersey (100%) and Iowa (90%) reported the highest % of daily use of art.

Following are a few examples that demonstrate the range of approaches teachers took to arts integration.

Drawing and illustrating. Teachers from around the country, not surprisingly, provided many examples of how drawing was used to demonstrate learning. One [elementary] teacher stated, “One of the things I do with my class every year is that they write their own stories and illustrate [them]... They can write about anything they want, as long as it’s an original story. They type it at the computer and each paragraph has an illustration.”

Creating mental images. One teacher has found that if students create mental images before they illustrate what they learn, that the student’s art and comprehension improved. That teacher uses a reading strategy that a good reader uses, that is, creating mental images. For example, for a read-aloud with a wonderful description of a house on a farm, students created mental images of what that might look like as they were listening to the read-aloud, then later they

A preschool teacher described how she uses drawing to teach new vocabulary. After reading a story, the students might say they want to draw a pig, but they say they don’t know how to draw a pig. The teacher then recognizes this as a teaching moment and asks the students, “What parts does a pig have?” This teacher reports that “...you start going at all kinds of new vocabulary the opportunities just blossom because of the activities that you’re doing through the arts.”

completed a drawing and watercolor.

The students got the point of what the teacher was trying to convey, which is, “if you are a good reader, you think about what the story looks like in your mind.”

Combining photography and journalism. Technology is used in some schools to support integrated language arts activities. For example, in preparing autobiographies, students

combine journaling with the use of software such as Photoshop where they can manipulate the images and then prepare reports combining the text and photos. At a high school, a visiting photojournalist worked with the students. “They’re taking photographs and then they’re writing about the photographs. They’re working in small groups. They’re going more into depth and they’re writing more in-depth because they’re working in small groups. They have more conversation and more interaction.”

Creating poetry. By acting as scribes, teachers are able to help young children create poems. An elementary teacher explains, “We let the children do nothing but explore ideas and then we wrote the ideas out. They had to come up with an action and a noun, and they just had to write the sentence. Whoever wrote the sentence out was the narrator and had to dress up as this wonderful narrator. Then the other person got to act it out. So if they said, ‘the caterpillar jumped,’ if that’s all they wrote, then the other person got to be a caterpillar and jumped while the narrator read it, and they loved that. They made little poems.” At another site, for a poetry unit, the teacher required students to compose and then to put at least a few of the poems to music.

Making fairy tales and other stories their own. Another teacher explained how students take story lines from a common base such as fairy tales, making it their own by changing the environment and characters somewhat (e.g., *Little Red Riding Hood*). A teacher described how children developed a new ending to the story *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. The children incorporated their own experiences and what they observed in their environment, including TV shows they watched, and things they read to change the story. They developed a superhero—a giant fat superhero butterfly with wings and a cape.

Using music to teach fractions. In the second and third grades, teachers linked math and music when teaching students about whole notes and half notes. Their students studied fractions by playing recorders; counting the beats, and measuring the rhythms.

Drawing the symmetry of a butterfly. At one early childhood setting a teacher asked students to draw the symmetry of a butterfly. For a science lesson on butterflies, students were given "half the butterfly" and instructed to draw the other half." Some students were very successful; others had difficulty even using a pencil.

Using mobiles as a practical application of math and physics. Another teacher described how physics and math were used as students made mobiles with different characters and symbol. Her students told their story through their mobiles. However, they also had to make calculations so that the mobile would hang right and were structurally sound.

Reenacting history. To achieve a significant degree of arts integration, artists collaborate closely with teachers. In one instance, after consulting with history teachers, the artist-in-residence integrated art into a performance of *The Crucible* based on the Salem witch trials. The artist orchestrated the entire trial, with teachers serving as the judges. At that same school, students worked under the guidance of the

Portraits of Nobel Prize Winners

A teacher, therapist, teacher's aide, and teaching artist worked with the students. The middle students were completing a two-week residency focused on, as reported in the project synopsis submitted to VSA arts of Washington, "developing skills in drawing the human figure—the drawing studies will focus on an individual that has been recognized for his or her contributions toward peace, Noble Prize recipients." In this particular session, the students were asked to complete their drawings and prepare them to be mounted and exhibited in the front of the school. After some preliminary remarks from the teaching artist (she had brought in several books with examples of ways different artists, such as Picasso and Renoir, had interpreted the human form in the past), the students found their portraits and began to finish their work.

Each student chose a photograph of a famous peacemaker, sketched a portrait based on the photograph, and was in the process of adding color and definition to the portrait. Some students decided to do realistic interpretations of the pictures, while others had opted to experiment with color and line. The student who chose to sketch Jimmy Carter enjoyed shading by softening the jaw line of his portrait. His patience grew thin at one point and he opted to simply color Carter's suit and tie in dark shades of red and blue. Another student had created a rendition in which the portrait was secondary to the use of color within the work. She had very deliberately created a dreamlike, impressionistic piece. Several students used tools to manipulate the colors to provide texture and shading.

The vocabulary they had developed in the course of the residency came into play as they put the finishing touches on their works. They responded to each other's work using arts-focused language like contrast and shading. They also talked about being able to "layer color" and "nail the white." The class ended that day with the work of the individual students being mounted and prepared for exhibition within the display case at the entrance of the school.

artist-in-residence in their study of the Holocaust. According to teachers at that school, the students "seemed to be learning a lot of [material] in a very short period of time because they only spent two or three weeks at most on a section."

Dramatizing major historical events. Teachers are using art to help students understand major historical events. A fifth grade teacher uses drama in studying the Civil War. Students took paragraphs and pages from the social studies book as background material to compose plays about the war. At a school in Kentucky, a group of teachers worked together on a study of the Civil War through the Civil Rights era by incorporating the arts. The teacher of one of the classes said that "...those kids know all about Rosa Parks and Harriet Tubman. It was just a different way of them learning...we thought what better way than to sing about it and act it out. They know it." Other examples include teachers who helped students dramatize the Great Chicago fire, wagons going West and the Gold Rush, and even using art to engage students in learning about ancient Egypt. Fourth grade students in one school who were studying Egypt both created mummies and painted a large map of Egypt on the school floor.

Understanding art during historic periods. The creativity in using the arts with history is indicative of the potential for integrating arts and learning. For example, with the help of an artist-in-residence, students learned about spinning wheels, making yarn, and tools for weaving. The weaving was used to "contextualize" learning and help students understand the daily lives of people at that time in history.

Taking art and history a step further, some teachers have linked art to historical fiction, creating symbols (as part of quilt) that had relevance to the story. Such projects help develop not only creativity, but also critical thinking and problem-solving skills as students consider how to integrate information from diverse sources to develop a believable story.

Creating volcanoes, crafting turtles, and going on virtual field trips. One elementary teacher who confesses to not being artistically inclined was amazed that in teaching through science kits, when students were creating volcanoes they also became very creative, and that artistic expression was naturally a part of the science activity and contributed to the students' interest and involvement.

- Another school conducted a yearlong "turtle man unit." The students learned about an employee at a local zoo who personally rescues turtles. The children not only learned a lot about turtles, they also enjoyed creating a giant turtle out of clay. This was the most highly sought after item at the school auction.
- At another school, a teacher combined a dinosaur unit with "a virtual field trip" and fossil dig activity center outdoors. Another teacher, using a cross-curriculum, theme-based approach, used art to facilitate reading and

learning when students created cereal boxes to represent their books. One student designed a cereal box about dinosaurs that he called "Dinobites." Dinobites had a game on the back of the box and the side to describe the "ingredients."

Exploring planets and the solar system through the arts. Space exploration provides a natural opportunity for arts integration. Several teachers described how they integrated art into learning about the planets and solar system. According to one early childhood teacher, 4 and 5-year olds are "really into space exploration. They know the names of the planets already. A lesson might involve having books, looking at the names of the planets, talking about the planets, and then maybe designing their own planet." The students develop space journals, describing what they would likely see during an adventure in space, or what the surface of the moon may feel like, for example. In another similar instance, students used art to develop a solar system, and two other teachers described similar art integration activities:

- A secondary music teacher collaborated with the visual graphics department to give a multi-media presentation, downloading images of the Land Rover on Mars and then incorporating music with the visual images. These images were used as students prepared for and performed Holst's music, the "Planets."
- Another music teacher described how movement is used...looking at the shape and design of things. "We worked with space one day. We talked about the movement of the planets; we talked about the movement of our own sun. Shooting stars, just thinking of the actions and the movement that happens there and putting them into the body. We did this yesterday for a final kind of fun thing, a springtime dance. That went along with a lot of concepts, the seasons."

One *artist-in-residence* told magnificent stories about the origin and use of each instrument before she modeled how to play the instrument and had students try to play the instrument. She spoke about how in some cases the tribes would use the drum as a mode of communication to share information from village to village, to signal a specific event, or as part of a ceremony. She indirectly introduced the ideas of communication through specific rhythms, tone (where and with what you hit the drum produces different sounds), and melody (groups of rhythms and tones in an established patterns communicating specific things).

Communicating through movement and rhythm. Children at a pre-verbal stage use movement to communicate, "... the way they express themselves is nonverbally, so movement is really good for that." That teacher continued, "It happens also in music...it's very loud...the rhythm goes through your body. You can hear it—ka-boom, boom, boom, boom. But then a meter starts to develop, and then accents start developing naturally because there is organization to music. Kids listen to it, they hear it, and they hear where the accent is

on the rhythm. Their body is the same thing. It starts to develop; it organizes and is added to. It's just what comes naturally and is already in our bodies, already in our environment. ...if you are doing some sort of rhythm and you are off doing something else, then, we know that you are not there. Because it's so powerful and it is so inviting it just draws you right in."

Writing songs about academics. An art teacher (K-12) uses multiple ways to integrate music into the curriculum; for example by song writing that reinforces what students are studying. At the first grade, songs, which may only be four lines, focus on rhyming words. According to another art teacher; "Especially for first grade, I base my lesson on the use of literature." That teacher usually plays music in the background, which sets the stage for learning. With one class, she is currently doing a unit on Lewis Clark. This provides an exciting format to fit in history and science.

Using innovative arts activities in a high school. At one focus group with primarily high school teachers, a variety of innovative arts activities were described, including work with a Mandela, tiles of Northwest art, a gardening motif, and totems. At another site, opera was a primary vehicle for involving students in the arts. A third site used art, music, drama, and writing centers where children chose how and what activities to do. In that classroom, art activities are always available, including instruments in the music center, and puppets in the drama/story center.

When the arts are less integrated. A few of the teachers were very direct in indicating that arts were implemented more separately at this time. One teacher said that art is usually done on Friday and it's more of a reward.

The impact of arts integration on students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL), and at-risk learners

It's inherently liberating to have an idea and then create something that other people can see, a play, and a picture. It's about learning to create meaning and create meaningful experiences.

2004 Focus Group Participant

The arts facilitate learning, motivation, engagement, and academic success for students with very diverse skills and needs. The teachers spoke about the way the arts inherently provide for individualization of instruction, a key element to meeting the needs of diverse learners. The arts allowed teachers to understand the strengths and weaknesses of students and to incorporate that knowledge into how they worked with students. Specifically, artist residencies allowed for moments when teachers were able to see their students in new ways.

Arts activities such as creative movement and music are valuable for students with disabilities in part "because there is no right and wrong, no failures, which is important since often a child with disability's basic relationship to school is one of

failure.” As one VSA *arts* affiliate director indicated, “The arts provide a very demonstrative and concrete way for students to illustrate their understanding of things and in a way that they can go back and look at it and take it in again and again and again. The arts provide a more reflective mirror for children to see the best of themselves.”

“They know the author of that book. They know the vocabulary from that book. They know the other books this author has written. It’s very powerful. And it was the art that had me sustain it for that long. That wasn’t a project we could rush. They have books and they’re very lovely, the journaling and the process, and making the artifacts and doing the movement, exploring the legend and all the characters in it.”

Second grade teacher who incorporated art into a 7-week project based on a legend from the book the Roadrunner’s Dance by Rodolfo Anaya

Improving motivation and comprehension.

Using the arts to express comprehension was one of the most common themes across the sites. Several teachers described how drawing and illustrating help students prepare for writing and simultaneously increase their motivation. When art is used, teachers also noted that students pay greater attention to detail in writing and are more likely to develop and use adjectives for description. Following are a few examples of this:

- A teacher reported that the arts work very well with students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who are at a disadvantage with low reading and writing skills. Book making projects, drawing, and creating images can help a student work through a beginning, a middle, and an end with an idea. It gives them something tangible in a character. It gives them an impetus to learn to write. It lets them pull things together, gives them something to start with.
- A university student who volunteers used drawing with students for whom English is a second language. Her students worked on a large collage on world peace, a topic they had chosen. Not only did they learn about texture and making the pieces of the collage fit together, they read about world peace and illustrated the concept.
- Vocabulary instruction is supported in many ways through the arts. For example, the use of charades was found to be a successful way to enhance vocabulary acquisition and retrieval in one Florida school. The teacher said, “The students act out the word. It’s amazing how their vocabulary has increased.”

- To tie in with learning about fables and fantasy, a teaching artist linked visual elements to something that children could grasp, like the alphabet, and came up with a new zoo alphabet. “We started with ‘A,’ and came up with alligator and ant. Students would name an animal (animal theme) and then the artist-in-residence drew a picture, part ant and part alligator. The word also was written on the board and students looked at the letters in the word and how it sounded. Then it started to make sense, where they could tie in the word with something visual and they would remember it...” The teacher indicated she was surprised at how much the students remembered.
- If the students did “alligator-ant” (see p. 16) students were asked if they saw any small words inside the word. Or they would find hidden words. “For the last time, they had to come up with an action and a noun, and they just had to write the sentence. Whoever wrote the sentence was the narrator and had to dress up as this wonderful narrator. Then the other person got to act it out. If they said the caterpillar jumped, if that’s all they wrote, then the other person got to be a caterpillar and jumped while the narrator read. We do a lot of things when we’re doing homonyms and adjectives; they draw and show that they understand the meaning of the word. The students get up and they act out the word. This is used for both reading and writing.”

Focus Group Participant
- An art teacher reported that playing a musical instrument was very helpful for a student who had trouble reading, paying attention, and focusing. It seemed as though he connected with the music in such a way that he was able to get through a whole band piece by the end of the year. This teacher said that she can't believe that that wouldn't carry over into the classroom and into other areas. She thinks it was the "hands-on" and the connection with reading that made the difference.

Increasing vocabulary and improving writing. Vocabulary is developed through the arts to increase oral language and reading skills. One teacher explained how students search for words to describe their art, “They really work at that, finding the words to express ideas. If a student is painting a picture, then she is talking about that picture more. Art provides more opportunities for productive, expressive talk, which in reality leads to better writing, and leads to better reading because you understand more language structures. This is especially so for bilingual children who may have difficulty expressing themselves in a second language (and other children who have difficulty with language).”

- One teacher explained how students use their new vocabulary that they’ve developed through art activities. “I have several who are quite amazing when they write because they use the vocabulary that we’ve been working on. And when we read books – I read every day to them – one of the Sunshine State books or other things. They always are quick to point out,

‘trudge, we’ve heard that word five times today. That was one of our words three weeks ago.’ They always pick out the words that are vocabulary words. They can’t imagine that what they’re learning is truly important and truly meaningful.”

- Many teachers provided examples of how art helps to build better background knowledge and improve vocabulary. When a unit/theme based learning approach is used—which often happens with arts-infused lessons—students have a built-in stimulus to learn new vocabulary.
- Drama and play writing also provides another venue for improving written communication skills. For example, in teaching integrated writing in Spanish with the arts, students developed characters and ultimately performed the skit they had created.
- Another elementary teacher reported that more writing was generated “when students write something about themselves and something that’s interesting to them. They get into the stories.”

Developing details and description. Art helps students build detail into their stories. One teacher commented that with drawing, “Greater attention to detail in writing is noted. I’ve seen it in their writing because I teach language arts. They are really editing and revising and trying to find better words. Some of it may be that just rushing things you don’t get as good a product as when you take your time, and they’ve learned that through the arts. That, to me, is a great thing.”

If students draw pictures, and they draw the story, they will include details in their pictures. After this experience, the students write using much more detail. If students are taught to use imaging, seeing the picture in their mind’s eye like they’ve seen it in a painting, then because their writing becomes more connected, it is improved.

- Visualization and imagination are also helpful in developing adjectives for description. In lower grades, students’ writing starts out short and concise. After they are done visualizing, students then develop drawings. They are asked to “write everything that you saw. Describe it so that I can picture it. You’ve got your picture. How are other people going to see it?” One of the questions on an essay writing assignment was what did you learn in school? One student chose to write about his learning how to draw, and he used some of the new vocabulary.
- An elementary teacher reported that more writing was generated “when students write something about themselves and something that’s interesting to them. They get into the stories.”

Drawing math problems. Teachers reported that art is very useful for students who are having difficulty with math problems. When they are encouraged to draw a picture, "It's amazing when they draw out what the problem is and they look at it from a visual perspective, they're able to do [the] math problem." One teacher found that multiplication is easier for students when they illustrate the multiplication problems. "If they can draw a picture of three sheep in two groups, maybe they'll know a little bit better that it's three times two."

More on the impact of art: Opening doors to communication

I can't imagine what way it doesn't impact, speaking as an artist. Kinesthetic communication, the practice alone. I imagine a playwriting situation would help verbal and written communication. The directing, acting things out, would help kinesthetic communication, just giving you practice in conflict resolution, work out scenarios and situations.
Artist and Focus Group Participant, 2004

The arts open doors to communication. Some children can use language (as result of their verbal training) to communicate, some use textbooks, others have a talking computer to speak for them, and some sign to communicate. Whether it is visual arts, dance, music, or drama, communication is integral to the arts. For example,

- In a developing a mosaic, the children have to understand the instructions that are being given. How are they going to use the materials? They have to organize the layout and understand the steps that go into putting the mosaic together.
- Visual arts itself is nonverbal communication--the arts help certain students communicate in a way that they could not do verbally without getting into trouble.
- For students with English as a second language, the arts act as a catalyst to create some cross-cultural communication and serve to break down barriers between parents and children.

"Whenever I get a new class every year, one of the first things I focus on, with the students being so young, is feelings because that will make the rest of the year be so much better if they can tell me how they feel. And feelings, because they're so abstract, the best way I've found to talk about them, to teach them or introduce them is through visual arts and through drama. They're acting out how they feel or giving it a rhythm or drawing different feelings, and then using those as a reference for the next couple of months until they become so engrained. Everyone knows what sad is now and what happy is. After doing that for a while I'll have kids come in and go, 'I feel like this today.' Right away, the person tells me how they feel. They produce more. They put more on the page. They are willing to experiment with more colors."

Early Childhood Teacher

In a dance situation, students have to communicate with the other members of their group how they are going to accomplish whatever the dance study is targeting. There is an understanding of how you function within a group in a kinetic situation, the understanding of how you use space when you're just one

person in a big empty space, or when there are many people who are negotiating about how to use the space together.

As one early childhood educator stated, "If you ask kindergarteners to tell you about their pictures, they can go on and on. They love to and they want to tell everybody. We do the little critique when they share their work and talk about it." At the elementary level several teachers incorporated bookmaking as an art activity. In one instance with nonverbal children, it has also become a communication book and students express themselves by pointing to the pictures they have added to their books. A third educator found use of clay great for nonverbal expression and nonverbal communication skills.

The arts also help students find *appropriate ways* to communicate. The arts can help someone with a major disability express anger, frustration, fear, confusion

On children with autism:

For a student with autism and cognitive impairments visual art classes provided a vehicle to communicate with peers in high school and also promoted socialization skills. Music was also very important—one student spent 4 years as part of a high school choir:

"Her mother reports she can't carry a note, but she can stand next to someone and sing along with her...she can follow along with someone."

Teacher

For children with autism who lack impulsivity control, music seems to break through some communication barrier. One preschool teacher finds that children are able to follow simple directions to music such as stop, slide and stop, gallop and stop, and walk and stop. Theater seems to be the greatest use of that particular art form for students with self-esteem and social issues. Theater is highly collaborative and very much about relationships and how people interact.

and unhappiness most of the time. "Art is a vehicle for us to express all of our darkest stuff, too." A participant explained how teachers can help children learn the art of positive communication: "You don't have to blurt out the first thing on your mind, like 'that nose is wrong!'" Instead, students learn to rephrase their thoughts to let peers know what they like about their art.

Through the arts, functional and expressive communication come together. Some of the students have a very difficult

time with nonverbal social cues. Working with them on a level that is nonverbal focuses on the ability to understand their environment and the things that are being said and being able to respond to nonverbal cues. Validating what the student is feeling is important.

Art not only gives students with disabilities a way to express themselves, but it can also enhance their self-esteem at the same time. The effect of singing on a child with speech and language difficulties was described by an artist-in-residence who brought in tapes and students sang along. One of them that really has trouble with speech.... "even when he's in counseling group, he will start something and then he'll say, never mind or I forgot because he cannot keep a

thought. He made up a song and they were singing it, that's really amazing. Singing definitely helps with communication. Students talk about what they're creating and learn to communicate politely and tactfully...to say things about other's work.. Art gives them a vehicle to communicate their thoughts... It gives them things they could write about and talk about and gives them background knowledge they will access, different kinds of books to have the knowledge to read them. Art is a way to communicate their learning and their thinking. Music especially helps people who are having a hard time communicating or finding ways to communicate. Music has given them a tool to show the different things they know."

Using mime and body movement to improve communication and social skills.

At one site, when deaf students are in classes, an interpreter provides access to full communication, but miming and body language are used either to communicate when the interpreter is not present or with those who don't sign. A teacher at that site indicated that, "It is a sign of personal growth and maturity when a student uses his or her body to communicate," as students do with mime and sign language to show that they do or do not want or need something.

Observation of Mime

The mime artist was a professional actor and mime, in addition to being a teaching artist, and had been working with these students for two years. In the process of working in the classroom he had learned basic American Sign Language. The teaching artist gathered the two students and took a few minutes to discuss the mime scenes they would work on that morning.

The first was a duet mime scene in which the students were at an amusement park riding a roller coaster. As the students began the scene they used their bodies to depict the scenario—they had developed the capacity to communicate using facial expressions and gestures. The students walked across the space having already decided the characters they would portray and how the scene would unfold. One student eagerly moved toward the roller coaster she could clearly see in her mind's eye, the other moved forward in obvious fear and trepidation. They also had clearly thought through details, such as what they would do with their cotton candy, how they would coerce an unwilling rider, and how to build humor and dramatic action into the story they were developing with their bodies.

After a good deal of angst, the students strapped themselves into the roller coaster car and their ride began. They stood, knees bent, reacting in unison. Their bodies tilted together as they climbed the imaginary hill. The student who was less than enthusiastic began to hold her head and stomach, communicating that she was struggling with the situation. They reached the top of the hill, and their bodies moved forward signaling a rapid decent. They completed the ride and stepped out of the car. The scene was resolved as the hesitant student initiated the next ride on the roller coaster. The residency continued and the students drew from their repertoire of established scenes. One student did a solo mime scene in which she was a waitress at a restaurant. Another solo mime scene involved being a pediatric nurse. (The student's sister had given birth to a baby the previous year and she had witnessed the work of a pediatric nurse.) The residency ended when the bell rang and it was time for the students to adjourn for recess.

Mime is used for socialization with peers. In one instance, a new girl moved into the community. A profoundly deaf student in the school, wanting to greet her, but not able to use voice, uses signing as her main mode of communication. As the teacher indicated, "...but the new girl doesn't know how to sign. So the deaf student tapped her on the shoulder and shows the motion to say, 'come on.' That

not only is a sign, but she's showing language in the expressions of her face. 'Come on. I'm really friendly. Let's go play.' She grabbed her hand and did the sign for 'swing' using body language (mime). 'Do you want to swing?' The new girl understood that peer was saying she wanted to go swing."

Training in the arts gives you a way to communicate. Learning to dance is learning another language, "...just another way to communicate your feelings, who you are, and this is especially important for an individual having problems communicating in some of the ways that we use every day."

In one state where students with autism have participated in a *VSA arts* community theater, teachers indicate that they've seen more spontaneous social interaction and that the participants have developed friendships with each other.

More on the impact of art: Problem solving, critical thinking, standards, and evaluation

"Even though we all know that there is an impact, it is just not used in that way. Will your reading skills be increased by doing movement? I'm sure it is, and I'm sure that there's research that says that, but we don't have enough empirical evidence to say for sure."
Focus Group Participant 2004

Art and standards of learning. Participants did not provide many examples of how art impacts standards of learning overall. In fact, many teachers lamented how the focus on standards has driven schools from providing students with arts experiences. In some schools budgets for the arts have decreased; in many schools time is spent primarily on drill and practice for academic learning. Yet many, many teachers truly believed that students with and without disabilities who experience success with the arts and have experiences with the arts, tend to

learn more and be more successful academically. Despite these beliefs, few concrete examples were provided of the impact of the arts on academic achievement, although some teachers acknowledged that sometimes the arts are used to measure learning. One teacher said, "They all know how to do PowerPoint, Hyper

"If we saw *VSA arts* with programs in the public school system, you would have enough research to keep you busy for the rest of your life because then we could really look at how the arts are impacting learning." Several sites mentioned the value of the Starts with Arts program and another program, the High Scope curriculum, which uses observations and anecdotal records to assess and keep track of progress. Teachers also indicated that they used portfolios to demonstrate student progress and that arts projects are a part of these portfolios.

Studio, get up and do a play – a lot of different things to demonstrate that they have mastery of a concept. I know that in middle school and at the high school level too, they're getting much better at allowing kids to have a wider range of ways to demonstrate mastery."

Across the groups, one stunning result was reported: After 15 years of implementing a curriculum where the arts were built into the curriculum, one school had the highest state assessment scores in the district. A poet, literary artist, and visual artist were given credit for developing art skills and raising scores. The poet “makes the kids think differently.” In that strand of the state assessment, the school was 12% above the state standard.

Problem solving. When asked about how art facilitates problem solving, teachers discussed the relationship to sequencing and figuring out how to organize and improvise with the materials at hand. Teachers indicated that:

- For example, sequencing is necessary to create art. Students need to think through what to do first, second, third, etc. And 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.”
- Another example of problem solving comes from an elementary teacher who instead of giving students paintbrushes might hand students other tools for painting and observe as students figure out how to paint with these other implements.
- Theater has an impact on critical thinking and problem solving skills, indicating that “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.
- A large part of the arts is synthesizing and applying learning to demonstrate understanding.

Evaluating the impact of art. Overall, the information teachers provided tended to be vague about how they assessed either the quality of the art produced by students with disabilities or the impact of the arts. At this stage it appears that teachers are doing very little to address in a formal sense how the arts impact learning for students with disabilities. While possible rubrics for evaluating the impact of the arts were shared with some focus group participants, participants seemed much more interested in describing the impact of the arts than in attempting to measure it. In some cases, it appeared that teachers are tired of testing and look to the arts to provide a respite from rigorous measurement.

One VSA *arts* affiliate director, in describing her interest in measuring the impact of the arts said, “What I wish would be happening is ongoing research and evaluation and that we had a structure set-up that would allow for doctoral students who would come in, link up with a university, and have them be a part of

helping us do research.” That same director indicated that videography is very effective since it lends itself to immediate assessment and feedback.

A follow-up teleconference discussion with seven teachers from three states clarified that while rubrics are used with state assessments, assessment of art ability or skill is not required, and that the arts curriculum is not specified in the assessments. These teachers who had volunteered to assist *VSA arts* through a teleconference discussion on evaluation and rubrics, however, are interested in using rubrics to measure the impact of the arts on learning and welcome the opportunity to work with *VSA arts* in both developing and implementing these rubrics. If this implementation may provide a vehicle for increasing funding or greater support for integration of the arts in schools, teachers appeared willing to investigate and utilize rubrics in their classrooms.

Influence on school climate, instruction, and transfer of learning

They have to learn and they have to write. It's amazing that they don't want to write, but you use the arts and they will write.

Focus Group Participant, 2004

When art is a stimulus for learning, it contributes to a positive school climate. Reluctant learners who become excited about learning change the nature of the cycle of teaching and learning that occurs within classrooms and schools. As this happens, students often learn skills such as focusing, problem solving, and researching that transfer across learning situations. Art also provides entry to the world of culture, taking students from the mundane or distant abstract concepts to direct and concrete experiences through dramatizations, and visual and musical explorations. Finally, art can also raise the regard of others toward certain students who previously may have been viewed primarily as “dis”abled. Teachers provided many examples of the positive impact of the arts on learning and how that transferred to the overall culture of the school:

- Through art, students develop better background knowledge which is linked to student achievement and reading. Art provides the stimulus to learn new vocabulary such as violin and melody and harmony and music – “All this language within a context that you’re giving children that they can access in other ways...the same with fluency and expression.”
- “It was good to see the other students showing them empathy in what they were doing. They were so encouraging. ‘I really like how you do this,’ encourage them on whatever it was that they

One of the autistic students was nonverbal at the beginning of the year. He’s starting to speak in short sentences like “Hug me” or “I’m going.” His teacher suggested that there was a strong connection between arts activities and the student’s development, “There is always a link between exposure to arts and learning because if a student finds success in one area, that often transfers to another.

Teacher

were doing. And the belief that all children, no matter what their learning level is, have creativity, and all children like to make music or sound, or whatever that is, and if we believe in it and we can appreciate it, and that it can grow."

- One of the things that art brought out was an eagerness to write. One teacher stated, "They were willing to put it on paper no matter how long it took them, and that's something that they struggle with. I've seen an increase in them wanting to write..."
- Teachers mentioned that in working on theme-based units, students learned to do research. These teachers felt that because students become so involved with projects, theme-based learning promotes retention.
- "Focus" can also be taught through music. An art teacher described how students who have trouble reading, paying attention, or focusing, often learn to focus *after* starting to play a musical instrument. As they enjoy learning to play an instrument, these students experience what it is like to concentrate their energies and efforts.
- Another example of transfer of skills is using the arts (e.g., PowerPoint) to present material in different ways.
- Incorporating art into research projects has been found by some teachers to improve the reading of children who couldn't read at the top level. Another teacher reported that her students, even in the second grade, always incorporate art into their research projects.
- The impact of observational skills learned in the arts on other learning was mentioned by a teacher who said that when "they have to observe, say a leaf pattern, the venation pattern in a leaf or the bone of an animal [that students then] have to reconstruct through drawing in their science journals, the outline of an object, and I saw it transfer from the skill that the artist-in-residence taught them by driving their car around the edge of a leaf or the bone."
- Addressing the overall impact of the arts, one focus group participant said that "when kids have other outlets like the arts, where they can be creative, where they can find out more about who they are as individuals and what their strengths are, then when they come back to doing something that is difficult for them, it makes it easier for them to do that."

When the kids like something they're going to learn more than when they don't like it...that's what our goal has been to help the kids learn and enjoy everything at the same time.

Focus Group Participant 2004

Using the arts for motivating and engaging. Many, many teachers expressed how

important the arts are for student motivation and engagement. Through art activities students are more willing to take risks because they're not afraid that people are going to give them negative feedback on their work. It raises their self-esteem.

Sometimes the arts "set the stage" for learning. One child needed to draw while listening. He would do drawing after drawing. Another child with behavioral problems could cope with working in a group and didn't want to work one-on-one. However, when it came to "playing the music, introducing the dance, being the stage manager that was his calling...that was when he excelled."

The importance of arts integration on improving listening skills was highlighted in comments from one teacher. After some integrating art with reading circle activities, the teacher reported, "I have reading circle every single day as well. My room could be off the walls, and when we say it's time for reading circle, especially during integration time and reading time, every single one of these students is sitting, listening, interacting appropriately, and answering questions. It's unbelievable..."

A related example comes from a teacher who describes the broad-based impact of the arts on learning and motivation. "I have some people who can read very well, but when I ask them to write things on paper, they have difficulty. However, when I gave them the chance to write their own screenplay, and to feel involved and be directors of a project, you should see how things got written on paper. They were so involved in the whole thing. They could illustrate their scenes. They made their own settings. It was like a whole different ballgame because they're in charge of their own project. There are so many examples – not one type of art, but all different types of arts combined. I think that happens in social studies, too, when they're learning subjects in social studies and they're allowed to make projects and posters and draw their heroes. That's when we see abilities that I don't think we would have seen if it was just paper and pencil and asking questions."

The general theme of engagement was elaborated on by one of the *VSA arts* affiliate directors who stated that, "the arts contain an inner energy. Any learning should have that inner learning, should have that inner energy, that excitement. When that energy is present...when she teaches from the energy point of view, the person becomes more open, and as you become more open, perceptions begin to take place...and memory systems change."

A teacher provided opportunities for arts activities to support social skills. Her students pushed their desks together to work. The students shared "that box of pencils." She said that "sounds easy but it's a major thing...to get along... It has worked really well."

Developing social literacy and positive interactions. Social literacy is children

being able to successfully interact with each other, communicate their ideas, and express themselves. They're learning skills to socially relate with each other and to positively deal with someone that they're not so happy with. As one teacher remarked, "The arts bring a social piece to your environment that's very strong and the children learn how to relate to each other in positive ways."

For students who have experienced failure, including students at a juvenile detention center where one of the teachers taught, the art and the success it brings "makes their failures bearable" and allows students to carry on. "It upsets the cycle of destruction and engages them."

As one teacher indicated, "It's inherently liberating to have an idea and then create something that other people can see, a play, and a picture. It's about learning to create meaning and create meaningful experiences." According to teachers in this focus group, projects that are art-integrated seem easier to introduce and students have a better feel for the work. At another site, a teacher commented on the relationship of the arts to social negotiation skills. "I've also done some cooperative paintings as well, where they'll start a painting, hand it off to someone, and that person can make changes to it and then give it back to the first person.... There's a certain amount of letting go, but then there's also how do you negotiate."

Improving participation and reducing absenteeism. For some students, the arts bring an opportunity for success and that impacts their attitude and their lives. It's well known that many students with special needs struggle with reading, language arts, or math and by time they are of middle school age they often develop negative, and even angry, attitudes toward school and learning. For students with special needs, even for those without artistic talent, art plays an important and positive role. As one teacher commented, "Art has been wonderful for all the special ed kids; it is where they could be very successful and be proud of themselves." Teachers reported that clay, or something similar, has been found to be very useful to deescalate strong emotions and negative behaviors. Many teachers noted that when students' attitudes improve, their enthusiasm also improves. Several teachers commented on how the arts improve participation in school and reduces absenteeism.

Teachers also mentioned that the performing arts are helpful with shy children. For example, a third-grade boy had been in school since pre-K. None of his teachers had heard him speak until he recited a poem. "He did several renditions, no less in a southern accent (he does not have an accent) of a poem, 'Honey I Love' by Eloise Greenfield. Plus he did several other pieces too." Another teacher in that same focus group remarked that students are motivated to change their behaviors and their mannerisms to portray a character.

Using art extensively and throughout the school. Some teachers identify a theme at the beginning of the year and work on it throughout the year, keeping it

as a backdrop. At one school, teaching a multi-age group, the students rotated around the school building, participating in mask making or rain stick making for the rain forest.

At some sites, art was used extensively. For example, at a school that serves deaf and hard of hearing students the teachers consider art to be another way of learning, and the arts are a way of showing what students have learned. At another school, a middle school teacher stated in reference to acting, "I use arts in everything; that's what I do daily. We hit it from every single angle, kinesthetic, the whole spectrum from mime to improvisation; it's in everything we do." With the younger group, that teacher is using a kinesthetic approach with "trust" exercises to draw out feelings. With the older group, students are writing plays. As many as 80 students currently direct or act in plays they have produced.

Simulations provide opportunities for whole school involvement to facilitate learning. At the eighth grade, 150 students are involved in researching immigration. The students research a specific type of immigrant and dramatize arriving in the U.S. The students come into school and everyone, "is dressed up in immigration kind of clothes and we have a whole simulation for them in the classroom. And then we have stations that the kids go through as if they were on Ellis Island. They're on the boat. Then I teach photography...we photograph everybody who comes through. There are about 15 teachers who participate. It's a whole-day experience, with three weeks planning time."

On perhaps what can be termed a less dramatic scale, art can be a useful transition technique for an entire school. At one site, teachers used music to move between classes and found that the entire transitioning between classes became smoother and more enjoyable.

From a more inclusive perspective, the comments of one of the *VSA arts* affiliate directors concerning the potential of the arts struck a chord, "we're working towards the day when people with disabilities are included by design in art, education, and culture. That's the simplest way to describe it...it's a vision of a society where having a disability is just another variation on the human experience and is casually accepted."

Collaboration

Hands down, my experience in the five years that I've been here is that we are most effective in those schools that engage not only in the residency, but that engage in the professional development for the teachers.

Teacher

Collaboration skills. Special and general education teachers, in an inclusive classroom, need to synchronize their respective roles, whether it is that of a collaborator or of a co-teacher. In self-contained and resource room settings,

collaboration is required for the special education teacher to effectively work with related services staff as well as with specialists such as teaching artists and artists-in-residence. At a program for autistic children, one educator explained how the collaboration worked with the music and art therapists. With this arrangement, they were able to put a story such as Sleeping Beauty to music, creating props, murals, and songs, and then acting out the story. In another example, at a summer sports camp for 5-8 year olds, the Start with the Arts program was integrated with sports, swimming, archery, and field games.

Teaching teams. In Michigan, teaching teams with occupational and physical therapists, nurses, and teachers are used. However, collaboration between the special education teacher and the art specialist who comes once a week is difficult. Because students are pulled out for special education, they also may miss the classes with the art specialist. In another case, an occupational therapist and speech therapist worked with autistic boys, 9-12 years old who didn't have much language. They structured a drama group that lasted five months. They performed a play together once a month. They would read a children's book together and make a skit out of it. The structured form of the play aided the children in improving their communication skills.

One site had developed a color-coded curriculum map with the main concepts in the visual arts program. The teacher listed the relationship then to concepts from reading and math. Through this collaboration curriculum charts were developed and posted in the office, a common space. Out of this, a huge school-wide cultural festival was planned. One teacher who was involved with this festival commented on how collaboration is furthered by the support of the administrator, "someone who believes in what you're doing and who is on board with you... You really need to communicate with your administrators and let them know how fun and exciting it is."

Fostering collaboration. A middle school fostered collaboration by organizing study groups made up of five to ten diverse teachers who met during the school day every other week. Each of the teachers on the team took turns teaching a topic, bringing in examples of how he or she integrates material. The arts have been pivotal in many of the groups because some of the classroom teachers were not knowledgeable about the arts and were eager to learn from others.

Several innovative solutions were portrayed for linking art to life skills classes for students with disabilities. One program teamed college professors with an artist, teaching the college professors an area of specialization in a middle school. In one example on first aid, safety, and medicine, the artist focused on the importance of observation of one's environment and using one's senses, preventing the need for first aid. Prewriting exercises were used based on observations of space, with role-plays about emergency situations and students developing rhymes and cheers about different first aid techniques.

“Start with the Arts has been an extremely strong program for us. The training program has been very strong...we were able to train a couple hundred teachers and we've got thousands of kids who've been affected by that program because the teachers are still using it.”

VSA arts Affiliate Director

The arts provide a valuable vehicle for adaptations and modifications necessary to enable the child to benefit from instruction whether it is in an inclusive, resource, or self-contained setting. An Arizona participant stated that the lack of collaboration between art specialists and teachers has direct implications for professional development activities. Specific issues emerged from the discussions such as communicating across disciplines and the respective role of a teaching artist versus an art therapist.

Professional Development

Educators need to understand the value and importance of arts learning.

This would seem to be a first step to enhanced professional development activities. A Montana educator puts this in context, "Art helps keep us focused. After 9/11 we all didn't go to a math lab; we went and heard music, we watched dance, we spoke together, and we did all this art together communally. The thing that we share in our culture is narratives and movies and books – all those things that are art, that when you come down to educators, they don't get that..." A Seattle area teacher puts it in context of the individual child: "The arts make the kids think differently. That's maybe the single greatest application of the arts, is that ability to find another channel or another road when all the other roads are blocked." "Getting the word out" is necessary. An Iowa participant said that regular education teachers don't know about *VSA arts* and don't get information about it but would like to be involved.

Incorporate importance of the arts into teacher training. Arts learning and its potential to positively influence children with learning or behavior problems should be part of training for regular education teachers, according to an educator in Iowa, "When the regular education teachers get to participate in an artsy or hands-on experience, they see those naughty behavior kids calm down...they see them being good...so they then begin to incorporate some art activities such as clay to deescalate problem behavior..." A Washington state educator states, however, that "the message that arts learning impacts on the student's creative thinking and problem solving skills isn't getting down to the classroom teacher, or it's not getting into the buildings for leadership teams...it's got to start with teacher training at the college level."

Start with the Arts (*VSA arts*, 1994) as a valuable curriculum resource.

Training in *VSA arts'* Start with the Arts— an early childhood curriculum with lessons for using visual arts, drama, dance and movement, and music to engage children in expressing concepts thoughts and feelings— was mentioned numerous times as extremely important for arts integration. A number of focus

group participants from various affiliate sites reported that the arts and Start with the Arts helped change teacher attitudes and negative perceptions of children with disabilities; it raised their expectations of the child's potential in a very real way. For example, a Florida-based elementary teacher said, "...other teachers can't believe what my students can do...A teacher learns a lot about a student through the artwork that he or she produces."

An art teacher's reflection as a student in a master of fine arts program: "Listening to people critique my work...my heart being pulled out of my body. I think a lot of us who are trained in the fine arts might have gone through some sort of experience like that with some professor in higher education. It made me think about how can you respond to art critically and how can you teach kids?" [I've heard] amazing self-evaluations of kids who are very young who say, 'I hate it. I don't like it. That's bad.'

How early we start to jump to those conclusions. This artist used the visual thinking strategies (VTS) method to address this issue:

First ask: When you look at a piece of art, what's going on in this picture? Not who made it, when, or what is it, but what's going on. Similar to asking about a narrative story, but it's getting you to see what you really see. This artist said that she realized all the good teachers that she had had used this basic method to discuss student work.

Or, in an improvisation class, the immediate response was, 'you didn't do that right. You ought to do this. You ought to go over here.' A good teacher would say, "Look back and say, 'What did you see? What was going on? What makes you say that? What did he or she do that indicated that?'"

And it's the same thing for visual art. You can apply it to dance and you can apply it to music. What did you hear? What did it make you think of? What made you say this reminded you of the rain? Going into the level of detail of observation and perception about the piece of art teaches you to observe and to understand the world in a critical way that's not about analyzing the world; it's about understanding the world through observation, which is critical, but not in that critical sense.

Michigan Artist

"Art is another way of learning something. It captures their eye. It's a way of showing what students are learning," according to a Montana educator. Other focus group participants pointed out that teachers could use artwork as a way to demonstrate to parents the child's growth.

Positive teacher attitudes toward arts learning are critical. Attitude formation in preparing teachers as change agents in support of arts learning was seen as important by a Florida educator, "Teacher education programs do not really prepare teachers with the right kind of attitude...it just takes that creative mind of the teacher and determination to do something to make a difference...and to avoid teaching as they were taught and "teach the same old way..." One educator expressed it this way, "Attitude is very important to successful arts integration. Ninety percent of what you teach is who you are."

Artist-in-residence. Several sites mentioned the importance of professional development for the arts specialist/artist-in-residence. It is important that this begin before the artists' residency starts. Similarly, teachers need preparation to understand the best

ways to collaborate with the arts specialists. When this preparation occurs, teachers are more likely to know how to work to support the artist and how to involve artists in meaningful ways to meet their classroom objectives.

Principals and school administrators. A principal's understanding of the importance of arts learning is critical. According to a Michigan participant, principals and school administrators should be included in the training for arts integration. An Arizona educator said that school administrators need to understand the value of the arts. Their support is critical especially when implementing whole school innovations such as the “curriculum mapping” project at a school in Iowa, or ensuring that sufficient time is allocated for teachers to meet.

Preservice education. Higher education institutions are not preparing teachers to incorporate the arts in every academic area and “...they need somehow to incorporate the importance of arts in the curriculum.” It is especially important because art specialists in the schools are being cut back and teachers need to be trained to fill the gap, was an issue raised by a Florida educator.

Some principles of teacher training for arts learning mentioned in the focus groups include the following:

- The importance of not modeling anything for students because they then expect their artwork to look like the teacher’s work.
- Teachers need to tolerate “messiness” in the classroom (and another teacher mentioned being able to tolerate noise as well).
- Teachers need to know various ways that children are “wired” for learning; for example, a student who needs to draw while listening.
- Students today are exposed to so much visually (TV, computers, videogames) and are “hard wired” for a two-dimensional visual world. Teaching strategies need to take this into account such as the need for teachers to help students in their self-evaluation processes to be more reflective and to think about something before responding.
- Displaying student's artwork is very important.
- Special strategies are needed for working with students with very, very low self-esteem such as using a step-by-step, formulaic, approach so that students are always set up to succeed.
- Specialized projects and ways to use art such as bookmaking and journaling projects can be replicated by regular teachers in their classrooms given hands-on instruction.

- The importance of communicating to students what art is--not just the ability to draw, but that it can be abstract and reflect their own personal experience.
- Reading facial expressions is an important skill teachers need to have, as well as use of mime or body language for communicating.
- Active learning and active teaching are extremely important for students with disabilities or other non-traditional learners who have a hard time sitting in a desk, paying attention and listening, or sitting for extended periods of time.
- Giving and receiving feedback and criticism are skills that need to be developed.

Limitations to arts integration and this research

We have a vision of where we want to go; we just don't have the manpower to do it.

Principal

Teachers were quick to point out that in some cases we don't yet know about the impact of art on learning and in other cases, art alone cannot be counted on to advance literacy. One teacher suggested that it was her experience that drawing had a minimal impact on writing fluency, except for older elementary (fourth graders) who may write about their favorite part of the book and then illustrate it freehand.

Teachers also provided some examples of what might need to change to improve the impact of art on learning. They were concerned that access to arts learning for special education students is very limited. One school, for example, only has visual arts once a week. At another school, "Art happens in the art room and music happens in the music room. Other teachers don't know that's going on and the music and art teachers aren't aware of the instruction that is occurring in the classrooms." In another state, the special education teachers seem content to send students to "the art and music rooms and be done with it...The other teachers don't want to get involved."

At another school, through grant and other collaborations to fund selected initiatives, some children "who appear artistically gifted are pulled from their classes...they have done math and all sorts of very interesting things...", but for students with disabilities, opportunities are very limited because to participate they have to be able to miss a class and make up work to do that. The artist-in-residence works with the other students so students in special education have gotten minimal exposure if they are in those classes (and not pulled out to the resource room) for art instruction. Another teacher reported that students with

severe disabilities are “still isolated in the classroom” and that these students are not experiencing inclusion in the arts or at other times.

The length of programs can be another limitation. One teacher indicated that “the programs are only 10 weeks long, so it’s really hard and takes a good four weeks for the kids to transition into anyway, and then you have a good three or four weeks where everyone is on top of it and it’s almost over...”

Finally, several limitations of this research should be considered in attempting to generalize from the results. First, the research was conducted primarily with elementary and preschool teachers, so that at this point very little is known about the impact on students with disabilities at the middle or high school levels. Second, the focus groups were composed of participants, most of whom had a long-term relationship with *VSA arts*, who volunteered to be a part of the focus group research; therefore, research is needed regarding the opinions of other teachers. Third, more information is needed on the perception of male teachers and as well as teachers from a range of ethnic groups. Although groups were held in places with diverse student populations, the same diversity was not reflected among the focus group participants. Also, logistically it would have been preferable to use teams of moderators at each site. That might have led to different follow-up questions and provided an opportunity for immediate reflection on the statements made by participants and the implications for the remaining focus groups. Although the moderator shared perceptions via phone calls with the research team, to some degree, the team was hindered by the impact of giving advice without another researcher on site. Similarly, this may have impacted the validity of the data obtained. Although the three researchers all read the transcripts and discussed the data and conclusions that were reached, the transcripts did not capture contextual factors that might have led to different interpretations of the data.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Comments from teachers across the country support the value of the arts for students with disabilities. The place where arts infusion seemed to occur naturally without barriers was in early childhood programs. However, teachers across grade levels enthusiastically shared anecdotal reports both of how they implemented arts curricula and of the impact for students. They reported the impact primarily in terms of their perceptions of changes in student attitudes, motivation, social skills, and ability to communicate. These teachers also described differences in the learning and the performance of students when the arts were involved. For example, often the writing was richer, more in-depth, and included more details.

Teachers also reported the differential impact of arts programs for students with certain needs or characteristics, for both at-risk students, and students experiencing learning, behavioral, sensory, physical, or developmental problems.

Music appears to be particularly important for students with autism, for example, and mime is very useful for children who are deaf.

Promoting social and pragmatic language skills is an important objective for working with older children with autism and higher-functioning children. These skills can make the difference to independent living, employment, and higher education (Batshaw, 2002). Arts learning can provide a way to use a new social skill in a variety of settings with different people and situations until that skill has been mastered. Teacher training is key to creating awareness of the importance of arts learning to children's development and the skills to implement appropriate interventions.

Voice

The arts can provide the opportunity and space for students with disabilities to find and explore their voice—however that voice may manifest. This is particularly important for students with disabilities whose voices may have been silenced in the process of diagnosis-centered labeling and standardized instruction. Voice within this context refers to the unique and individual way students with disabilities can utilize 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. For example, the first grade students who were creating poems were sharing thoughts and feelings within the structure of poetry that they normally would not express through essay writing and grammar assignments. Their ideas came out with confident fluidity through the poems.

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 thereby yielding self-esteem and confidence. The crucial act of finding your voice, your way to communicate and contribute within the world, is central to the pursuit of what it means to be human. Students with disabilities must be afforded the opportunity to find and explore their voice through engaging in the arts.

Choice

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. Through the arts, students who are typically never asked how they view the world are given the opportunity to share their thoughts. For example, though the medium was predetermined, the students participating in the mime program got to decide what stories they would explore and what actions would manifest those narratives.

Choice cultivates autonomy. The arts continually engage students with disabilities in the acts of observation, rehearsing, weighing, judging all of which are essential tools for learning in general. As they decide how paint goes on canvas, what to say on stage, or how to format a poem, they are honing the highly critical capacity of decision making that will enable them to be active and independent members of society. Participant teachers 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.

Access

The final thought to explore is the notion of access. Access provides a conceptual bridge that can be used to connect the idea of voice and choice to the larger arts, education, and disability conversation. Access within this context refers to the opportunity to fully engage in the curriculum, participate in the school and community, and contribute in ways that allow students to reach their full potential. Student, school, and community are strengthened when true access is achieved.

Teachers 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, within the peacemaker project, students were able to meet the curricular objective (drawing the human form) in the way that they desired and were able. The students involved in the exploration of poetry accessed the language arts curriculum in individual ways through writing and illustrating a poem. There were no wrong poems and illustrations. The students who were learning mime created and physically explored narrative in ways not bound by language or physical ability.

While the focus group results support the value of the arts in providing access, choice, and voice, more rigorous research is needed. Research beyond the scope of a focus group approach is needed to determine more specifically both the procedures teachers use to integrate the arts and the impact of arts activities on academic achievement and cognition in particular. Six avenues of research may be particularly worthwhile for follow-up: (a) development and implementation of rubrics to measure gains in cognitive, academic, and artistic skills; (b) interviews or focus groups with students and adults with disabilities to gain appreciation of their views regarding the values of the arts and integrating arts

into cross-curricular instruction; (c) focus groups with middle and high school teachers; (d) focus groups with teachers, including general education teachers and others without a long-term relationship with *VSA arts* ; (e) measures of the impact of professional development activities on teacher implementation and results for students; and (f) implementation of specific arts curriculum and measurement of the impact according to state standards of learning or performance on national assessments.

If these projects are implemented, several cautionary notes should be considered. While some of these are obvious considerations, in these times when teachers are facing the pressures regarding achievement and *No Child Left Behind*, extra consideration of their circumstances is recommended. First, care should be taken not to burden teachers with additional responsibilities without adequate remuneration, and to give consideration to the amount of their time that may be needed in implementing any research. Secondly, if rubrics are designed and implemented, they should complement and not confound the use of existing rubrics-based assessments or other standards of measurement being implemented in schools. Related to this, teachers should be provided choices for using rubrics and given opportunities to modify suggested rubrics to best meet their individual circumstances. Thirdly, there are advantages to starting with projects that are smaller in scope that use specifically designated curricula such as Start with the Arts and might be implemented with specific grade levels.

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Appendix A
VSA arts Affiliate Research Project
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

[Note on methodology: Prompts are used only as necessary to elicit more descriptive information. For question #3 and 4. Tailor questions to the demographics of participants. Question #5: only ask if participants have not yet discussed this.]

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this focus group meeting is to better understand the breadth and depth of the work being done by *VSA arts* affiliate organizations. This is one of the 10 *VSA arts* affiliates that is participating in this targeted investigation of student learning in and through the arts.

We are particularly interested in learning more about how arts-based instruction (as exemplified in the work of the affiliate organization) meets the academic, social, and artistic needs of the students, the relationship of the affiliate's work to the national standards for arts learning, and how learning is evaluated and assessed within the arts affiliate network. The question that guides our discussion today particularly addresses how the work of *VSA arts* affiliates can contribute to the larger arts in learning conversation.

We will discuss this within the context of the broad theme of arts integration; for example, in what ways do you incorporate the arts in your classroom and school? We are interested in learning from you how arts instruction impacts on the learning of students with disabilities and other non-traditional learners, especially in the academic and functional literacy domains. We want to explore with you how collaboration and partnerships have contributed to your overall project goals, especially related to arts integration, and what professional

development would be useful to promote better outcomes for the students you teach.

INTEGRATION AND COLLABORATION

1. How do you integrate the arts (visual arts, music, drama, performance arts) into instruction?

- Please provide specific examples
- What role does an art form itself play in how you teach? (For example, do you use it to introduce a lesson, for practice, or as part of the “final product” to demonstrate understanding)

2. In your school, has a team of educators (e.g., general education, special education, art specialist, *artist-in-residence*) worked together to use the arts to enhance student learning?

- If so, in what ways?
- What contributed to the success?
- How much collaborative planning went into the effort?
- Are arts specialists part of the planning team?

STANDARDS-BASED INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

3. How do the arts improve student performance, including their:

- Demonstrated competence in communication
- Demonstrated competence in problem-solving strategies and critical thinking skills
- Demonstrated competence in reading, math, and writing skills
- Demonstrated competence in other academic areas

- Demonstrated competence in using technology (only ask this question if time allows).

COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

4. Do you have any examples of how the arts influence a students' ability within the areas of (Please tie/focus responses to examples that focus on use of a particular art form):

Questions for secondary teachers:

- Memorization, observation skills, and attention to sequence and detail
- Critical self-assessment, questioning, work habits, and risk taking
- Reasoning, mental alertness, and goal setting
- Creativity, expression, and empathy

Questions for pre-k and elementary:

- Listen to and follow directions
- Pay attention to sequence and detail
- Observe and problem solve
- Understand and respond to symbols
- Creativity, expression, empathy

5. Do you see arts education as a way of increasing access to the general curriculum for non-traditional learners? Would you agree with this? Why or why not?

- Have you found that arts integration works particularly well with certain subject matter? With certain children?