

# Voices From the Field

What Integrated Teaching through the Arts M.Ed. Graduates Tell Us About Arts Integration in America's Schools.

*A Research Study  
funded by the Ford Foundation*



## What is the relevancy of arts integration pedagogical practices in today's educational climate?

This study examines the relationship between arts integration, student learning and development, and teacher efficacy and satisfaction. In particular, the study explores the relevance of arts integrated pedagogical practices in today's educational climate, a climate that is increasingly emphasizing students' development of 21st century skills. These skills - imagination, creativity, innovation, collaboration - are the skills that many economists, business leaders and other experts are pointing to as crucial for the future well-being of our nation. Drawing its data from over 200 elementary and secondary teachers who are alumni of Lesley University's Integrated Teaching through the Arts program, the study examines how arts integrated pedagogical approaches create the kind of "deep learning" experiences that foster 21st century skills. The study further explores how teachers' use of these strategies affects their own lives and effectiveness as teachers.

### Methodology

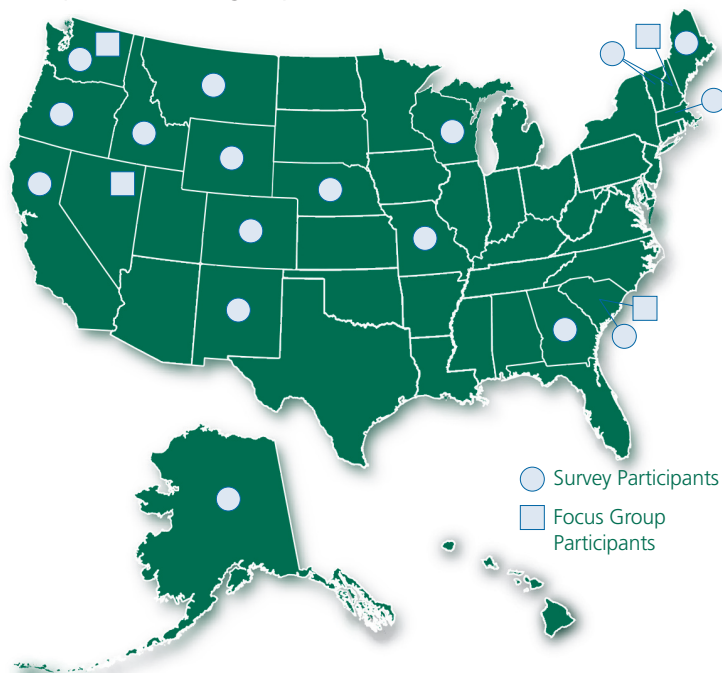
A research team from Lesley University's Creative Arts in Learning Division is conducting the research. Using mixed methods—including quantitative, qualitative, and arts-based research strategies—the team is gathering a broad base of data from alumni of Lesley University's Integrated Teaching through the Arts (ITA) graduate program.<sup>1</sup> The first phase of data collection, completed during the 2008-2009 academic year, included:

- On-line survey of 202 teachers from 19 states gathering both quantitative and qualitative data
- Eleven focus groups held in Las Vegas, Nevada; Kent and Tacoma, Washington; Raymond, New Hampshire and Florence, South Carolina with a total of 62 teachers participating.

During the 2009-2010 academic year, the research will continue with more extensive analysis of the first year's data and with additional fieldwork to explore emerging themes.

### About the Study Sample

An invitation to complete the online survey was sent to over 7,900 alumni of the Integrated Teaching through the Arts program (ITA) in 24 different states. To date, 202 teachers from 19 different states have responded to the survey. The research team held focus groups in five cities—Kent and Tacoma, WA; Las Vegas, NV; Raymond, NH; and Florence, SC—selected for their large base of ITA alumni and their collective diversity with regard to geographic region and urban and rural populations. Alumni living in or within 60 miles of each of these cities were invited to attend the focus groups. The research team took measures to ensure that the focus groups included a mix of classroom teachers and specialists and alumni with a range of graduation years. A total of 62 teachers participated in focus groups across the four cities.



An analysis of the participant pool reveals several characteristics including:

- Teachers in the study have been teaching for many years in their career (68% of survey respondents and 64% of focus group participants have been teaching for more than 10 years and as many as 39) and 75% of survey respondents and 79% of focus group participants have completed their ITA graduate degree in the last nine years. By learning in, with and through the arts, teachers focus on both the content area and the richness of the art form allowing students to be "creators" of art and knowledge.
- Teachers in the study were primarily Caucasian (92.7 % in the survey; 84.3% in the focus groups) although there is a noticeable increase in participation among other ethnic groups, mainly African Americans (13.7%), in the focus groups.
- While the majority of the graduates from the ITA Program are female, it was surprising to see relatively high numbers of male participants in the study (7% in the survey and nearly 11% in the focus groups).
- The majority (86% in the survey and 77% in focus groups) of participant teachers teach in public schools. These schools, as reported by the teachers, report their schools AYP status (55% Meeting AYP in the survey; 32% Meeting AYP in focus groups while 25% in survey and 34% in focus groups are Not Meeting AYP: Needing School Improvement.)
- While the majority of teachers in the study are general classroom teachers, a significant percentage is specialists (arts and non-arts) who participated (33% in survey, 23% in focus groups).
- It is also noteworthy that for both survey participants and focus group participants, the clear majority of teachers (67% survey and 61% focus groups) teach at grades K-5 levels.

### Emerging Themes

Preliminary data analysis suggests that arts integration leads to "deep learning" resulting in the achievement of 21st century skills. In addition other key themes emerge including the transformation and resilience of teachers, the ability of the arts to reach diverse groups of learners and ways that effective and intensive professional development undergird the possibility for all of these.

### Arts Integration, Deep Learning, and 21st Century Skills

Lesley University faculty, Diaz, Donovan and Pascale define arts integration (as modeled in the ITA program) "We introduce the concept of arts integration by investigating curricular content through artistic explorations. In this process the arts provide an avenue for rigorous investigation, representation, expression and reflection of both curricular content and the art form itself."<sup>2</sup>

By learning in, with, and through the arts, teachers focus on both the content area and the richness of the art form allowing students to be “creators” of art and knowledge.

The data in the study indicate that arts integration helps students develop higher order skills, synonymous with 21st century skills, in addition to increased success in academic content. Arts integration approaches are the conduit through which “deep learning” happens.

James and Gipps, scholars on deep learning, “argue that education for the twenty-first century should place emphasis on higher-order skills and ‘deep learning’ while not neglecting basic skills” and is about “deeper understandings of concepts and principles and their application in unfamiliar contexts.”<sup>3</sup> Partnerships for 21st Century Skills describes the curriculum that “blends thinking and innovation skills; information, media and ICT literacy; and life and career skills in context of academic subjects and across interdisciplinary themes.”<sup>4</sup>

Teachers report that their students are achieving numerous 21st century skills including:

- Creativity and innovation
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Communication and collaboration
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Initiation and self-direction

This study is finding that when arts integration is used, deep learning results leading to the achievement of these 21st century skills.

## Universal Design for Diverse Learners

Teachers who employ integrated arts strategies in their classrooms note particular learning outcomes for distinct populations of students—students who have special needs, for example, or those who are culturally/linguistically diverse, economically challenged and/or gifted and talented. Teachers report a range of outcomes for students in these groups including increased engagement and collaboration, creativity, reflection, ability to access content in new ways, and break-through aha! moments. This finding suggests that the arts are a powerful tool for differentiation.

## Teacher Transformation and Resilience

Almost 66% of teachers responding to the survey report that their participation in the ITA program, and its lasting effects on their teaching practice, have played a role in their staying in the teaching profession. In a time when teacher turnover is a substantial policy problem and when teachers face mounting challenges, such as overcrowded classrooms, testing and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP – a measure of No Child Left Behind) pressure, and stress in their own and students’ lives, this link between arts integration and teacher resilience is notable.

## Professional Development

Teachers who have experienced long-term immersive professional development in the arts are able to bring these experiences into their classrooms in significant ways.

The ITA program takes students on a 22-month journey, immersing them in visual art, movement, storytelling, poetry, music and drama in addition to curriculum and theory courses. In the ITA classroom, teachers step into the role of artist, which challenges their comfort zone while allowing them to engage in risk-taking and experimentation. After the program, teachers report that being placed in this role as student and creator allows them to work with their students in new ways. Through the new approaches teachers apply, students become deeply engaged, highly creative, able to take risks and to understand multiple perspectives to problem solving.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE NEXT PHASE

In the second phase of the project, the research team will continue analysis of survey and focus group data and collect additional qualitative data to explore the following emergent questions:

- How does deep learning happen through arts integration approaches?
- How do arts integration approaches lead to learning outcomes that prepare students to be active citizens of the 21st century?
- How do arts integration approaches affect teachers and their desire to stay in the teaching profession?
- What are the qualities of professional development that prompt significant changes in teachers’ practice?
- How do teachers’ contexts affect their use of arts integration approaches?
- What contextual factors enable and constrain teachers’ abilities to create opportunities for deep learning?

For gifted and talented students, 93.80% of teacher’s report that students reflect more deeply and 87.10% note creativity as a major learning outcome in their students.

For culturally/ linguistically diverse students, 80.90% of teachers report more self-expression and 80.60% report a break-through moment in students’ learning.

For economically disadvantaged students, 84.50% of teachers report students are more engaged and 83.90% report students are collaborative with their peers.

For students with special needs, 87.70% of teachers report students are more engaged and 87.70% of teachers note students access content in new ways.

## REFERENCES

- 1 Lesley University's Creative Arts in Learning Division has been offering an M.Ed in Curriculum and Instruction in Integrated Teaching through the Arts (formerly Creative Arts in Learning) since 1976 through on campus and off-campus national cohort models. To date, an estimated 8,000 teachers have completed the program.
- 2 Diaz, Gene, Donovan, Lisa & Pascale, Louise, "Integrated teaching through the arts." Paper presented at the UNESCO world conference on arts in education, Lisbon, Portugal, 2006.
- 3 James, M. & Gipps, C. "Broadening the basis of assessment to prevent the narrowing of learning," Curriculum Journal 9 (3) (1998): 285-297.
- 4 Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 21st Century Curriculum and Instruction. [Tucson, AZ: Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2008],  
1. [http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/route21/images/stories/.../r21\\_ci\\_epaper.pdf](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/route21/images/stories/.../r21_ci_epaper.pdf) {accessed June 10, 2009}

## ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM

Kerrie Bellisario, Co-Principal Investigator, is a consultant, researcher, faculty member in the Creative Arts in Learning (CAL) division, and a visual artist. Lisa Donovan is Director and an Associate Professor in CAL at Lesley University and serves as Co-Principal Investigator of the project. Monica Prendergast is an arts-based researcher and Assistant Professor in CAL.

Lauren Stevenson is an external arts and education researcher and doctoral candidate at Stanford University.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the research study, please visit:

<http://www.lesley.edu/gsass/itaresearch>

To learn more about the Integrated Teaching through the Arts graduate program, please visit:

[http://www.lesley.edu/gsass/cal\\_offcampus.html](http://www.lesley.edu/gsass/cal_offcampus.html)

