

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A PORTRAIT OF PERSUASIVE POTENTIAL

The Evaluation Study of

ArtsNOW: 2007-2008

Prepared by

David E. Myers, Ph.D.
Professor and Director, School of Music
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN

For the Board and Staff of Creating Pride, Atlanta GA

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An evaluation study of *ArtsNOW* was conducted during the 2007-2008 school year. Data were gathered for four workshops – October, December, February, and July. In addition, follow-up data were gathered for August 2007. Each participant completed a pre-workshop survey, a post-workshop survey, and a follow-up survey five months following the Level One workshop. In addition, the researcher visited four "case-study" schools, where implementation levels were observed first hand. Focus-group and telephone interviews completed the data collection.

Classroom teachers were the largest professional category of educators attending workshops, followed by arts specialists and administrators. Participants were experienced professional educators with an average of 15.6 years of experience. The vast majority of participants taught in, or administered, elementary schools.

Data showed that participants generally held positive views of the value of the arts and arts integration prior to workshops. Though administrators reported that they encouraged collaborative planning for arts integration, they were less likely to actually schedule time for arts integration planning.

Post-workshop surveys indicated very strong perceptions of the knowledge gained, quality of leaders and presentations, and the usefulness of the workshops. Participants generally felt ready to integrate arts and academics, though arts specialists and classroom teachers felt more "ready" than administrators to create activities and lessons. Comments regarding the workshops were extremely positive, indicating very strong perceptions that the workshops were relevant to classroom practice, reinforced/respected participants as professionals, and increased knowledge and confidence for arts integration.

Follow-up surveys conducted five months after the workshops showed that participants were actively applying strategies learned in the workshops. They felt most comfortable integrating visual arts, music, and drama, with less comfort integrating dance. Eighty-nine percent saw students as "more engaged" during arts integration and 87 percent said that students "respond better" when teachers use arts integration. Eighty-seven percent felt that students achieve at higher levels when using arts integration, and 97 percent disagreed that "there is no difference in student achievement when I integrate the arts." Participants saw the workshops as an excellent use of professional development time, with 94 percent agreeing that the workshop met their primary professional development need. Participants generally felt that they wanted more arts content in order to be effective integrating the arts. They saw time – both for planning and for integration – as being one of the strongest factors influencing arts integration. Participants felt that they are subjected to too many overlapping and conflicting school improvement programs that fail to address classroom realities, whereas the *ArtsNOW* workshops were viewed as connecting directly with children's learning needs.

Case studies of four schools supported the survey findings, indicating that effective arts integration requires collaborative planning time, that achievement testing too frequently drives classroom practice and limits child-centered teaching, and that the arts enhance cross-curricular learning.

Conclusions drawn from all data sources indicated that workshops reinforced and enhanced teachers' positive beliefs and skills regarding arts learning, improved implementation in the classrooms of those who attended workshops, and perceptibly enhanced student engagement and achievement in classrooms where the arts were integrated with academic content. Extending workshop content and principles from attendees to other teachers, however, proved difficult given the time limitations on planning and expectations to focus on content that is tested. Participants agreed that more teachers should participate in arts integration training as delivered by *ArtsNOW* and that more administrators should be apprised of the values and the supporting implementation strategies, such as collaborative planning time.

Recommendations included continued emphasis on the high quality of workshop delivery and content, as well as the professional environment in which workshops occur, additional efforts to apprise system-level administrators of the value of workshops, ongoing support of those who attend workshops, and assessing teacher performance relative to national standards for teachers. Evidence from the evaluation suggests that controlled studies should be undertaken to compare students in classrooms with systematically trained *ArtsNOW* teachers with control groups. Ideally, intact classrooms of students would remain with *ArtsNOW* teachers over several years in order to assess longitudinal impact.

Results indicate that *ArtsNOW* is meeting important professional development needs for teachers, reinforcing their practice-based understanding of children's learning needs, and equipping them for creative classroom approaches involving the arts. Arts specialists find that arts integration enhances, rather than diminishes, their roles in schools. All participants believe that *ArtsNOW* should play a larger role in professional development and that more teachers and administrators should be prepared to understand the ways in which arts integration enhances children's learning.