

Student and Teacher Learning in the Perpich Arts Integration Project 2012-2013

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Executive Summary

The arts integration project is an initiative of the Perpich Center for Arts Education in Golden Valley, MN, in collaboration with multiple schools in the Southeast and West Central regions of the state (to be expanded over the next two years). Special Legacy funding allocated by the state legislature has allowed the Center's staff to work with interested educators to improve student learning and enhance teacher capacity through the use of arts-integrated curricular units closely aligned with the state's academic standards. Perpich professionals support and reinforce teacher teams in participating sites through providing professional development opportunities; promoting educator networks that bridge participants' various disciplines; encouraging documentation of their efforts and the use of technology; and by positioning the ideas of standards, alignment, and assessments front and center in the teachers' deliberations. This annual evaluation report reflects the first year of progress for the Southeast network and the third year of progress in the West Central network.

Evaluation activities which generated data that addressed student learning and teachers' capacity to integrate the arts included holding regular conversations with Perpich staff, attending training sessions, surveying teachers and students, observing teachers' classes, conducting face-to-face interviews with participants, reviewing project-related documents (including curricular plans, student work and grades, teacher reflections, and Perpich staff member's reports and memos), and eliciting feedback on evaluation draft reports.

For their part, students indicated that they very much liked learning through the arts, based on "Quickwrites" that 850 of them completed. These brief written surveys asked students to indicate what they had learned about the art form, the non-art subject area, and integrating the two -- as well as their willingness to participate in similar types of instruction in the future. This last question gave an estimate of how positively students responded to the units. Of the 824 who provided an opinion, 607 (about 75 percent) affirmed that they would.

Teachers provided an explanation as to why students appeared to enjoy the units so much. In fact, at least half of a group of 36 teachers who answered a survey about the Quickwrite data reported greater student participation in key learning behaviors (like using the arts, making choices about how to do a task, choosing how to demonstrate learning, getting to do hands-on activities, and being thoughtful) during the units than were typically evidenced in non-unit classes. In no instance did a teacher suggest that such behaviors were more prevalent in the non-unit lessons.

Evaluators' observations of 55 classroom lessons confirmed that students were more engaged and thoughtful in unit-related lessons and tended to more participatory in lessons that incorporated the arts regardless of whether they pertained to the project-related units. Students in 60 percent of the unit-related observed lessons that also included the art form were deemed to

be interestedly active and rigorous in their behavior (22 lessons). Fifty percent of the non-unit related lessons that nevertheless drew on the arts evidenced students acting in these ways (14 lessons). Forty-four percent of the unit-related classes that did not happen to include an art form found students to be engaged and thoughtful (nine lessons). And only 20 percent of the lessons that neither were a part of the unit nor included an art form contained a predominance of students who acted in these ways (10 lessons).

The teachers who responded to the above-mentioned survey also reviewed students' answers about what they learned and judged how well these responses captured what the teachers wanted them to learn. Thirty-three of the 36 indicated that they "agreed" or "strongly agreed" their students clearly understood the main points related to the non-arts subject area; 31 used "agree" or "strongly agree" with respect to the art form; and 32 opted for the same two answers for students' grasp of how to integrate the two.

The distribution of students' grades received on integrated unit activities reinforced the idea that considerable learning had taken place. Understandably there was no uniform system of grading the units across the schools. But regardless of the type of grade used (e.g., letters or numbers), across all the schools the bias was for them to be more concentrated in the higher end of the grading scale. Thus, the majority of scores were As or 4s or whatever the highest possible score was. In fact, three schools reported all the students to be at the highest level.

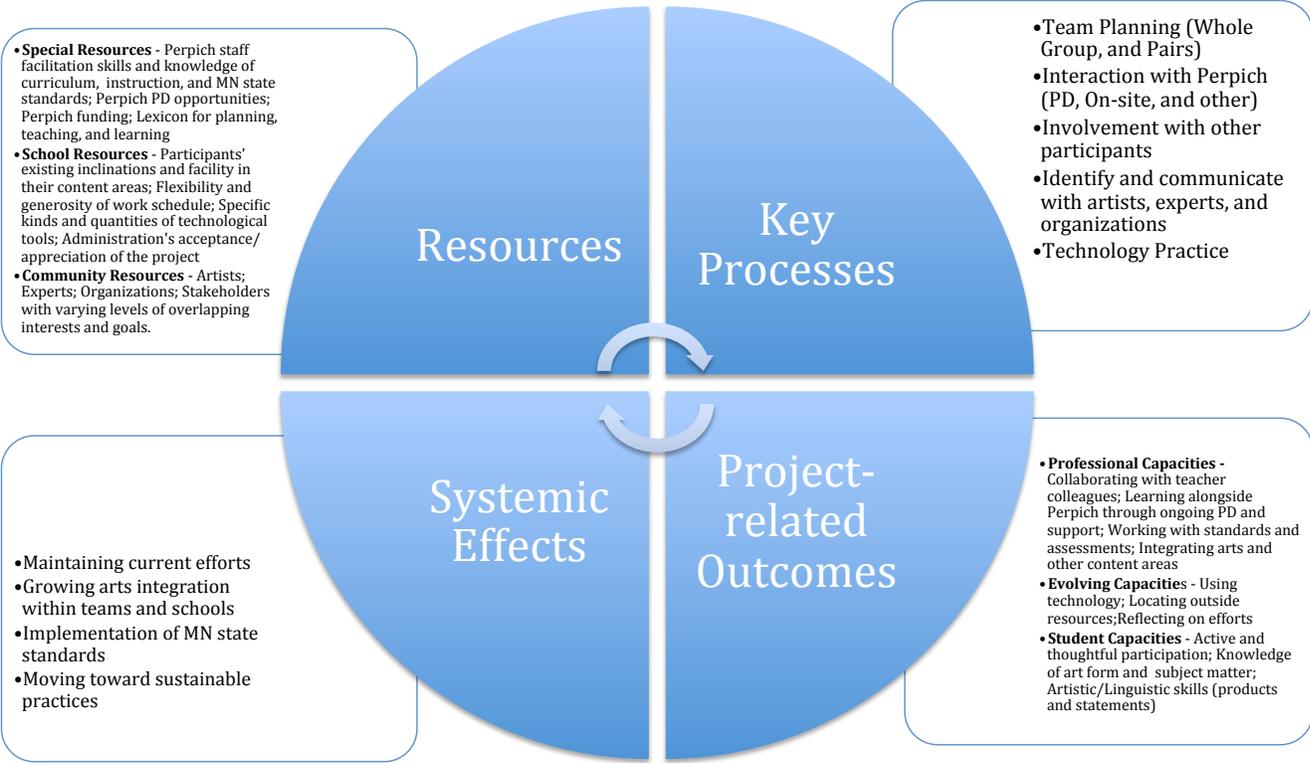
Finally, teachers anecdotally noted positive impacts on students when the arts were injected into lessons. They mentioned more prevalence of "on-task" behavior, students taking great pride in their work, applying arts and non-arts content accurately, and actually helping each other. Students who historically had struggled in school appeared to flourish, according to some teachers, so much so that one reported that several other teachers in the building exclaimed about one particular young person, "Oh my god, I've never seen that student do this."

Teachers reported that their professional skills had been enhanced through involvement in the project. They repeatedly mentioned four key capacities in interviews, Perpich-guided reflections about their efforts, and surveys. Each represented an aspect of teaching that they rarely engaged in and yet they quickly recognized the value the skills added to their work as educators. One was collaborating with colleagues, as one teacher noted: "We have been looking for a long time for ways to collaborate. We have to change the fear from isolation. This [project] is a great vehicle – it shows exactly what you can do if you share expertise." A second capacity that typically lurked outside teachers' normal professional repertoire of activities was gaining knowledge about and facility with incorporating standards and assessments into their plans. A teacher explained more about this endeavor: "We had to start with the standards. That is very different from anything we have ever done before. It is one of the most solid pieces of work I have done. The key was to start with the standards and figure out what kids need to learn and

then scaffold from there.” While educators participate in a myriad of professional development events, in-depth involvement with external experts and facilitators is usually missing from those sessions. Not so in this project and thus a third capacity entailed the teachers becoming more adept at taking advantage of their interactions with Perpich staff. According to a participant, “They [Perpich staff] look at things in ways I’ve never done before and they express it in ways I’ve never done. My best thinking and learning has come from my time with Perpich staff.” Finally, teachers increased their confidence with the complexities of weaving the arts and non-arts subjects together. One teacher echoed the opinions of many participants in saying “I have become enamored of units as a long-term learning strategy – the analytic thing is most important, looking deeper and longer at a topic.”

The enhancement of student learning and teacher capacity was brought about through an intricate interplay of (1) available resources (both those that Perpich provided and the schools had access to), (2) Perpich and participant actions, (3) student/teacher instruction-related interactions, and (4) school and district organizational influences. The report portrays these developments in the form of an iterative and recursive “logic model” that attempts to capture how the strengths and challenges of the project evolved over time.

Figure 1: Perpich Logic Model for Arts Integration



This graphic presentation yielded several critical issues for the project to consider as events unfold in the upcoming years, some of which were the meaning of “art” in arts integration; the balancing of the new skills of arts integration, collaboration, and standards alignment; assessment; the “sliding-scale” of professional development; internalizing arts integration; the infusion of new technology; the scarcity and allocation of time and resources; and the role of arts integration as a feature of sustainability.

Overall, participants and Perpich staff accomplished much this school year, especially in exposing young people to the arts and enabling the arts to engage students with varied learning styles. Indeed, initial indications are that students widely embraced this type of instruction with higher levels of engagement and thoughtfulness. Teachers acquired facility with academic standards, curriculum planning, alternative forms of pedagogy, and meaningful assessment – and became more adept with collaborating with others.

Introduction

The arts integration project is an initiative of the Perpich Center for Arts Education in Golden Valley, MN, an agency of the State of Minnesota whose mission is to provide students across the state with opportunities to develop and integrate their artistic and non-artistic abilities. With special Legacy¹ funding allocated by the state legislature, the center's staff members work with interested educators from several geographic regions across the state to improve teacher pedagogy and student learning through two more specific goals:

Goal 1: Increase the capacity of teachers to design, implement, and assess collaborative arts integration in Minnesota schools, and the capacity of administrators to support this instructional strategy.

Goal 2: Improve standards-based student learning through collaborative arts integration, a strategy used by teachers and supported by administrators.

This vision is ambitious. Efforts to bring the arts to a more central position in public education face a steep uphill battle for a number of practical reasons. First, throughout the history of American education, many educators and stakeholders have viewed the arts as marginal to the overall curriculum despite proponents' valiant arguments to the contrary. Second, most schools' schedules rely on elective arts courses to free up time for non-arts teachers to plan – thus minimizing collaborative opportunities for the arts teachers. Third, other subject and grade-level teachers feel constrained about using the arts in their own instruction because of time pressures to implement state and national common core standards and to prepare kids for standardized tests, not to mention their admitted lack of confidence with drawing on the various art forms without assistance.

These challenges are exactly what the Perpich project is designed to overcome. Through funding to schools and the provision of K-12 teacher professional development, staff help teacher teams (usually two to six per school -- 21 schools participated last year, a list of which is contained in Appendix A) develop and implement arts-integrated units organized around the benchmarks that are the centerpieces of the state's academic standards. Perpich professionals

¹ The Legacy Amendment to the Minnesota Constitution increases the state sales tax by three-eighths of one percent beginning on July 1, 2009 and continuing until 2034. The additional sales tax revenue is distributed into four funds as follows: 33 percent to the clean water fund; 33 percent to the outdoor heritage fund; 19.75 percent to the arts and cultural heritage fund; and 14.25 percent to the parks and trails fund. The initiative is part of the arts and cultural heritage fund.

support and reinforce the teams' endeavors in four concrete ways. First and foremost is offering **professional development opportunities** with multi-day workshops in the summer, several one-day meetings through the school year, and school-based meetings. Email and online contact allow Perpich staff to follow-up on the teams' work, provide coaching, and to give further feedback. These activities concentrate on strategies to entwine the arts into other content areas in meaningful and engaging ways; promote alignment of state academic standards, learning goals, and assessments; and instigate reflection and learning from student work.

Second, the project promotes **educator networks** that bridge participants' various disciplines. Two networks are currently in place. The first is in the West Central region of the state which has been operating for three years but often with rotating staff so that only a handful of those participants have been exposed to multiple years of arts-integrated professional development. The second is in the Southeast and those participants have just completed their first year of participation in the project. Additional networks will be added in the future. These networks seek to make connections among content areas, school teams, and geographic regions. The networks come to life in person at workshops and meetings and through online communications wherein participants share expertise, solve problems, give and receive feedback, brainstorm, reflect on lessons, and celebrate successes.

A third means of assisting the teacher teams is encouraging **documentation of their efforts and the use of technology**. The initiative is, in essence, an arts-integration laboratory to create, test, and refine lessons and a vehicle to make these available to others. School teams, therefore, contribute to the "big picture" of arts integration in Minnesota by digitally documenting and sharing those exemplary lessons and practices.

Finally, Perpich staff members position the ideas of **standards, alignment, and assessments** front and center. While constructing lessons, teachers work together to address the key skills and content students must acquire, devise tools that accurately reflect what they have learned, and review student work to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the activities and learning.

The evaluation of this endeavor seeks to inform the Center about what has been accomplished (the outcomes in terms of what students and teachers have learned), as well as to provide a fine-grained look at the implementation process to help the Perpich staff think about their work in new and different ways. This past year the evaluation team collected five kinds of data that addressed student outcomes – one of the two project goals. These data sources included student surveys (Quickwrites) from over 850 students where they reflected on what they had learned and what they valued about the process, a review of the distribution of teacher grades for each domain being assessed across each arts-integrated unit, classroom observations of 55 lessons mostly timed to coincide with the teaching of the arts-integrated units, face-to-face interviews with nearly all the participating teachers to hear about what students were learning,

and a short survey that solicited teachers' understanding of how much students learned from the unit.

Teacher growth in implementing arts-based instructional units – the other project goal - was also tracked through five activities: observing 55 lessons of the participating teachers, interviewing them about their practice and involvement in the program, reviewing the information about the arts-integrated units the teams posted on Google Docs, examining summaries of the participants' periodic reflections about their project-related experiences, and surveying teachers at the end of the year.

The report first discusses student learning and then turns to how the project promoted teacher professional capacity. These two outcomes reside at the heart of Perpich's expectations. Because the project is in a formative phase, the report's third section depicts its strengths and challenges and how these interacted to influence the initiative's effects. This then highlights several future considerations for Perpich staff to weave into their planning for the next couple of years. The final section summarizes the considerable success achieved in the first year.

Student Benefits of Participating in Art-Integrated Lessons

This section begins with what students said in their Quickwrites about active participation in these lessons, how teachers felt about the opportunities students had to be active in the units versus other lessons, and the extent to which classroom observations reinforced participants' claims of students' being active and thoughtful in unit activities. Then the discussion turns to other aspects of student learning, such as teachers' assessments about how well the Quickwrite responses reflected desired learning and the actual grades the young people received for their efforts. This portion of the report concludes with teachers' commentaries on the value of the arts for enhancing learning.

Student Active Participation in Lessons

Many of the schools structured the actual planning and implementation of the units such that a pair of teachers rather than the entire team carried out each one. That is, an entire team continued to meet with Perpich staff, go to training, and touch base on progress while – at the suggestion of Perpich staff – the two- member sub-teams would fill in the details and enact the one or more units the team had slated. The end result of the teams' efforts was that staff from the 18 districts and 21 individual school buildings created 39 actual units.

The evaluation plan called for the teams to consider having students who took part in the units to complete a five-question "Quickwrite" a week or so after the project ended. At least

thirteen units targeted students deemed too young to handle the writing assignment, typically second grade or younger. One site did attempt the Quickwrites with second graders, but settled on having the kids respond orally and a teacher recorded the answers. Teachers that did seven units did not respond to the request. Thus, Quickwrites were returned for 19 of the overall 39 implemented units, 11 from elementary schools and 8 from secondary. These came from 13 of the 18 districts and 14 of the 21 schools. The sample size was around 70 percent whether units (when the K-1 classes are removed), districts, or schools are considered as the basis for analysis. Close to 850 students gave answers. The actual N varies slightly from item to item as not all students wrote something for each.

Of the five questions, three concerned what students had learned – about the non-arts subject(s) of interest, the art form(s) emphasized in the unit, and integrating the non-arts subject and the art form. The fourth asked which activities were particularly helpful in promoting learning. The fifth requested students to indicate if they would like to do units like the arts integrated ones again in the future and why.

This last question is of particular pertinence as an overall estimate of how positively students responded to what the teachers had them do. Eight hundred and twenty-four said either they would like to or would not like to do similar projects. Six hundred and seven of these (about 75 percent) affirmed that they would. Overwhelmingly they regarded the units as “fun,” and for a variety of reasons ranging from the mundane “we got out of school to go on a field trip” to the educationally comparative “it was different from what we usually do” to the intellectually beneficial “because I learned it better.” Typical of the negative explanations were “I don’t like art,” “it was too hard,” and “it took too much time.” The Yes/No ratio split for students who experienced six of the units was below the 75 percent average but more than 50 percent of the students were positive in each instance. Of the six, three were secondary and three were elementary. The highest percent of enthusiastic participants was a group of fifth graders at 95 percent (23 out of 24). The lowest were high schoolers at 53 percent (49 out of 92).

These numbers suggest a decided majority of students found the units to be engaging. On a survey, we therefore asked teachers to compare what students did during the units with what they did during the teachers’ other instructional time with them, as one possible source of insights as to why students were so positively inclined toward the arts integrated units. The 36 responding teachers used the descriptors “never,” “rarely,” “sometimes,” “often,” and “always” to indicate the frequency with which students did each of the following nine activities:

- used one or more art forms
- chose how to complete an assignment
- chose how to demonstrate their learning
- did hands-on activities

- worked with partners or groups
- explained their thinking to peers
- were highly engaged in a lesson
- thought deeply about what they were learning, and
- received feedback from the teacher.

The respondents never availed themselves of the “never” choice and rarely chose “rarely.” Thus, the effective response range was from “sometimes” to “always.” This truncated pattern squeezed the range of the numerical averages for the items and made them too skewed for a statistical analysis. That is, looking at a 4.3 average for the frequency of students’ use of the arts during the arts integrate unit as compared to a 3.0 average for other instruction (which was the widest gap between two means) is obviously noteworthy, but not so apparent was the 3.7 – 3.2 difference for students’ being able to choose how to do a task in the units versus non-unit instruction.

What puts what the teachers had to say in sharp relief, however, was their juxtaposition of the actions available to students in the arts-integrated units compared to other instruction. In this light, teachers basically could make three types of responses: either students acted in these ways (1) more in the arts integrated units than in other instruction, (2) the same, or (3) less. The data show that students’ opportunities to participate actively in a range of ways broadened in the arts integrated units, in varying degrees. For this analysis, the N was 34 rather than the 36 respondents as two teachers did not answer the nine comparative items. Table 1 shows that twenty-six participants said the students used the arts more during the unit than in other instruction; 21 felt that students had more choices on how to do a task in the unit; 17 said this was the case with choosing how to demonstrate learning; 18 agreed with respect to hands-on activities; 12 indicated students worked in pairs or groups more; 14 felt students explained their thinking to peers to a greater extent; 18 also believed students to be more engaged; 17 claimed kids were more thoughtful; and seven said students got more feedback. A small minority of teachers suggested that students acted in these ways more during “other instruction.”

**Table 1: Teachers' Responses to Students' Actions
During Arts Integrated Units and in Other Instruction**

Student Actions	Students did more in arts integrated unit	Students did the same in arts integrated units and in other instruction	Students did more in other instruction
Students have the opportunity to use one or more art forms.	26	6	2
Students can choose how to complete an assignment.	21	10	3
Students have choices about how to demonstrate what they have learned.	17	14	3
Students do hands-on activities.	18	15	1
Students work with partners and/or in groups.	12	17	5
Students have to explain [share] their thinking to/with peers.	14	15	4
Students are highly engaged in the lesson.	18	15	1
Students think deeply about their learning experience.	17	16	1
Students get feedback about their work from me.	7	23	4

Thus, more than half of the responding teachers reported greater student participation in six of the key behaviors and in no case did the teachers as a group suggest that any of the activities occurred more in non-arts integrated lessons. This all means that the numerical averages for each of the nine pairs of responses favored the arts integrated units and by a half-point or better, except for working with partners and groups (.4 difference) and getting feedback (.2 difference). Taken collectively, the answers indicate a distinctive contrast: Students quite simply got to be more active, took on a larger decision-making role, and interacted with peers to

a greater extent in the units – and perhaps as a consequence prompted them to be eager to take part in similar types of units in the future.

Evaluators’ classroom observations – all of which were of participants – put more light on the extent to which students exhibited engaged behaviors in the participating schools’ classrooms. The documentation team visited all 18 participating districts. Opportunities to observe lessons varied according to site constraints and unforeseeable circumstances, as did chances to see activities related to the implementation of the arts integration units. For instance, in one district it was only possible to visit with team members after school and thus no observations occurred. Other time constraints in another district limited contact with staff to interviews only. For the 16 other districts, the number of classes seen ranged from one in two situations to five or six in three others, yielding 55 observations overall. These took place in 19 of the 21 individual school buildings that housed Perpich team members.

The lessons fell into four categories, depending upon whether they were related to an arts integrated unit and whether they included the arts. Twenty-two classes evaluators observed were both unit-related and arts-related. These took place in 14 of the 19 buildings. Nine lessons were unit-related but did not include any arts activities or arts instruction on the day of the evaluator visit (nine schools). Fourteen observations, 11 of which were arts classes, were not related to an arts integrated unit but did include an art form (12 schools). Ten observations entailed lessons that were neither unit-related nor arts-related (six schools). Because some teams had finished their projects ahead of the site visit, it was not possible to observe units everywhere this year.

Lessons were scripted as thoroughly as possible. This enabled the development of tentative criteria by which to determine how engaged students were in the lesson – and how thoughtful they were in their verbal comments. The term “thoughtful” denotes synonymously the rigorous aspect of students’ actions in the classroom. These criteria included:

Engagement:

- students attending to the task at hand (includes passive compliance unavoidably),
- conferring with and interacting with peers
- transitioning smoothly from one part of the lesson to another
- asking questions
- seeking help
- getting loud

Thoughtfulness (i.e., acting rigorously):

- making design choices
- having to respond to teacher questions randomly rather than being able to volunteer
- using content-relevant and accurate language

- creating artists' statements and/or offering descriptions and interpretations of their artwork
- formulating opinions and defending them
- directing their conversations with groups and organizing themselves for tasks
- conducting and discussing Internet research with peers
- having to apply criteria/rules to judge whether they had completed a task well or not too).

As an aside, artists' statements, where available, were particularly rich reflections of students' thoughtfulness about their work.

These depictions of engagement and thoughtfulness in all 55 classes occasioned the chance to see if higher concentrations of engaging and thoughtful student actions took place in some of the four types of lessons more than in others. This appeared to be the case.

Table 2: Distribution of Classroom Observations by Student Activity and Focus of the Lesson

			Student Activity		
Focus of Lesson	High Engage/ High Thought	High Engage/ Low Thought	Low Engage/ High Thought	Low Engage/ Low Thought	TOTAL
Arts & Unit Focused	13	7	0	2	22
Arts but Not Unit Focused	7	6	0	1	14
Unit but Not Arts Focused	4	1	1	3	9
Not Unit and Not Arts Focused	2	3	0	5	10
TOTAL	26	17	1	11	55

Nearly 80 percent of the observed lessons contained engaged students and almost half presented students' exhibiting thoughtful and challenging behaviors. The latter type evidenced students being both highly engaged **and** thoughtful, such as in a couple of sixth grade classes wherein students worked in teams, decided on objectives to teach to another grade of students related to the unit's topic, did research on the topic, formulated lesson plans, posed absolutely zero instances that prompted the teachers' disciplinary directives, addressed each other about work-related topics, gave explanations for their decisions, and used accurate language concerning arts elements.

The former type was typified by engaged students as well but they did not illustrate much deep thought or hard work along the way. This was very common in non-unit-related arts classes in which students did hands-on activities for much of the class without having to discuss what they were doing or why and had a relatively straightforward series of steps they all were to follow. In non-arts integrated classrooms, engaged but unchallenged students showed much in the way of amiable and compliant behavior but rarely had to offer more than one-word answers to teachers' questions, such as in a third-grade class that was a review and entailed completing a worksheet which all kids appeared to do enthusiastically. Thus they appeared animated but none offered explanations for their answers or responded with more than one or two words.

The observations suggest that, overall, most teachers who chose to take part in the Perpich project generally offered activities that students became relatively engaged in, unit-related or not, although they appeared less successful in forcing students to do so thoughtfully. The table also suggests that engagement is enhanced when the arts are involved. The numbers are too small to be conclusive but it is interesting that eight of the lessons in which students showed little in the way of active or thoughtful participation did not involve any of the arts. Such comments have to be tentative at this point in time, but the results appear to indicate that this grounded approach would be valuable for talking about student benefits in the project in the future.

Student Learning

During the 2013 summer institute, teachers read evaluator-prepared summaries of the Quickwrites for the units they had specifically taught. The Quickwrites for 13 of the 19 units were available ahead of the training and 36 participants completed the survey about them. During and after the training, teachers returned six other sets of Quickwrites but only two of them subsequently completed the survey.

On the survey, the teachers reacted to three statements that referred to what the students stated that they had learned about the major subject, the art form, and the integration of the two. The statements said that, based on the summarized student answers, "My students appear to have

a clear understanding of [the major subject, the art form, and integration of the two]. Teachers had five options from “1-strongly disagree” to “5-strongly agree” to use in responding to the statements.

There was little equivocation among the teachers. Thirty-three of the 36 indicated that they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” their students clearly understood the main points related to the non-arts subject area; 31 used “agree” or “strongly agree” with respect to the art form; and 32 opted for the same two answers for students’ grasp of how to integrate the two. “Agree” was the decided modal choice for all three items. Only two people disagreed with a statement. Both “disagreed” that the summarized answers reflected a clear understanding of the non-arts subject and one of them “strongly disagreed” that students had a handle on how to integrate the two.

The teachers’ grades backed up their contentions on the survey, although the data provided were not always complete. The Perpich staff asked each participating team to provide a distribution of grades across all the assessed unit activities. Teachers posted these on Google Docs. The evaluation team used four criteria in its analysis of the quality and content of this particular database: completeness, comprehensiveness, nature of grades, and distribution of grades.

Completeness referred to the extent that all participating teachers provided grades for all their students. The result was decidedly mixed. Three of the 21 schools (14 percent) uploaded no data. Twelve (57 percent) offered partial data, i.e., only some of the grade-level, non-arts subject, or arts teachers provided grades. For some schools, only arts teachers sent the information and in others it was only the non-arts teachers who responded. Complete data came from six schools (29 percent).

The evaluation team also made an assessment of the comprehensiveness of the grades, using a three-point scale with low comprehensiveness meaning only one or two grades were provided for each student, medium comprehensiveness represented more detail for some areas but not others, and high comprehensiveness involving having detailed grades for all students. An example of the latter was one group of teachers that used nine different criteria to assess student performance. Half of the schools (nine of the 18 referenced in the above paragraph that actually posted data) were deemed to have low comprehensiveness, four were medium (22 percent), and five were high (28 percent). A notable association existed between completeness and comprehensiveness. That is, four of the six schools with complete grades also received a high rating for comprehensiveness and the other two were medium. Because this was the first year the teacher teams faced getting data requests for the evaluation, it was difficult to assess whether this correlation meant that some schools were more generally compliant than others or whether some truly understood and embraced the importance of student assessments more than others.

The formats in which teachers presented grades varied. Three types dominated: letter grades, rubrics, or a combination of the two. Eleven of the 18 schools (61 percent) exclusively reported rubrics, even though it was not uncommon to find teachers on the same teams using different ones. Likewise, variation was apparent in the complexity of the rubrics. Some teachers employed ones with simple dichotomies such as “met/not met” or “beginning/secure.” Others attempted to make finer distinctions with multi-point scales. Three schools reported only letter grades – A-F, and the remaining four schools used a combination of letters or numbers (e.g., 0 to 100) and a rubric. As with rubrics, these combinations sometimes showed up within the same teams, making it more of a challenge for teachers to compare and contrast the performance of their students they shared with one another during the unit.

The fourth criterion for reviewing student grades addressed the distribution of student scores. By far the most prevalent pattern was a significant range of scores across most, if not all, the grading categories (e.g., grades A to F and 4-point rubric scores of 4, 3, 2 and 1). Eleven of the 18 schools displayed this trend. But within that varied range, the modal result across all of the schools was for the grades to be biased toward the high end. Thus, the majority of scores were As or 4s or whatever the highest possible score was. In fact, three schools reported all the students to be at the highest level. Four schools had the majority of the scores in the middle ground, with the students having “met expectations” or being “proficient.” The larger picture from all these data, therefore, is that students were succeeding at relatively high levels. This result aligned with what students wrote in their Quickwrites and teachers said in their reflections. However, the varied formats and missing data make it difficult to making sweeping conclusions about student progress or to offer guidance about how these data might inform future teacher practices.

Finally, it is worth taking note of teachers’ own assessments of the value for student learning of injecting the arts into their lessons. Teachers talked about the “on-task” behavior that was so evident, as was documented by the engagement levels noted in the evaluators’ observations. Educators noticed students taking great pride in their work, appearing to be engaged in the tasks, applying arts and non-arts content accurately, and actually helping each other. For instance, one math teacher became “super excited” by how much the students knew compared to past years. The person claimed that the students seemed to have such a greater depth of understanding of the two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional shape and solid geometric planes (and related vocabulary), appeared to internalize the math concepts they were being taught, and demonstrated high levels of interest in completing hands-on learning activities. Moreover, the students maintained their focus throughout the lessons and were rarely off-task.

Struggling students appeared to flourish, according to some teachers. One pointed out that there were kids with special needs who tended to stand out in their small communities but added that “they’re working normally” in the arts units. Said another teacher: “Some other

teachers were like ‘Oh my god, I’ve never seen that student do this.’ It showed different sides of students people hadn’t experienced.” In an observed class that was arts- and unit-related, the work groups with special needs students were the first to complete their tasks because the students were so enthusiastically participating in the activity.

Teachers offered a host of such comments and made a compelling case for the arts. Unfortunately, their assessments appeared to be impotent in overcoming the pressure they felt to “cover” all the content that might be tested on the statewide standardized tests, according to a number of them. One echoed the sentiment: “We take MCAs next week, after that we can do more creative activities that the kids like. They do take a lot of time.” Thus, they were acutely aware that what they professionally thought would engage their students best in classroom activities took too much time to use on a regular basis – which is a topic addressed in more depth in the third section of this report.

Teacher Capacity

The arts integration project requires much of teachers. Teachers are accustomed to working alone but the initiative asks them to work with other teachers, with Perpich facilitators, and with artists and other community members. Teachers are accustomed to teaching content in small, isolated segments but the project asks them to learn how to integrate content from multiple content domains into thematic units that connect the arts, sciences, social sciences, and humanities in meaningful and productive ways. Teachers are accustomed to generating lesson plans, but Perpich staff ask teachers to contextualize the lesson in larger ideas and understandings, to derive learning goals that fit these and the standards to be addressed, to design lessons that engage students in rigorous learning activities, and to create assessments that align with all this. Teachers are accustomed to being in front of students all day, providing instruction, but their participation with Perpich asks them to think more about what the students can do, what products signify learning and demonstrate that students know the content **and** can do something with it. Teachers are accustomed to using minimal technology in their classroom due to limited availability and a conception of instruction as ‘sit and get.’ Perpich again asks more. It asks teachers to plan with shared files, to communicate professionally with technology, and to use these tools to help students create something with what they are learning as well as document what they have learned and made. Teachers are accustomed to implementing instructional improvements only to see leadership move on to the next initiative, but the arts integration effort asks teachers to develop the capacity to sustain the effort by embedding it in instructional practice.

These, and the other expectations that Perpich has for teachers, are much beyond the ones usually established for teachers. And yet, participating educators relish meeting the challenges. They are developing new capacities and using them to benefit their students. While it is true that

these capacities are fledgling at this point, teachers are making great strides, according to their self-reports as expressed in interviews, participant reflections, and survey data. In the coming year, assessments of capacity will be rounded out with administrators' and students' input.

Teacher Capacities Developed During 2012-2013

Over the course of the year, Perpich staff and the evaluators paid close attention to the various kinds of knowledge and skills teachers appeared to be acquiring. Their deliberations suggested at least nine areas of potential professional improvement. These were incorporated into a survey format and then used with 42 educators who attended the June 2013 Southeast regional conference. The educators used a four-point scale from “great improvement” to “no improvement” to denote their advancement on each. The participants were all quite positive about their growth. Only one percent of the responses across all nine areas fell into the “no improvement” response category and only three percent indicated just “slight improvement.” So, the vast majority of answers fell in the “moderate” or “great” improvement range.

Teachers were most effusive about their growth in dealing with four key aspects of the project – creating arts-integrated units, aligning units to benchmarks, knowledge of arts integration, and collaborating with colleagues. For these areas, about three-quarters of all of the teachers or more noted “great improvement” (see Table 3 for a detailed distribution of the answers). Teachers also offered two growth realms where more than half but less than three-quarters of them made a “great improvement” assessment (making modifications to instruction based on student work and reflecting on student work). Less than half of the teachers thought they had made “great improvement” in three final areas. These were using Google Drive, designing assessments, and evaluating assessments.

**Table 3: Proportion of Teachers Reporting “Great Improvement”
in Their Professional Lives**

Area of Professional Life	Proportion Answering “Great Improvement”
Creating arts-integrated units	85.0
Alignment of work to benchmarks	78.6
Knowledge of arts integration	78.0
Collaboration with colleagues	73.8
Making modifications to instruction based on student work	60.0
Reflecting on student work	57.1
Using Google Drive	46.3
Designing assessments	38.1
Evaluating assessments	28.6

These responses then guided the evaluators in their overall examination of the available interview and project document data. The results of this analysis elaborated on and deepened what the above short survey answers suggested. That is, teachers felt that they had gained considerable facility with collaboration (not only with colleagues but also with Perpich staff), the Minnesota system of academic standards and benchmarks, and arts integration. This part of the report addresses each in considerable detail. Several other capacities with less prominence in this year’s data surfaced during the analysis and warrant a brief mention in this part of the report as well.

Collaborating with Teacher Colleagues. It is an often lamented fact that teachers work in isolated classrooms with little professional collegueship, so much so that, even in the small schools participating in the arts integration project, the team meetings were “a good way to get to know each other.” Teachers felt “It’s kind of nice to work together.” The teachers were clear that the initiative was unique among other school improvement efforts in prompting collaboration: “We didn’t do a lot of work together outside of Perpich.” This was true even when teachers had established desires to collaborate:

We have been looking for a long time for ways to collaborate. We have to change the fear from isolation. The key to change is mentoring and coaching [across peers]. This [project] is a great vehicle – it shows exactly what you can do if you share expertise.

Designing the arts integrated units and co-teaching reduced isolation which in itself was a worthy goal. Yet it also had direct impacts on teacher knowledge. As one team member put it, “Ideas flow together when we collaborate.” Collaboration was central to discerning what other content areas did with art and to developing excitement and engagement in the co-planning and co-teaching processes.

Teachers, moreover, learned about different teaching styles and content areas through collaboration. “It forced us to see what other teachers are doing,” said a member from one team. Others reported that this learning from each other was a powerful form of professional development. Working together enabled teachers to have a clearer understanding of the style they preferred for collaborating itself. One team was emphatic: “We love co-teaching, but we don’t like parallel teaching. We have designed a co-taught course for the fall so that we are able to have more time to make this happen.” One teacher was direct in evaluating the primary benefit of these types of interactions: “It allows us to do just good teaching.” The implication was clear that there was little opportunity for this in today’s schools.

Younger teachers learned both valuable skills and earned professional appreciation through collaboration. As one relatively new teacher explained about her work with an experienced art teacher:

She is so organized and had the rubric pinned down. She had the ability to clearly lay out expectations. As a young teacher, I saw that done well for the first time ever. But she realized that my kids worked just as hard.

Teachers also gained much from looking at student work together, as a team. It allowed for deeper consideration of learning and was both interesting and valuable for their overall teaching practice.

While the teachers had developed both capacity and enthusiasm for collaborating, it was clear to them that there were some costs associated with it. For example, they recognized that planning for co-teaching takes significantly more time, and that it was challenging to make that happen logistically in schools. “The key is the time to collaborate. That’s what moves us forward and makes our instruction better.” Further, some teachers discovered they could plan together but had styles too disparate for co-teaching. As one teacher explained: “We have opposite methods – my kids drove her crazy.” Others were able to work through their differences: “We let our strengths happen. We’ve learned to be upfront with each other.”

Teachers did note an area for future collaboration--creating a common assessment for each integrated area. The teachers did not offer any details on what they thought this would entail, but the idea was how to assess the integrated content whereas now they are assessing the

content areas separately even though they are taught in an integrated fashion. This would both require considerable professional development and possibly a new understanding of assessment itself.

Some teachers saw long term benefits emerging from collaboration:

(We) would not have connected without Perpich. That connection will continue. I see so much more that can be connected [because of our collaboration] and kids learn better with that.

But other teachers who viewed working together as an added responsibility were less sanguine about the sustainability of collaboration over the long haul: “(This is the) first time a lot of us have thought about it. It’s nice but extra. I have to do my lesson on top of what I already have to do. It’s unrealistic.”

Understanding and Working with Standards and Assessments. Preparing participants to be able to navigate Minnesota’s system of academic standards was a central project emphasis. Teachers said that, as a result, they were teaching standards not taught before and using strategies not tried before to do so. One teacher explained:

We had to start with the standards. That is very different from anything we have ever done before. It is one of the most solid pieces of work I have done. The key was to start with the standards and figure out what kids need to learn and then scaffold from there.

I was forced to have more intimate contact with state standards and we were able to go deeper into content with kids.

Overall, the teachers became convinced about the value of using a ‘big idea’ as an umbrella under which they could organize coherently the academic standards and learning goals covered in their units. This was desperately needed, according to the teachers, because they were relatively unfamiliar with coordinating their curricula conceptually across content areas or grade levels. The process had a very positive result.

Teachers worked with the state academic standards to create “focused” learning goals which “were more precise and specific to the curriculum” and to better link the instructional activities to the goals in all the subject areas that were to be integrated in the unit. Similarly, teachers found creating and executing the integrated units more “satisfying” because of the specificity of the learning goals.

As teachers talked in interviews about what they might do to align assessments with their plans, they concentrated more on what they, as teachers, were learning and what still needed to

be accomplished. For example, teachers discovered that alignment was essential for assessment to adequately depict student learning. By the end of the year, they also figured out that completion of assessments enabled better teacher and student reflection on learning.

However, the more teachers tackled this aspect of curriculum development, they realized that they were not where they needed to be with assessments and evaluation. They expressed this in several ways:

Assessment is hard to do. Some will have to be performance some will be products but not sure how to do it. Don't know yet what we're doing.

We hope to improve on that (assessment). We're not there yet. But we want to change and improve.

The use of rubrics (is) hard for me. I don't explain why I grade the way I do well.

Still, teachers were positive that using new ways to assess yielded real benefits: “Kids really understood what we were teaching and that learning was more obvious to me, especially when they pulled all of the pieces together in writing.” Another teacher added: “I plan to do this within my classroom whether or not I’m able to sign back on with Perpich.”

Learning to effectively use standards and assessments was challenging. The teachers needed the external support to develop this capacity, and the Perpich Center provided it.

Learning with the Assistance of Perpich Staff. Schools tend to be insular institutions in that much of what teachers do is carried out only in the presence of students rather than other adults. The prevailing assumption among the public and many educators alike is that teachers arrive on the site fully prepared to become good teachers. While much research shows this premise to be untrue, many in-service education programs run by schools and districts are woefully inadequate by anyone’s standards as remedies. They are usually episodic, time-limited (hours at most), and focused on information provision. When districts and schools are implementing new programs, they elaborate this model slightly by having outside experts conduct the training. Infrequently do teachers have access to professional development which is extensive and multimodal and includes direct, project-based consultation. For this reason, then, teachers rarely have the opportunity to figure out how to interact with external resource people effectively and how to translate the outsiders’ ideas into concrete action.

Engaging in such interactions in ways that actually benefit teachers meaningfully, then, represents a new skill set most need to develop. This appeared to be taking place among the participants. Indeed, they commented extensively upon the value of their involvement with Perpich staff and described how they were becoming more facile with putting the implications of

these discussions to good use. The teachers discovered that the training sessions and interactions with Perpich staff on-site were very important to getting the arts-integrated units planned and executed successfully. On one level, teachers were simply happy to not be talked down to. As one teacher put it: “I feel like we are treated like true professionals by Perpich staff.” But on another level, they praised the depth and breadth of their experiences. It brought new resources to them, introduced them to teachers who sincerely supported each other’s growth, and allowed all of them to do their work in new and exciting ways. In their words:

This is the best PD I have ever attended.... We had the resources and support to do something we would do in our classrooms. We were also encouraged to experiment. . . . This has all directly impacted what I do in my classroom. Every session I attend I learn new things. It is an extra bonus each time. . . . the Perpich staff are always very well organized, they provided a vision and focus and they helped us create stuff we can use, along with giving us time and money to do the stuff. . . . They [Perpich staff] look at things in ways I’ve never done before and they express it in ways I’ve never done. My best thinking and learning has come from my time with Perpich staff.... All the presentations are part of a creative process. It is not just providing information. They walk through examples from their own experience. And the way they support teachers – their model is to check in on us. . . . They have a way of working that’s exciting and encouraging.

They let you grow at a pace you are capable of handling. I also like that it is certainly more in-depth than most training. It involves higher level thinking and there is a creative aspect which helps with kids seeing connections to other learning. . . . This is such a deeper level of learning and teaching. It is hard to explain to other peers. This is what quality work looks like.

It should be noted that there was a discordant voice concerning the training. Several people from one building in particular felt that the activities were not keeping ahead of their development and that terminology was an issue. This was from a school which had some years’ experience working with Perpich efforts: “They are teaching us what we already knew. With all their terminology, they make it more complicated.”

The project, of course, is more than the professional development sessions. It provided constant support in terms of site visits and phone (and SKYPE) and email communications. Participants deemed Perpich curriculum consultation as helpful and transferrable to other subject areas and they saw the facilitators as very responsive. They returned emails quickly, for example, which allowed teachers to maintain momentum in planning. Teachers also were effusive about how effectively the staff served in a guiding role without dictating what teachers should do. Staff asked pointed and thoughtful questions rather than giving answers, teachers said. The consequence was a degree of self-sufficiency and ownership:

It was refreshing to work with them. They are well-trained. They respect the process and met us where we were at. They accepted us trying and re-trying. They forced us to reflect and explain why we made the choices we did. They also gave us feedback. At the meetings it was like we had our own personal coach and with emails we got instant feedback . . . They practice what they teach.

The teams enjoyed the significant emphasis that Perpich placed on ‘process’ and saw that Perpich guidance helped to build a more effective team. Teachers said of Perpich staff: “They let us figure things out ourselves” while still providing guidance.

They forced us to meet and inspired us. We don’t have collaboration [with district initiatives] any more. It was great to always have their emails, ideas, suggestions, and feedback. It is very easy to just delay doing new things . . . It won’t work with just email contact. [Facilitators] made us really think hard about what we want to accomplish with kids.

They don’t just leave us on our own. They keep coming back and keep pushing us. They gave us time to check out what we had learned . . . They listen to our thoughts and then they steer us.

The curriculum planning process led teachers to think more clearly about what they intended with a lesson, “especially on keeping a focus, and keeping our eye on, where different content intersected naturally.” A key aspect of this work involved the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards. The standards had to be unpacked and the arts had to be seen as an important way to address the standards effectively:

Perpich breaks down standards – lot of resources – I’ve learned so much from (this)... breaking down standards is painful – doing a great job but it’s a work in progress – doing arts is fairly new to school.

We learned how to chunk things and create little goals.

Teachers commented that the facilitators were keenly effective in linking academic standards to alignment across the unit being designed. This was especially true with assessments.

Last year we brought our assessments to the meetings. We got critiques. That was the most valuable thing of the project. The K teacher and I made changes based on those assessments.

Participants claimed that discussing these issues with Perpich staff during site visits were most important to “connecting the dots” between academic standards and assessments. Teachers learned that timely completion of assessments enabled better reflection on learning by both teachers and students.

The teachers themselves provided the best summary of what project participation meant to them. These ranged from simply prompting meeting together to encouraging high quality work to recognizing that students experienced the benefits.

We couldn't do it without them. They keep us going via emails and visits. We are never alone. If we need help they're here. They are so good when we have questions – they know their stuff. . . . the research says that the best PD (professional development) is ongoing and sustained. That is exactly what Perpich does. I want them to come and do all our PD.

Perpich is so helpful – I'm not best with wording and they have the language down pat and advise us to go deeper and so helpful with guidance – each year I'm learning more and they've pushed me in a good way.

Perpich peels back layers and forces us to go deeper – especially their level of questioning and adept at not saying what project should look like – if they hadn't come, we wouldn't be where we are.

But most importantly, as a teacher concluded, “It meant something to the kids.”

Integrating the Arts. The work on academic standards, planning and alignment was in the service of integrating the arts. To do so, teachers needed to learn how to link arts and other subject area content. This required discerning how content areas were related and could be brought in service of one another. Designing instruction to teach the integrated content also required teachers to think not in terms of individual lessons (the usual focus of instructional planning) but rather in terms of longer term and more ambitious ‘units’ that incorporated many lessons. Indeed, the teachers saw that the pursuit of developing their ability to weave the arts-related and non-arts-related subjects together had definite benefits, which in turn reinforced and sustained their endeavors. Echoing the sentiment of many, one teacher stated “I have become enamored of units as a long-term learning strategy – the analytic thing is most important, looking deeper and longer at a topic.”

Planning an integrated unit also led to new teaching strategies:

We did center-based activities.

We created very individualized activities; they were not cookie-cutter at all.

I think about lesson design in a new way. I have changed my role in the classroom to more of a guide or facilitator.

Teachers were often already aware of alternative instructional approaches but project participation helped them to understand those tools more deeply and to put them into practice. One teacher provided an example of this: “Intellectually I knew about multiple intelligences but as an English teacher I always focused on writing skills. But now I realize it is not all about writing.” Importantly the project allowed teachers to *show* capabilities they felt testing and accountability stifled. In this way, the initiative gave them “permission” to use existing skills they did not often get to exhibit in their classrooms.

Teachers said they were beginning to recognize how to support learning effectively by being more intentional in their instruction and adjusting plans during their implementation. As one teacher asserted, “I have learned to stop and scaffold their learning.” It seemed that students’ responses to the units convinced teachers about the value of arts integration. As discussed earlier in the report, the integrated units gave students opportunities to make important choices and authentic connections among various domains of knowledge. They were aware that their teachers were using the arts to spark interests in other subject material. But when the educators launched into the units they were still surprised: “I have been overwhelmed by the students’ enthusiasm for this project.” Another teacher commented early in their unit that “I think I see a higher level of engagement from the kids. If it works as well as I think it is, I’ll do it every year this way.” Thus, the integrated understanding of lesson content teachers were hoping students would make became realized and engaged the students in powerful ways: “Connections between subjects allowed students to be successful, confident, and enthusiastic.”

Teachers offered other benefits beyond these as well, that were consistent with the kinds of indicators concerning thoughtfulness and engagement used with the evaluators’ classroom observations:

It gives kids more freedom to think more deeply.

This kind of learning has them more motivated; it makes their learning more personal.

Additional Capacities, but of Less Prevalence in the Data. The above four capacities dominated the data this year. However, that does not mean that teacher growth was only limited to those areas. Indeed, the interviews were dotted with a host of other ways in which teachers had built capacity. Three found their way into conversations with more than just the isolated teacher, but less frequently than the commonly mentioned themes from above.

The first was **technology**. Technology often was a topic in interviews, reflection documents, and Perpich staff site visit reports. In these, technology seemed to be addressed in two ways. One was the technology that teachers bought with project funding to enhance their units, usually with respect to the arts. Teachers purchased Ipads, cameras, and other devices (as well as arts supplies) to enable students to create products that reflected what was learned. These tools were also useful in documenting the units' accomplishments for various audiences--but most clearly for Perpich and the evaluation team. Participants viewed these acquisitions as investments that could outlive the projects and potentially contribute to sustaining arts integration in the schools.

The second way participants discussed technology was in terms of facilitating instructional planning, execution, and progress documentation. Google Docs was the primary tool for planning. This tool was selected for online writing and collaborative sharing because it was free and easy use, easily accessible online, many teachers already used it, and it included many useful features. Multiple project teachers and Perpich staff have been able to edit and comment on posted documents simultaneously. It has also provided convenient online storage for sharing student work samples and unit documents. As one teacher explained: "Google Docs allowed us to add and clarify our planning. Everything was right there. It helped keep us going in the right direction." For instruction, applications like Prezi, Photoshop, Garageband, and social media were all noted. Yet teachers did not elaborate on how these fit their units. Also, teachers were not resistant to learning about technology but they were dismayed by the failure of the technology to work when needed: "Knowing these has been good for me. But we have lots of system glitches."

The initiative prompted teachers to make contact with other **local outside resources**. Community members and artists were the most common. For at least one teacher, embracing arts integration came from working with an artist: "My interest in AI (arts integration) was first based in collaborating with (an artist). It was an opportunity to avoid compartmentalization of economic concepts." Here the teacher found a different way to think conceptually and was attracted to it and arts integration as a result. On occasion, they had to alter their practice to be "in sync" with guest artists as an outgrowth of the implications of preparing for, sequencing activities with, and taking full advantage of an artist's visit. Teachers noted that they had much to learn about working effectively with guest artists. They were not always sure how to negotiate with the artist so that the unit made effective use of the artist's talents. Some teams used community members as resources as well, either for their cultural expertise or as "extra hands" to better serve students instructionally in the units. One teacher noted this latter strategy: "A high school helper came into the class and broke [the] art portion into stations to create a 4:1 ratio."

While no doubt implicated in all of the preceding themes, teachers occasionally referred to **reflection** as a stand-alone capacity which they were developing through the project. One

teacher recounted: “I now have a whole new appreciation for the process of improving my work.” This reflection was often student-centered, based on what students did and did not do. One team found reflection led to “an elegant fit” between art and other content areas. Further, educators perceived reflection to be connected to increasing the rigor of the units and to students performing better on assessments. Teachers did much more of this reflection on student work after the evaluation team’s site visits and we plan to track this more closely in the coming year.

The Potential for Sustaining Teacher Capacities

There was no doubt that participants developed new capacities in terms of collaborating with colleagues and with Perpich staff in an ongoing way, using standards and assessments to plan, and in integrating the arts with other content. And, they believed that facility with technology, collaboration with artists and community members, and reflective practice were becoming ingrained skills as well. Uncovering ways to continue to enact these abilities routinely and successfully is what distinguishes reforms with staying power from those where burgeoning improvement washes away all too quickly.

In the same Summer 2013 survey referred earlier in this section, teachers had a chance to weigh in on the long-term sustainability of the nine capacities for which they had indicated the extent of their improvement during the year. The 42 responding teachers rank ordered each of the nine areas in terms of (a) the degree to which these were important to sustain and (b) the likelihood that the participants would sustain them. Table 4 presents the average rankings. Since the task was to rank order, the lower the mean for a capacity, the more likely it would be sustained.

Table 4: Teachers’ Rankings of the Importance of and Likelihood of Sustainability Across Nine Areas of Their Project-Related Capacities (N=42)

Importance of Sustainability	Mean Rank	Likelihood of Sustainability	Mean Rank
Collaboration with colleagues	2.49	Collaboration with colleagues	2.59
Alignment of work to benchmarks	3.67	Alignment of work to benchmarks	3.33
Creating arts-integrated units	4.08	Reflecting on student work	4.31

Reflecting on student work	4.46	Making modifications to instruction based on student work	4.50
Designing assessments	4.61	Creating arts-integrated units	4.63
Making modifications to instruction based on student work	4.67	Designing assessments	5.16
Evaluating assessments	5.32	Evaluating assessments	5.69
Knowledge of arts integration	6.03	Knowledge of arts integration	6.36
Using Google Drive	7.62	Using Google Drive	6.68

The table shows that teachers had very similar assessments for both the importance and likelihood of sustainability. In fact, the top two and bottom three items were in exactly the same position. The four middle items changed places but only by one or two places. Thus, from a statistical standpoint, the level of agreement about the relative rankings was very high. It appeared from the average scores that teachers were making meaningful statistical distinctions between the more and less important areas in their professional work.

More substantively, the numbers suggest that teachers appreciated the importance of collaboration with their peers and its continuance into the future. That was the highest ranked area in both columns. A close second was the capacity to align their work (learning goals, assessments, and evaluative criteria) to state benchmarks and, by extension, to academic standards. This result perhaps portends a productive and significant role for collaboration and standards alignment in the future. The idea of technology use was the least important and least likely of the areas to be sustained. This reinforces what the report noted elsewhere about teachers easily reaching levels of frustration when electronic tools malfunctioned or were balky. It also may reflect a realistic assessment on the part of teachers that schools are not organized in ways that allow the most effective use of technology.

It was surprising to see knowledge of arts integration ranked near the bottom of importance of and likelihood of having a lasting place in the schools. Teachers were almost universally hopeful that the arts would become and remain prominent. For example, they commented “I hope this is not a one and done,” and “We’ve now got legs; we have a

foundation.” However, they also offered some caveats that were mostly clustered around time and resources, as indicated by this arts teacher’s assessment of the situation: “I would love to work with [classroom teacher] but I am not sure how it would work logistically. We can’t plan and carry out this work without time and resources.”

Critical Considerations

The danger in writing about student learning and teacher capacity separately is losing sight of the dynamic interplay among people, processes, and places that actually determine the project’s true merits. In other words, how the year unfolded is as important to understand as its yield. This section therefore tries to address the nature of the initiative’s “connective tissues” – or its complex, interlocked web of activity.

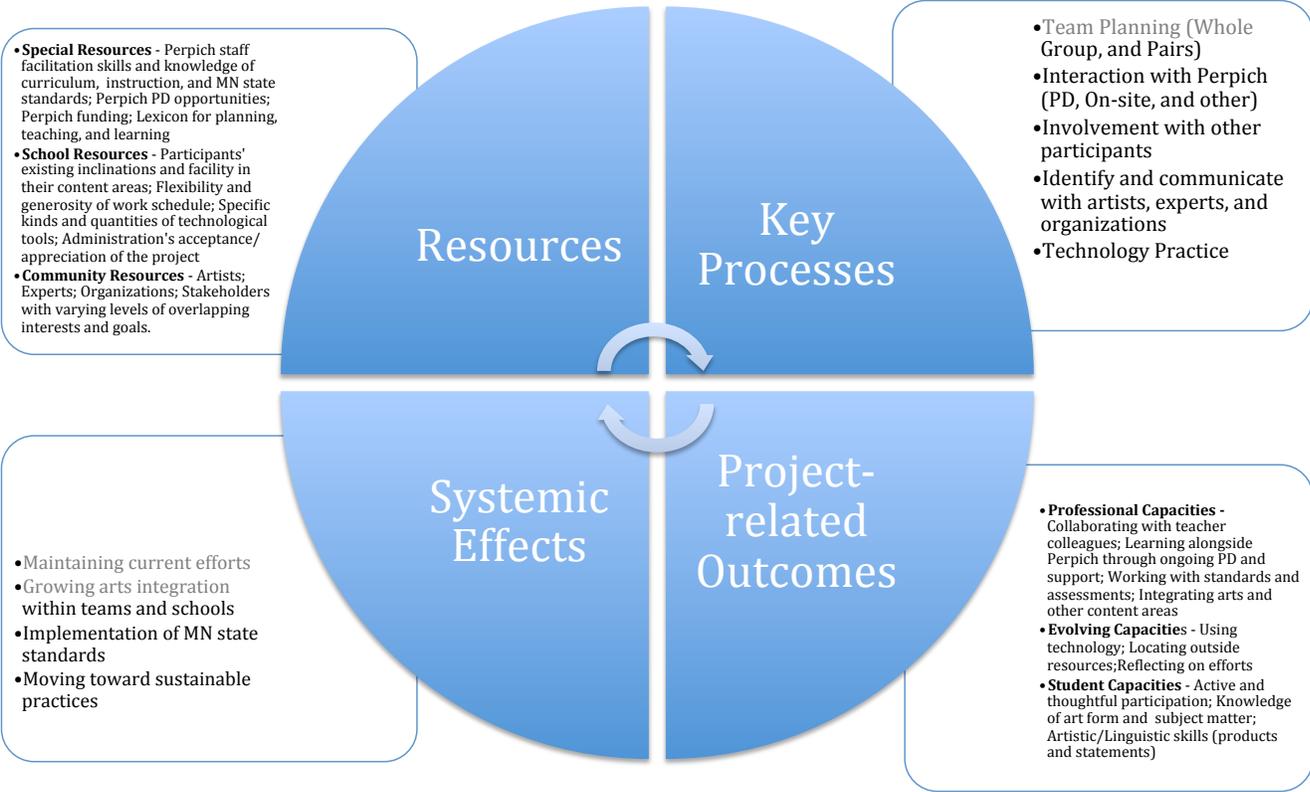
A constructive way to portray the interactions among the project’s various moving parts is through a logic model. Such devices serve as useful maps of a project’s evolution because they summarize the significant factors that shaped how the year went and can be a springboard for reflecting on what needs to happen in the coming years. The model presented below, both in text and graphic forms (see Figure 1), has four categories of important conditions, events, developments, and/or actions. These are (1) resources – including those the project specifically provided, those available within the schools, and those residing in the communities of which the schools were a part; (2) key interactive and connective processes, primarily related to the teams’ planning and their involvement with Perpich staff as well as other participants and local artists/experts; (3) project-related outcomes for teachers and students; and (4) systemic effects that may alter the way participants and their schools educate students in the future. While the general flow of influence in the model is from the first of these through each of the others sequentially, there is a recursive quality to how the project operates because subsequent developments can both reinforce and hinder the continuance of the conditions that actions that brought those developments about.

The project provided a wealth of special resources to participants. These included the Perpich staff’s acknowledged facilitation skills and their deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and Minnesota’s system of academic standards; the professional development opportunities Perpich offered; the funding given to teams for extra-school unit planning/meetings and materials; and a lexicon related to planning, teaching, and learning. The schools possessed resources important to the project too, such as participants’ existing inclinations and facility with the arts and their own knowledge of the content to be taught in the units, the flexibility and generosity of the work schedule, the kinds and quantity of technological tools, and the administrations’ acceptance and appreciation of – and occasional active involvement in – the project. Finally, within the schools’ local and statewide communities resided artists, experts, organizations, and other stakeholders whose interests and goals overlapped in varying degrees with those of the project.

During the year, some of these resources facilitated the project and some thwarted it, as abundance varied among them. They therefore mutually shaped processes central to project progress. For instance, one such key interactive process was of course team planning. The agenda of professional development sessions and the inflexibility and limited time in school schedules constrained this to a degree, according to teachers, and instigated – on the advice of Perpich staff – a modification in how many of the teams operated, which was to leave a good bit of the nitty-gritty detailed planning of units to pairs of team members rather than to the whole team. Regardless, team planning was the procedural vehicle upon which much of the project’s progress rode. Contributing significantly was the team’s interactions with Perpich staff, during PD sessions, on-site, and via other means electronically. On these occasions, teachers praised the rich flow of ideas, critiques, and encouragement and, in fact, attributed whatever success they had to having such access to the staff. Other important processes including the connections participants made with each other within and across the schools, identifying and communicating with local and statewide artists/experts, and the practice they had with various artistic and technological media and tools.

Through the above interactions and connections, participants reinforced and developed four professional capacities: collaborating with teacher colleagues, working with standards and assessments, learning alongside Perpich through ongoing professional development and support, and integrating arts and other content areas. Capacities in three other areas appeared to be evolving and were related to technology, outside resources, and reflection. Students benefitted too. They actively and thoughtfully participated in many of the units and thereby got a taste of what arts-integration can bring to the classroom. They also gained knowledge about the unit’s content and art forms and skills of expression (artistically via the products and linguistically through artists’ statements). These project-related outcomes for youth and for professionals engendered a sense of satisfaction with the year’s efforts and disposed both groups to wanting to take part in similar ones in the future.

Figure 2: Perpich Logic Model for Arts Integration



It would be inappropriate for the report to draw summative evaluative conclusions about these developments at this point of the evaluation. However, as Perpich staff monitor and adjust their efforts, it is appropriate to offer several issues for consideration in how the events displayed in the logic model played out and affected progress.

The Meaning of “Art” in Arts Integration. In the professional development sessions, the teachers thoroughly enjoyed the arts-related activities and these were a stimulus for their involvement and commitment to integration. In the units’ lessons, art was often a means of engaging students. And it worked well in this capacity. As teachers develop their capacities in this arena, Perpich staff envision a more substantive positioning for the arts than this. Whether this larger role occurs seems tied to two other topics: two-way arts integration and art as production. For the most part, art was more a vehicle for promoting learning in other subjects than the other domains were instigators of learning in the arts. Two-way arts integration was noticeably difficult to achieve but remains a worthy goal. Similarly, the units typically ended with students creating artistic productions. The available data did not indicate whether the products were the occasions for deepening student learning or whether they only allowed the units to end on a “high note.” But it appears most probable that art was mostly a reflection of learning done prior to the creation of the product, even though it could serve a much more powerful role in advancing students’ understanding and as a bridge to future learning.

Balancing Arts Integration, Collaboration, and Standards Alignment. The project is an ambitious effort with three crucial elements: arts integration, collaboration (with an expectation that this would be done both in planning and co-teaching), and standards alignment. Teachers saw appeal in co-teaching but to do it on more than an infrequent basis would require schools to change how they do scheduling and other practices, or for an infusion of outside funding for that specific purpose. The arts proved themselves to be effective in engaging students and as vehicles for learning other content, but the arts played largely a supporting role overall it seemed. Standards and alignment moved from being mysterious entities to being useful organizers for the units, but ‘integrating’ them was still a work in progress. The three elements were all vitally necessary and in need of further development – and considering how to balance them may be complex.

Assessment. Related to the above is the teachers’ perception that assessment was an area where they needed more assistance. It appeared that teachers did not think about assessment concomitantly with considering standards and learning goals. Assessment clearly was central to both arts integration and standards alignment, but teachers did not seem to regard the term similarly to the way Perpich staff did and perhaps to the way it is referenced in the state standards. It would appear that teachers needed a lot of new knowledge and practical advice here. This is touchy however because teachers also felt that as professionals they were well-versed in how to “test” their students. It may be that people were using the same term to refer to

different aspects of gathering data on what students know and can do. Assessment also needs to address content integration and not simply the separate content domains being brought together. Eventually, assessment of the units will have to complement rather than compete with the other assessments participants have to give to students.

Sliding-Scale Professional Development. The teachers could not offer more abundant praise of the project's professional development and follow-up consultations. Perpich staff should feel proud of their work with teachers. Further, the professional development programming allowed for adaptations, since regions varied by experience. Expanding on this principle needs further consideration. Not only are new schools being added as time marches on, new team members will be added into the mix. In this, there is a dilemma that will need to be resolved: How can the project and/or experienced participants support people who have diverse knowledge and skill with arts-integrated units and with collaboration planning and implementing them. This is a differentiation task that teachers face daily (and for which they could use some productive modeling).

Internalizing Arts Integration. As important as the Perpich Center has been as an external support agency, teachers will eventually have to internalize arts integration as their own practice. They will need to use all the capacities they have developed to support one another and to teach their students. Given the prevailing state of teacher isolation we have noted in this report, this will undoubtedly be a challenge. There are many issues to address in this. First, teachers must fully develop the capacities we have outlined above. Second, teachers will need to develop support networks to develop new ideas and identify new capacities that need to be acquired. Third, teachers will have to take ownership of their own development as professionals. Finally, teachers will need to negotiate with school administrators and their other teacher colleagues to enable collaboration and to access necessary resources. The importance of this to sustaining the arts integration effort cannot be overestimated.

Technology. Teachers seem less enamored of and more impatient with technology than with any other aspect of the project. This was not due to anything Perpich staff did necessarily but to site conditions. Most schools were not really set up for easy access to technology and teachers typically did not work collaboratively with it. In fact, a good number of teachers did not appear to even use email for their professional communication very much, making the vision of an online community a challenge. Further, when technology failed, teachers dismissed its relevance. This impatience was probably professionally sound since to have this happen in their classrooms not only reduced time for instruction but also created time for students to misbehave. It is worth considering focusing technology use on the tasks teachers and the project need it for, such as building a "user-friendly" document repository that is structured around the types of documents to be submitted and the timeline for their submission. Adding teacher discussion groups, wikis, blogs, etc. may also help.

Time and Resources. Teachers stated unequivocally and repeatedly that “You can’t plan and carry out your plans without time and resources.” The project strived to ameliorate their dearth. This complaint arises so often in all education reforms that it sometimes becomes trivialized and thereby glossed over. But the inescapable fact is that usually when special funding for time to plan disappears so does that which was being planned. It would do both Perpich staff and the evaluation team well to ferret out where planning seemed to mesh with existing school schedules and where it occurred only because of Perpich’s resources.

Arts Integration as a Lower Priority Sustainability Issue for Participants. This finding from the survey data puzzled the evaluation team. Three possible explanations are that teachers believed that they had that knowledge firmly in place within their instructional repertoire by the end of the year. Thus, it had become second nature and no longer needed to be a priority for the future. This seemed less likely than a second interpretation which was that teachers learned all they had the capacity for with respect to arts integration and there simply was no more room or time for continued growth in this area. And, as a third interpretation, it may simply be that teachers viewed arts integration, however that might be defined, as just less important in the scheme of all that they are pressured to do. All three were evident to varying degrees among participants.

If the project is to endure to the point that it can yield systemic effects that involve the arts, then more than having students and team members being favorably inclined toward them will be needed. Such a desirable attitude – backed with knowledge, skill, and enthusiasm – is a good starting place. But to maintain what was accomplished this year and to grow the presence of arts integration in participants and their schools in the future, the project will have to sort out which of the resources, processes, and project-related outcomes most effectively paved the way to progress and whether these are ones that are sustainable in the future. At the same time, long-term, embedded ramifications from the project will clearly have to further the teachers’ and schools’ efforts toward implementing state academic standards and they will have to do so using sustainable practices. These will all be issues of priority over the next two years as the evaluation team and Perpich staff work together to develop implementation and sustainability plans informed by evaluation data. In addition, examinations of and discussions about these ideas should also be integral to conversations among Perpich staff, their advisors, and stakeholders in the coming year.

Conclusion

Much has been accomplished this school year by the participating teachers who have been working with the Perpich Center for Arts Education to infuse their curricula with arts-integrated lessons and improve prospects for student learning. Indeed, during the 2012-2013 school year, more than 1000 Minnesota students have been exposed to the opportunity to learn about the arts and non-arts content in new and different ways. Initial indications are that students widely embraced this type of learning with higher levels of engagement than much of their other

classroom situations and in many cases with a higher level of thoughtfulness. In other words, students acquired content in deeper ways with higher levels of enthusiasm. At the same time, teachers learned about academic standards, curriculum planning, alternative forms of pedagogy, and assessment as well as how to work with colleagues to ensure that these tools could be shared with others in their buildings. This collaboration enhances the prospect that what they have learned will become a routine part of their own and their schools' instructional practice in the future. With that high note come some cautionary considerations that such approaches have not always been nor will necessarily be easy to attain in the future. Arts-based instruction has always struggled for primacy in American education. There are still barriers, but with a healthy acknowledgment that those will continually be addressed, this project has begun down a productive path.

Appendix A: Participating Schools, 2012-13

West Central Region (N=7)

- Breckenridge Elementary
- Lake Park Audubon Elementary
- Morris Elementary
- New York Mills Secondary School
- Osakis Elementary
- Pelican Rapids Elementary
- Rothsay Elementary and High School (one shared unit)

Southeast Region (N=14)

- Austin High School
- John Adams Middle School
- Kenyon Wanamingo Elementary
- LaCrescent Middle School
- LeRoy-Ostrander High School
- Mabel-Canton Elementary
- Mabel-Canton High School
- McKinley Elementary
- Plainview-Elgin-Millville Lower Elementary
- Plainview-Elgin-Millville Upper Elementary
- Plainview-Elgin-Millville High School
- Sibley Elementary
- Southland Middle/High School
- Triton High School