

Building and Sustaining Capacity for Arts Integration

Three themes emerge from this study about teachers' capacities for arts integration and the likelihood of these skills remaining in the participants' teaching repertoires in the future:

1. Teacher capacity to assess and respond to arts integration units.

As teachers learn about assessment they develop appropriate tools and measures to provide feedback to students. As a teacher's understanding and use of assessment increases, so does their ability to judge the effectiveness of arts-integrated instruction. They become better able to make adjustments during instruction, or immediately afterward in collegial post-unit reflection. Participants' opportunities to engage in focused reflection and panel reviews of student work became a key aspect of the project and a resource for schools developing their strategies for arts integration.

2. "Inspiration" as a source for teacher innovation.

Inspiration can draw students in, pique their interest and serve as an entry point to engagement. Inspiration may draw on personal connection to material or may signal a way to learn that seems new or innovative. Though arts integration is not a new concept, teachers said that arts integration seemed innovative to them. In the face of standardized testing and accountability, the opportunity to do artistic work felt novel to both students and teachers.



Teachers from Plainview, Minnesota, (left to right) Amanda Fry, Lynelle Snyder (partially covered), and Kari Donze, put on a puppet theater production about the amount of water used in the United States during an arts integrated kick-off workshop.

Teachers respond to the experiences in this project with the same thoughtfulness and engagement they seek to elicit from students. Perpich staff not only models innovative ideas, but also allows teachers to experience what engagement and thoughtfulness through innovation looks and feels like. Professional development experiences that included the arts provided fresh ideas that inspired the interest of teachers who, in turn used their experiences to tailor arts-integrated units to meet their students' needs and interests. Schools benefit from using the arts to inspire and engage teachers as well as students.

3. The influence of funding for teacher capacity.

Teachers spoke forcefully in interviews about the significance of the funding associated with the Perpich Arts Integration Project. Participating teachers made discretionary decisions about how funds would be divided, including for teacher stipends, substitute teacher pay to release teachers to attend workshops or planning meetings, materials, field trips, and for engaging community art experts in support of their unit goals.

When pressed to talk more about funding, one teacher stated, "We have such small classroom budgets. In planning, we always have to ask ourselves, 'What can I do to stretch this very small amount of money?' With Perpich, this is the first time we've been able to ask the question 'What do I want to do?'" Small amounts of funding can help teacher colleagues risk cross-curricular instruction, and promote staff confidence in arts integration.

“ [The arts integration approach] made me realize that kids get it quicker if they see it several ways and in several places.

- Teacher Participant

