

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