

Arts Infusion: My Lived Experiences as an Elementary Visual Arts Teacher

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Abstract

In this article, I present my lived experiences as an elementary visual arts teacher working in an arts-infused school. Investigating arts infusion as a form of arts integration, I introduce arts infusion and what it looks like in practice. Weaving together personal experiences, stories, reflections, lesson examples, and a literature review, I am inspired by narrative inquiry as a way of knowing and making meaning of past experiences and how reflective thinking can provide insight into the complexities of teaching and classroom practice. Reflecting on themes such as scheduling, time and space, participation, content knowledge, relationships and engagement, and support and funding, I highlight successes and challenges I encountered while working with arts infusion. Recognizing that many schools, particularly at the elementary level, are implementing arts integration, it is important to become aware of the lived experiences of those working in such programs and the possibilities their experiences, such as my own, have for growth and change. It is my hope more schools will acknowledge the potential for the arts and arts infusion in education.

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Introduction

As a new college graduate and state-certified arts educator, I was excited to begin my teaching career. After a few months of searching, applying, and interviewing for jobs, I accepted a position as a visual art teacher, or also referred to as an art specialist, in a public school district in Pennsylvania. Although I thought I was hired to teach typical art classes in two elementary schools (K-5), I soon learned that I was assigned to teach in one school that focused on arts infusion and a second school that focused on environmental awareness. The school district offered a program called schools of Focus, which integrated a specific theme such as the arts, Spanish, the environment, or entrepreneurship into the elementary curriculum. Parents were able to choose the elementary school their child attended, but if no request was made, the default option assigned students to the school located nearest to their home. A majority of students attended their neighborhood school.

My responsibilities as the art teacher in the two different schools slightly differed. In the environmental awareness-focused school, I was expected to teach typical art classes. Although the school principal encouraged me to incorporate environmental themes into my art lessons, it was not required. Because my position was expected to travel between two schools and teach over 500 students, it was acceptable to design lessons for each grade level and teach the same lessons at both schools. As for the specialized art school, I understood the general responsibilities of teaching art but was confused with the concept of arts infusion and additional duties it would entail. I quickly began to research arts infusion to prepare for my new job, not knowing it would be a topic I would continue to investigate over the next two decades.

In this article, I present my lived experiences as an elementary art teacher working in an arts-infused school. Since transitioning to a career in higher education, I have dedicated time to revisiting and reflecting on my former teaching experiences. In addition to reviewing personal writings, lesson plans, documents, and student artwork images, I also researched arts integration more thoroughly. This reexamination process has allowed me to make meaning of my past experiences and relate it to existing research. Weaving together personal experiences, stories, reflections, lesson examples, and a literature review, I am inspired by narrative inquiry as a way of knowing. Similar to how researchers and educators such as Chase (2003), Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), and Elbaz-Luwisch (2007) have used personal stories as a way to understand teaching and learning, revealing my storied teaching life allows me to reflect and interpret my personal and professional journey with arts infusion. As Lyons (2007) explains, reflective thinking provides insight into the complexities of teaching and classroom practice. Therefore, I have chosen to apply this thinking to my work as an art educator and the possibilities for arts infusion. In the following section, I introduce the context and related literature. Then, after presenting an example of an arts-infused lesson, I reflect on themes such as (a) content knowledge, (b) participation, (c) relationships and engagement, (d) time and space, and (e) support and funding, while highlighting successes and challenges I encountered working with arts infusion.

Exploring Arts Infusion: Context and Literature

The week before school started the principal at the arts-infused school provided me with a one-page printout from the school website that briefly summarized arts infusion as a way to

stimulate students to think abstractly and creatively, improve confidence with communication skills, enhance problem-solving skills, and recognize the importance of the arts in daily life.¹ She explained that general classroom teachers were expected to work alongside the art teacher and visiting artists to incorporate the visual and performing arts in their general academic instruction. This was to help enrich and expand student learning by providing opportunities for students to engage in a variety of interdisciplinary art lessons (e.g., hands-on art projects) and learn through the arts.² Rather than asking students to learn by simply reading a textbook chapter and completing the accompanying worksheet in a single subject, teachers were to use arts infusion to help teach academic content across the curriculum in more creative, engaging, and meaningful ways. She summarized a few arts infusion lessons that were carried out in previous years such as a butterfly metamorphosis mural that integrated art and science. New to this arts infusion concept, I felt overwhelmed but excited with the possibilities for teaching and learning.

Wanting to learn more, I searched for additional information about arts infusion. At the time, I could not find much online information about arts infusion specifically, but I discovered the topic of arts integration. I slowly began to understand arts infusion as a type of arts integration that explores multiple pathways to teaching/learning by focusing on concepts that are connected to the arts and other disciplines and include artists-in-residence as active participants who work alongside teachers (Barnum, 2017; Davis, 2005).³ Over the last few decades, researchers have attempted to resituate the arts in education and explore how the arts and arts integration can promote student learning (Fiske, 1999; Fowler, 1996). The arts are said to be well suited for integration because they deepen instruction by connecting thought, feeling, and action, facilitate co-teaching and co-learning, and link the self to the larger community (Burnaford, Aprill, & Weiss, 2001). Small and large-scale arts integration initiatives such as *Arts for Academic Achievement*, *Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE)*, *North Carolina A+ Schools Program*, *Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge (TETAC)*, and *Project Zero* have been shown to have positive effects on education (Bickley-Green, 1995; Burnaford et al., 2001; Deasy, 2002; Diaz & McKenna, 2017b; Luftig, 2000; Mardirosian & Lewis, 2018; Miller & Bogatova, 2018; Rabkin & Redmond, 2004; Russell & Zembylas, 2006).

Arts integration can be explored as a dynamic process of merging art with at least one other discipline that opens up a space of inclusiveness in teaching, learning, and experiencing (LaJevic, 2013a). For example, a teacher can provide an interdisciplinary learning opportunity where students connect the arts with a second (or third) subject such as science or social studies. Recognizing educational learning as a whole, arts integration is a decentered interface that “does not divide the curriculum into distinct parts (i.e., science, art, etc.), but celebrates the rhizomatic

¹ The school website where this information was posted is no longer active. The district has since merged the six elementary schools due to declining enrollment, rising cost of maintaining the buildings, and district debt. As such, there are no longer schools of focus. The Pennsylvania Department of Education placed the school district into financial recovery status and seized control of the finances.

² Because I did not have much involvement with the visiting artist component, as I will explain later, I will focus on the visual arts infusion component for which I was responsible.

³ Since arts infusion is a type of arts integration, I use the terms interchangeably throughout this article.

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) overlapping qualities between subjects. . . . It concentrates on the arts ability to teach across/through the curriculum and transcend the school subject boundaries” (LaJevic, 2013a, p. 2). Examining arts integration as a complex living curriculum (Pinar, 2004) highlights the possibilities of *subjects-in-the-making* (LaJevic, 2013b). This concept informs my approach to arts infusion as subjects, or bodies of knowledge, experiences, and participants, are fluid, constantly changing and informing one another. As an art teacher, I, along with students and classroom teachers, bring in our personal experiences and knowledge as we travel on unique journeys, we discover meaningful connections between school, life, and our world(s). This relational way of being provokes new educational pathways and ways to view, understand, and engage in learning and teaching through art.

While learning about arts infusion and my role as an art teacher, the principal also introduced the unique district-wide schedule designed to support the arts initiative. The elementary schedule was divided into a six-day rotation cycle, a schedule with which I was unfamiliar. Art class, along with the other special classes including music, library, and physical education were assigned a number rather than a day of the week and students would have their special classes on the numbered day. For example, if Monday was a day 1 and there was no school on Tuesday, then Wednesday would follow a day 2 schedule. After day 6, the cycle would start over again with day 1. The six-day cycle aimed to provide consistency and ensure students would not miss classes that met on a specific day of the week. As a visual arts teacher who traveled between two schools, I was assigned to teach at each school for three days during the cycle. The students had art class scheduled once in the six-day rotation for 50 minutes during which they engaged in art lessons. For example, a second-grade class may have art class each day 2. Because the arts infusion school was a smaller school with fewer students (i.e., approximately 200 students), instead of teaching the regularly scheduled art lessons on each of the three days, I taught regular art classes for two days (i.e., days 2 and 3) and had one full day (i.e., day 1) to devote to arts infusion planning and teaching. As such, these students explored art through two approaches: they received regular visual arts instruction where art is studied as its own subject and offers insight to all the other academic subjects as they are taught through an arts lens (Davis, 2005) and also through arts infusion. In the regularly scheduled art class, I designed lessons that concentrated first on art and would make relevant cross-curricular connections if encountered. In contrast, in arts infusion, the arts and another subject were simultaneously thought through when designing and teaching the lessons. Priority was not positioned on only one subject, rather, an equal emphasis was placed on at least two academic subjects, including art. CAPE refers to this as “parallel processes” (Burnaford et al., 2001) and the North Carolina A+ Schools Program as “two-way integration” (Rabkin & Redmond, 2004). Each subject was considered a fluid space that generated thoughts to flow back and forth, each influencing one another.

As a new art teacher, I used the first few day 1s to create a tentative schedule and research more about arts infusion through online searches. To facilitate teacher participation, I provided the classroom teachers with an opportunity to sign-up for arts infusion. I posted a sign-up sheet on the door that led down to the art room in the basement. Teachers were asked to schedule at least one week in advance with the amount of time needed, a theme or lesson idea, and provide necessary subject matter content and resources. Teachers could sign up for whole-day, half-day, or hour-long lessons since the entire arts infusion day was open and flexible. I

would then try to meet with the classroom teacher to discuss ideas for the lesson. There were many ways to integrate the arts into the classroom and the degree to which it could be infused greatly differed. It could be done more simply by discussing or critiquing a historical work of art, or done more complexly by incorporating a time-consuming hands-on art project, which enhanced the student process of active learning, or a combination of both. The next section provides a closer look at an arts-infused second-grade lesson that culminated in a collaborative class-wide artwork.

A Lesson Example

It was mid-December and I was excited to see that one of the second-grade teachers signed up to co-teach an arts-infused lesson in honor of Black History Month for our school's annual February celebration. She stated that her students were learning about African-American history in social studies (i.e., in their regular classroom) and provided me with a copy of their social studies textbook to review. I was immediately reminded of Kara Walker, a contemporary African American woman artist who explores race throughout American history. Having recently viewed one of Walker's installations in an international art exhibition at a nearby museum, I had been eager to incorporate her work into my teaching (to see Walker's work, please visit her website <http://www.karawalkerstudio.com/>).

During the following week on the next scheduled arts-infused day, I read the textbook chapter to learn more about the subject matter, researched information about Walker's artmaking practice, and reviewed the state standards. In reading the Pennsylvania Department of Education Academic Standards for History (2002b), I learned that second-grade students were expected to understand chronological thinking (8.1.3.A) and the contributions of individuals and groups to the U.S. (8.3.3.A). I then found three relevant Arts and Humanities Standards (2002a) that stated students should know and use the elements and principles of each art form to create works in the arts (9.1.3.A), identify works of others through a performance or exhibition (9.1.3.C), and explain the historical, cultural and social context of an individual work in the arts (9.2.3.A). In one of our next lunch periods, I shared the information with the second-grade teacher and proposed that we design a lesson inspired by Walker where students could explore social issues such as power and freedom and create a visual timeline of Black American history as installation art. She thought it was a great idea. After discussing additional details about the lesson and its implementation, we started preparing. Since I was knowledgeable in the arts, I took the lead in planning the artist discussion and art materials and the classroom teacher focused on the timeline by devising a list of important people and events with her students. I created a PowerPoint presentation with images of Walker's work, which I carefully selected due to some of its graphic nature, and gathered supplies such as a large 36-inch roll of black paper, white pencils, scissors, and masking tape.

During our first scheduled arts-infused day in mid-January, the classroom teacher and I met with her second-grade students in the art room and asked them to share what they were learning in social studies class. To build upon the discussion about African American history, I displayed the PowerPoint slides and introduced Walker's work. Because Walker's work depicts explicit and violent content, I carefully selected images from her installations such as *The Emancipation Approximation* (1999) which was locally on display. As we examined Walker's paper cut-out silhouette works that address themes of slavery and racism, we discussed terms such as freedom, oppression, and what it means to have power or feel powerless, and other

related words including the silhouette, installation, positive and negative space, perspective, timeline, and storytelling. I found students to be engaged in the conversations and intrigued by the work. Explaining how we were going to create a Walker-inspired visual timeline of Black American history recognizing events, important movements, and people in the pursuit of freedom, students were excited to choose a person or event to depict from the list they devised with their teacher.

During the next arts-infused day (i.e., approximately a week later), students began the artmaking process. They partnered with a classmate to create silhouette shapes of their selected persons or events. They traced their partner's carefully positioned body on black paper that was placed on the floor and then cut out the silhouette shape. Some of the images depicted enslaved persons engaging in plantation work and crawling in the Underground Railroad, as well as well-known people such as Rosa Parks, Jackie Robinson, and Tiger Woods who pushed the boundary of limitations. Students eagerly asked to create additional silhouette shapes such as clouds and grass to use in the foreground and background to depict perspective. The teacher and I then assisted students in chronologically arranging their silhouettes in a visual timeline around the multi-purpose room walls using masking tape so the whole school could enjoy and reflect upon the work. We were impressed with how smoothly everything went. Although the installation (Figure 1) focused primarily on visual art and social studies, aspects within other subject areas were explored as well. In language arts class, the students researched their portion of the installation and wrote a few short paragraphs about the history and impact of the person, place, or event. As a culminating activity, the students presented their installation during a school-wide assembly in February that many parents attended. Each student proudly read a statement explaining their visual representation.



Figure 1: Black American history timeline art installation. Photo courtesy of author.

Many additional arts infusion projects were implemented throughout the years as well. A first-grade class created symmetrical butterfly wings to wear while performing a play to complement a science unit where they studied and raised butterflies in the classroom. A second-

grade class created a large two-dimensional map of their local neighborhoods in a social studies lesson based on community. Another second-grade class investigated the notion of heroes in a story they read in Language Arts class, examined Faith Ringgold's story quilts including *The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles* (1997) (to see her work, please visit her website <https://www.faihringgold.com/>), and then created a hero quilt (Figure 2). In a third-grade science and art lesson, students discussed the artist James Turrell who is concerned with light, perception, and space and created a solar system installation (Figure 3) (to see his work, please visit his website <http://jamesturrell.com/>). In another third-grade science and art lesson, students created musical instruments in a sound unit. They experimented with how music affects their moods and drawings and brainstormed sounds they imaginatively "heard" when looking at Kandinsky's *Composition 8* (1923) painting (to see the work, please visit <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/1924>). Important terms such as wavelength, frequency, and pitch were discussed. The whole fifth-grade cohort participated in Colonial Days, a culminating activity that took place after their social studies unit on colonial America. The students transformed the classrooms by making murals, a log-cabin structure (Figure 4), stone walkways and fireplaces, placemats, etc. Students learned traditional colonial dance, sang songs, and made soap, candles, quilts (Figure 5), rugs, and brooms, and parents volunteered by cooking colonial American dishes for the students to eat. To provide a fuller examination of arts infusion, I will now explore the following themes that surfaced throughout my experiences and research: content knowledge, participation, relationships and engagement, time and space, and support and funding.



Figure 2: Student hero quilt. Photo courtesy of author.



Figure 3: Solar system artwork. Photo courtesy of author.



Figures 4 & 5: Colonial day art. Photos courtesy of author.

Content Knowledge

I quickly learned that having knowledge of the academic content for each subject and the grade level was very important in preparing and teaching arts-infused lessons. The teachers and I often used a backward design approach for designing the lesson by first addressing the desired results, or what we wanted students to learn (e.g., standards and objectives that included big ideas and skills) and then considered the assessment task and learning experience (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). We worked to link content from the district curriculum documents and state standards for the academic subject areas and design lessons students would find engaging and relevant. For example, if the students were expected to learn about American history or communities in social studies, or the solar system in science, the classroom teacher and I would find concepts or issues that relate to art and design an arts-infused lesson. I felt it was important for the students, teachers, and myself to critically examine concepts and issues that were prevalent in our lives as well as across the curriculum. As such, contemporary artists who explore current themes that relate to the academic content were commonly investigated.

I faced challenges in understanding the academic content and district curriculum plan, which were undergoing curricular revisions at the local level. More expertise in the non-arts curriculum of each grade level would have helped me to better serve the needs and goals of the teachers, students, and school. Since the projects were expected to support the academic state standards, I had to become familiar with the standards for the various subjects including science, social studies, mathematics, and language arts. Because I had each day 1 to devote to arts-infusion, I was able to use the time to learn about the content areas, read the student textbooks, conduct additional research, and brainstorm lesson ideas. But since I was often simultaneously designing or teaching multiple arts-infused lessons at the same time, I felt like I was constantly struggling to learn and reflect upon the non-arts content knowledge needed to design and teach strong arts-infused lessons. By the third year, I was more familiar with the academic standards and curricular topics for each grade level, but since I tried to vary the arts infusion lessons and experiment with new ideas each year, I frequently revisited the state standards documents. Interestingly, when I taught the arts-infused lessons, students were often surprised to find out art could overflow into their classroom learning and that my knowledge was not simply limited to the visual arts—they were sometimes shocked I knew more than the subject of art and could also teach what they were studying in science, social studies, and so on. Furthermore, given the opportunity to see the students' strengths in other areas outside of the arts, their knowledge and abilities in the other academic areas amazed me.

Just as it was vital for me, as the art teacher, to learn about the non-art subject matter, it was equally important for the classroom teacher to become familiar with the arts. High-quality arts infusion relies on a teacher's knowledge of the arts (LaJevic, 2013a). Many teachers were not aware that the classroom academic standards mandated by the state could connect with the visual art standards, or furthermore, that the discipline of the visual arts had its own academic standards. As new teachers were hired in the school, many were unaware of the concept of arts infusion and uninformed on how to implement it into their classrooms. Throughout my four years teaching in the elementary school, my coworkers and I did not receive any official documentation regarding arts-infusion, other than the brief description included on the school website. Many of the teachers had limited knowledge of the arts, which presented challenges for arts infusion. This is aligned with findings from a recent study where teachers working with arts integration expressed that they were uncomfortable and lacked knowledge in teaching and discussing the arts (Miller & Bogatova, 2018). Successful arts infusion requires teachers to be skilled in art history and art vocabulary, and know how to think and talk about/through the arts. It is equally important for teachers to understand artistic materials and actively engage in the art-making process so they are comfortable and understand the potential and limitations of the materials (Burnaford et al., 2001).

On occasion, teachers would express interest in creating an art product that related to an upcoming holiday, but did not have a strong curricular connection. For example, a teacher asked to create deer antler headbands for students to wear during their winter holiday party. To push her thinking, I challenged her to connect the subject matter with the district curriculum, which was based on the state standards. She then decided to have the students read a story about deer and perform a short play based on the reading. I often found myself confronted with trying to educate teachers who are set in their ways regarding the placement of the arts in the school, and the issue regarding what is constituted as a "proper" arts-integrated project. Although I do not

consider making a costume prop for a play a very strong arts-infused lesson as it lacks meaning-making and a strong curricular connection, I agreed that the performance of the play was related to the arts, so I decided to help assist with the antler headbands. But, before the art production aspect, we discussed science-related information regarding the purposes of antlers, what antlers are made from, and looked at a few selected art images that depicted various types of antlers.

Teachers also lacked knowledge regarding how to assess the arts-infused outcomes such as art projects. More often than not, teachers did not formally assess the art component or works of art as they did not feel that it was a suitable form of assessment and/or were unaware of how to properly assess the works. This could imply that the hands-on arts infusion projects were less important than their tests and homework, for which students received a letter grade. For example, with the Walker-inspired art installation, the classroom teacher did not grade the silhouette artmaking component, but graded the textbook-based social studies knowledge about African American history in a multiple-choice test and the written essay about the person or event for language arts. I found myself having to remind many teachers that arts infusion did not serve the purpose of filling in empty time throughout the school day, but consisted of carefully planned lessons that incorporate the components of lesson planning: objectives, academic standards, procedures, and assessment (Burnaford et al., 2001). Occasionally, I would introduce assessment methods such as rubrics and show how they could be used to evaluate student learning of the interdisciplinary objectives that were based on the state standards for various academic subjects, including the visual arts.

Participation

I learned that many people contributed to arts infusion at the school. As the art teacher, I co-led the arts-infused day 1s with the classroom teachers. The physical education teacher who was also a potter, had time in her schedule to teach ceramic lessons. A music teacher ran the chorus and theater portion on the three days I was teaching at the other school which often left me uninformed about the performing arts aspect. The school had a partnership with a local non-profit arts organization that assigned local artists (e.g., a storyteller and mural artist) to help with the program. Additionally, the school's Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) funded assemblies that supported the arts as well. A few of the assemblies included a puppet show and dance performance. Parents were also invited into the classroom to assist the teachers, artists, and students with selected arts infusion lessons.

I discovered that learning how to share teaching responsibilities in a classroom and shift roles according to the lesson was often a difficult task, and teachers who were flexible, open to new ideas and ambiguity, and comfortable with getting messy, seemed to work well with the arts infusion approach (Burnaford et al., 2001). As explained to me by the school principal when I was hired, it was expected that the classroom teacher and art teacher co-plan and co-teach the arts-infused lessons together, but a few teachers had me doing the majority of the planning and teaching. Although teachers presented me with basic content matter that the students were learning since I had one full day devoted to arts infusion, I was typically the person accountable for researching additional information on the subject matter, designing the lesson, searching for artists who work with similar content or materials, and gathering and preparing the needed supplies. The lessons were often designed solely by me without much help from the other teachers even though it was supposed to be a collaborative effort. For example, a teacher would sign up and write they wanted to do an arts-infused lesson about seasons, which they were

learning in science, but would leave the rest up to me. Additionally, some teachers signed up for arts infusion to be relieved of their teaching duties especially if they disliked a particular unit of study and/or wanted to free up time in their schedule. They would use the instructional time as a preparation period where they would sit at their desks to grade homework assignments and tests. It was challenging to co-teach a lesson when the classroom teacher wanted a brief escape. I would occasionally remind the teacher of their responsibilities and ask them to assist with the lesson, which sometimes helped and at other times did not make a difference.

Furthermore, I found a lack of involvement by a few of the classroom teachers in the school to be frustrating. Typically, the same teachers, those who enjoyed the arts and project-based hands-on learning, would sign up for arts infusion with great ideas. But there were also a few teachers who seldom participated and were hesitant to sign up. Many teachers expressed that they felt pressure to teach subject content needed for the high-stakes standardized state tests in more time-efficient ways and through methods that more closely resembled the multiple-choice state tests. Additionally, a select few stated that they did not want to disrupt their regular teaching routine. Although I would encourage the teachers to participate it was ultimately their choice.

Relationships and Engagement

Throughout my experiences, I found that the nontraditional organization of arts infusion allowed me, my fellow teachers, and students to engage in teaching and learning in new ways, which helped to strengthen our relationships. As I worked closely with students and teachers, I began to see them more often and in their typical learning context. No longer was I imprisoned in the basement art room, but welcomed into their regular upstairs classroom. My routine presence allowed me to spend extra time communicating with my colleagues and students, thus learning more about their personal lives and interests. I began to better understand the challenges my coworkers experienced (e.g., teaching to ensure student success on the standardized state tests) and their approaches and philosophies of teaching. Additionally, since many of the arts-infused lessons included collaborative art discussions and production, the students had opportunities to build relationships as they worked together throughout the learning process.

The co-teaching and co-learning process blurred the boundaries between the participants and promoted a sense of enjoyment, interest, and motivation. I routinely found myself looking forward to going to work on the arts-infused day and co-teaching with my colleagues. We motivated one another and were excited to see the students so involved in the lessons. Since there were two teachers (i.e., an art teacher and a classroom teacher) for the arts infusion lessons, we were able to provide students with more individual help, personal guidance, and different perspectives. The students' smiles, time-on-task, and inquisitive questions demonstrated their enjoyment, excitement, and desire to learn. Similarly, recent research has shown arts integration increases student engagement and self-confidence and reduces stress about learning resulting in a more joyful learning experience (Barry, 2010; Miller & Bogatova, 2018; Stixrud & Marlowe, 2018). We often had so much fun, we sometimes forgot we were in a formal school setting, and we rarely encountered student behavior problems. On a side note, as I continued to work with students outside of the art room environment, I found their behaviors and attitudes in the regular art class to improve. Surprisingly, I realized I was sending home fewer behavior notices to parents for students in classes that participated in arts infusion more regularly.

The students were proud of their arts-infused work and eager to engage in arts infusion lessons. As I stood in the school building entryway for morning bus duty, students would pass me and ask when I would visit their classrooms next. They were excited about arts infusion and the artwork and pride permeated throughout the school. For example, in the Walker-inspired arts-infused lesson mentioned earlier, the art installation was located in the multi-purpose room, which also served as the breakfast, lunch, and assembly room (with a stage) and gymnasium. Within the first week it was displayed, a few of the silhouettes started peeling off the wall. Students, who were not the second-grade creators, took it upon themselves to ask me for the masking tape to re-stick the paper cut-outs. Over the next few weeks, students continued to use the tape, which we stored on the stage in the room, resulting in a school-wide effort to keep the installation looking properly displayed. Since the arts-infused lessons were designed to establish meaningful associations between art, regular classroom content, and their everyday lives, the students found the experiences, content, and learning tasks relevant, accessible, and enjoyable.

Time and Space

Working with arts infusion, I found that time and space were important aspects. I encountered challenges in finding sufficient time for planning, designing, and implementing the arts infusion lessons. As Eisner (2002) acknowledges, “An integrated curriculum makes more, not fewer, demands upon the teacher” (p. 155). It took a lot of effort and imagination to co-plan in an artistic interdisciplinary manner—the planning and implementation was an artistic process in itself. Although I did have one full day to dedicate to arts infusion, it became difficult to arrange a time to meet with the classroom teachers to discuss ideas and plan upcoming lessons and projects. Due to scheduling conflicts, we would often meet before school or during lunch, if we ate during the same period. It was further complicated by my teaching schedule, which required me to teach in the other school the three days (i.e., days 4-6) prior to the arts infusion day. Events such as assemblies, standardized testing, and snow delays often interrupted scheduling time needed to plan and implement the arts infusion lessons. Because most of the teachers were interested in learning activities that resulted in a final art product, whether it was an individual, small-group, class-wide, or school-wide hands-on project, the lesson and artmaking processes were often time-consuming. If projects required more than one day to complete or involved wet materials that needed to dry before moving onto the next step, teachers had to choose whether to finish the project during the week without my assistance or wait until the following day 1 when I would be available again. On a related note, because I taught at two different schools, my absence at the arts-infused school hindered my involvement with the local non-profit community arts organization with whom we had an artist-in-residence program grant. My schedule prevented me from attending meetings, discussions, and activities related to the artist-in-residence program, therefore, I did not have much input in planning or assisting with the visiting artists’ lessons.

Having enough space, especially for the storage of supplies and projects and for the creation of artwork was also an issue. Some of the classes that had over twenty-four students would often have a difficult time finding enough room to work, especially if we were creating a medium to large size work. Because the art room was smaller than the regular classrooms, many of the teachers allowed their classroom space to be used as a large art studio during arts infusion. The students would help me transport the lesson materials and supplies from the basement art room upstairs to their classrooms. We would also use the school hallways, multi-purpose room,

and areas outside of the school as needed for space to work, store, and display the art. Additionally, since I shared a room with the music teacher, I needed to make sure all the art supplies, resources, and projects were organized and properly stored. Although the music teacher was very careful with the stored supplies and works of art in the room, there were about 200 students who visited the room for music and chorus class during the three days that I was at the other school. The tables and chairs would have to be reorganized every time the room transformed from music to art, and vice versa. We did our best in attempting to keep artwork organized and free from damages, but occasionally accidents happened and work or art supplies would go missing.

Support and Funding

I learned that in order to keep a strong arts infusion program, maintaining local support (Remer, 1996) from all key players including the school administration is important. In fact, a school principal may be “the most important point of leverage in creating a sustainable impact on a school’s arts education status” (McAlinden, 2017, p. 93). During my first three years of teaching in the school, I received support from the building principals. My first principal would often visit the classrooms during the arts-infused lessons and assist as needed. Knowing she was the principal who applied for the arts grant years earlier, it only makes sense that she enjoyed the arts and believed they play an important role in learning. During my second year of teaching, she went on maternity leave, which left the school with a vacant principal position. Over the next few years, there were three acting school principals and a permanent principal who had varying or little knowledge about the arts and arts infusion. Although they did not seek out additional funding or arts opportunities, they usually did not interfere with our established arts infusion practices. Unfortunately, on one occasion, a student-made Keith Haring-inspired mural on the hallway wall next to the art room was unexpectedly painted over with white wall paint (to see his work, please visit The Keith Haring Foundation website <https://www.haring.com/!/art-work>). When I inquired about the disappearance of the mural, the principal claimed to have not known about the situation, but the maintenance crew informed me they were issued a work order to paint the wall. While I told the inquisitive students (and parents) that this presented a great opportunity to create a new mural, the situation left me feeling disappointed and frustrated. It also made the difficult personal decision to later resign to pursue graduate study a bit easier.

Another important area related to arts infusion support involves funding. Although the program was externally funded prior to my arrival, during my last year working at the school funding was becoming scarce and our partnership with the local non-profit arts organization was dwindling. With the absence of the artists-in-residency, I felt that I was the backbone of the arts infusion program, and due to lack of funds and time, the lessons and schools were not flourishing with the arts as in previous years. Although Burnaford et al. (2001) stress the importance of establishing long-term partnerships with arts organizations, I found without funding it is difficult to keep the alliance(s) alive. A goal of some external funders is to provide seed money to initiate projects that will become self-sustaining over time (Diaz & McKenna, 2017a). This means that grant programs that offer financial assistance for the arts may last a few years and when the funds are exhausted, they may not renew the grants. Rather, they may assign the monies to other applicants or schools who would benefit from seed money for arts-related programs. This was the case for our grant. By having the artists-in-residency, the funder hoped the classroom teachers would learn from the artists, which would, in turn, allow teachers to continue doing arts-

integrated projects successfully after they left. I experienced that once an artist-in-residency left the school, many classroom teachers did not continue using the arts in the classroom. Although I do not know the reasons for their actions, it could have been because the teachers did not feel comfortable with the art content or material and/or felt pressure and time constraints in teaching subject matter required for the state standardized tests. Furthermore, during my four years of teaching in the school, I was expected to purchase all the supplies needed for both the regular art program and arts infusion from my yearly art budget. It was at times challenging to order all the supplies a year in advance when we did not yet know what supplies would be required.

In Reflection

Recognizing that many schools, particularly at the elementary level, have recently introduced forms of arts integration in the curriculum, it is important to become aware of the lived experiences of those working in such programs and the possibilities their experiences, such as my own, have for growth and change. I have witnessed the positive effects arts infusion has had on myself as an art teacher and on those in an elementary school, but we also faced obstacles. Many of my experiences are aligned with findings from arts integration that also show challenges involving time, funding, communication, incorporating the arts, teacher preparedness, and school issues (Miller & Bogatova, 2018). Although I tried my best to maintain a strong arts infusion program, once funding with the community arts organization diminished and a new principal was hired, I was troubled to see how quickly the quality arts-infused lessons and projects seemed to disappear from the classrooms. A full-time art teacher would have been ideal for the school, but due to dwindling funding and a tight budget, it was not a practical suggestion. I tried to invigorate arts learning and teaching across the curriculum, but knew I could not do it alone. Since the classroom teachers taught the students daily, it was important for them to have a broad yet well-informed understanding of the arts and arts infusion and be willing to experiment with non-traditional forms of teaching and learning.

Reflecting on my experiences, I agree with Diaz & McKenna's (2017a) recommendations for maintaining strong arts integration and building capacity in schools. They propose providing in-service opportunities, ensuring support and funding for art teachers, preparing principals as leaders, connecting school resources, and collaborating with local community arts organizations. I believe professional development such as in-service training for teachers and administrators is the most crucial aspect. Training can provide an understanding of the role the arts can play in learning and what arts infusion is, what it looks like in practice, and how it can be properly implemented and assessed (Diaz & McKenna, 2017b; Eisner, 2002; Fowler, 1996). Providing teachers with time to learn, read, and reflect upon current arts integration research and best practices can help bridge theory and practice as they brainstorm, discuss, and co-plan lesson ideas. Professional development opportunities such as in-school workshops, summer institutes, and graduate courses can empower teachers with a new mindset and skillset (Mardirosian, 2018). Preservice teacher preparation programs can play a significant role in better preparing teachers in arts integration earlier on in their training (Huser & Hockman, 2017). Personally, I wish I would have had more training and knowledge about arts infusion as I worked in the school. Although I performed my job to the best of my ability (i.e., as a novice art teacher), I feel I would have benefited from learning more about existing research, strong examples, and the experiences of others working with arts integration. For example, applying what I know now, I would have tried to design more quick lessons that focused on discussing or critiquing a work of art about a

curricular topic (e.g., seasons), rather than time-consuming lessons that resulted in a final art product. This would have allowed me to work with more teachers and students on a routine basis by infusing the arts into their weekly learning.

It is my hope more schools will acknowledge the potential of arts integration in the educational setting. Arts infusion can playfully reawaken the curriculum, teaching, and learning and create a school culture that embraces collaboration and working across disciplines. Although I enjoyed my experiences teaching arts infusion, I learned that successful arts infusion requires hard work, support, time, and effort. Offering an innovative and engaging approach to teaching/learning, experiencing, and understanding, arts infusion concentrates on the arts' ability to teach across the curriculum, make meaningful real-life connections, and re/think and transcend the traditional boundaries of school subjects.

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